

**Persian Language and the Decline of Indo-Persian Knowledge Tradition:
Significance, Perception & Revisit**

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Abstract

The meeting of two cultures and their intellectual traditions always provides an opportunity for new churning and intellectual innovations. However, the churning sometimes is prohibited or thwarted by political power. In contemporary times such a dialogue is becoming difficult as knowledge traditions are being subjected to identity politics. This article suggests that to reclaim this tradition of dialogue, inter-faith and inter-cultural interactions and engagements, we need to go deeper into the process of the pre-colonial era. In this context, it hints at the contributions of innumerable personalities, including likes of Dara Shukoh and look carefully at our pre-colonial history’s traditions and cultural attitudes.

Keywords: Persian, India, Knowledge tradition, pre-colonial era, Culture

Introduction

In Indian culture, *Samudra* (Ocean) has been used as a metaphor for knowledge traditions. The mythological story of ‘Samudra Manthan’ to Dara Shukoh’s ‘Samudra Sangam’ indicates that this geographical region has witnessed several inter-cultural dialogues. One can count the Bauls of Bengal and enumerable Sufi traditions in this series. One needs to recall the philosophical churning of the 6th

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century BC when in Vaishali in Bihar Buddhism, Jainism, Charvakians, Naiyyayiks, and many others were engaged in intense dialogue. The meeting of two cultures and their intellectual traditions always provides an opportunity for new churning and intellectual innovations. Unfortunately, the churning sometimes is prohibited or thwarted by political power. In contemporary times such a dialogue is becoming difficult as knowledge traditions are being subjected to identity politics. This article suggests that to reclaim this tradition of dialogue, inter-faith and inter-cultural interactions and engagements, we need to go deeper into the process of the pre-colonial era. In this context, it hints at the contributions of innumerable personalities, including likes of Dara Shukoh, who was one of the leading intellectual interlocutors in the recent past. The greatest irony of our times is that the streams of knowledge, culture, and shared heritage of our civilization, which has been flowing for centuries, are being attached or, more precisely has, already been done to small identities and getting divided among them. This is the biggest challenge before us to respond. To understand this tradition, one must look carefully at our pre-colonial history's traditions and cultural attitudes.

Indian Knowledge Tradition

While looking into the Indian Knowledge Tradition, we need to look into the notion of Knowledge Tradition and what does the Indian Knowledge Tradition mean? Knowledge in any form may probably be created or produced by an individual or group of people of a particular place or region, yet it may not be restricted to a demarcated domain. It is something inherited by all, and therefore it has been part of the evolution of the whole human society at large. Thus, human society has travelled since the time of a gatherer and nomad to the era of exploring other planets in the space. It is therefore, since ancient period people

have been traveling and migrating to learn from the experiences of different people, and vice-versa. It is therefore, restricting knowledge to any region, community etc or considering it circumscribed to a restricted domain would be primarily an anti-knowledge or flawed approach, as people have always been learning through the interactions. Yet, experiences and experimentations vis a vis production of thought and ideas in the form of practices, traditions, customs, conducts or texts do have an identity background, though it may be disseminated to others after some years or centuries.

It is therefore, knowledge is created and inherited by human being as a whole. The apparent diversities are because of the lack of dissemination, interaction or mostly different environmental conditions. Historically, a huge number of events, and incidents prove the same. For instance, imprints of exchanges among Mesopotamian, Indus, and Nile valleys is now a known fact, and similarly caravans swarming through silk, roman, sea and different other routes throughout the history; one of the reasons of Alexander's military adventures said to be to see the dissemination of Aristotle, his teacher's philosophy and teachings. It means attempts were made to do so. Similarly, Zoarashtra's travel from Baku to Balkh, Buddhism's propagation to Srilanka and Bukhara, and subsequently to Central Asia, China and Far East. Import and revival of Greek, Indian and Chinese texts and knowledge by Arabs and Iranian at the *Baitul-Hikma* in Baghdad, and rejuvenation of old Babylonian, Egyptian, Iranian, Semitic traditions. Again re-interaction of West Asians with Europeans, opening of different doors of interactions, travel of West Asian-Indian-Chinese knowledge to Europe, and subsequent revival of Greek and Roman knowledge tradition, and its entry into Indian sub-continent. This reveals, neither knowledge nor people could be so-

called pure or unalloyed, or any such claim would prove being primitive like untouched aborigines.

Therefore, when we talk of the Indian Knowledge tradition, it means the knowledge in different forms produced due to various interactions, interfaces, exchanges, and inheritance within and from outside the sub-continent. There has not been any singular stream, nor the streams flowed in were singular in characteristics. Nonetheless, during the last millennium, the dominant stream introduced to and exchanged with the sub-continent traditions could be termed the Persian Knowledge Tradition, which otherwise was already a concoction of almost all the traditions mentioned above in an evolved form.

Indo-Persian shared legacy and Decline of Indian Civilization

Identity politics is the real cause and a trap which led to the civilizational decline of the Indian Sub-continent. This can be understood through a glance at the historical developments in education, language and identity politics during the last two hundred years. For instance, Persian, for many centuries before the arrival of the colonial feet in Asia, was, in fact, the link language of Asia and the most important language of literary and academic expressions from banks of the Black Sea to China and the Indian sub-continent. Being an Indo-Arian Language, it has connected with almost all the languages of different regions, even with Sematic and Turkic languages like Arabic, Uzbek, Turkish, Kurdish, etc. This helped vitally spread and communicate knowledge, poetry, philosophy, interfaith, and intercultural dialogues.

This also should be reiterated that in Asian tradition, forms of knowledge, including languages, were generally not attached with the identities. Therefore,

we see people like Amir Khusraw, Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Mulla Badauni, Dara Shukoh, etc. as the experts of Sanskrit and translating Sanskrit texts into Persian finally introduced Indian philosophical traditions globally. Similarly, we see Mahesh Thakur, Baba Lal, Chandrabhan Brahman, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, etc., as the experts of Arabic, Persian and Quranic studies. This was indeed a general trend among the educated, and attaching knowledge traditions including languages to identities was almost foreign to Asians.

With their colonial ambitions and agenda, the British were active in all these regions (especially from mid-18th – mid 20th century). Therefore, they very well realized the importance of this connection, as well as the role of the Persian language in this vibrant cultural, economic, academic, and political exchange and link. During the last two millennia, Persian had well interacted and mingled with different sub-continent languages, including Sanskrit, and incorporated their intellectual and literary traditions and transported them around the world. This can be understood even by one aspect of this interaction, i.e., translation, from *Panchatantra* (in 6th century) to *Upanishads* (17th century).

Indo-Iran relation is as old as these two civilizations. They probably have the most intimate cultural and civilizational relations compared to any other civilization. Either you take the examples of legends mentioned in *Shahnama*, to the translations of *Panchtantra* as *Kartak wa Damnak* and *Matigan e Chaturang*, to the mention of Indian fables mentioned in *Masnawi* of Mawlana Rumi, and subsequently his popularity along with other poets of Persian like Nizami, Saadi, Khayyam, Hafiz, and many more in Indian sub-continent. Alberuni's India has always been a source of information and insight for everyone, and Indian Persian poets Amir Khusraw, Bedil, and Iqbal are equally popular in the whole Persian

world. *Shahnameh* of Firdausi and *Mahabhart*a of Ved Vyas are among the greatest epics of the world of literature and have many identical characters, such as Arash and Arjun. The name Arash remains a popular name among Iranians, and so Arjun among Indians.

This vivacious connection was indeed a great hurdle to the larger colonial and imperialist aspirations that aimed and pursued political and cultural ambitions. Therefore, while pursuing their colonial agenda to control politically and prevail culturally in India, they first tried to dissociate people from this link language through identity politics and attach them to regional dialects. For example, they replaced Persian with Hindustani in 1835, almost an unborn language, a conglomeration of different dialects, not having even of its own grown-up prose. For this purpose, they had earlier established Fort William College, where some of the Persian and Sanskrit texts were translated into Hindustani, which was further divided as Urdu and Hindi on the ground of scripts and then attached to two identities, i.e. Muslims and Hindus. This is obvious that these infant languages would not have been able to stand English language and literature, similarly as English could not have the strength to compete with Persian in Asia, including the Indian sub-continent. So, it was part of the politics of the British Empire that firstly to replace Persian with the infant or frail local dialects in the name of identity, besides the language of the empire i.e. English.

Obviously, since these languages could not have the strength to stand before English as a literary or academic language, English would easily become the link language, and exactly this happened during the course of the last two hundred years in the sub-continent or elsewhere, including Afghanistan and Central Asia. Later, the same policy was apparently followed by Russians in the occupied

republics of Central Asian Countries. And therefore, all those countries which suffered colonization also suffered a kind of 'Culture-fracture', which means they were separated from their cultural past and knowledge traditions. The Imperialist powers successfully pursued this policy by boosting regional nationalism and identity assertion, pampering through awards, etc. Probably, one of the reasons for awarding Tagore with the Noble and not awarding Iqbal may be the language, as Iqbal mostly wrote in Persian. Possibly, if he had written only in Urdu together with conformist content, he too would have got it. Though, it is needless to assert that Tagore's creative genius certainly deserved the recognition. Besides, the Noble Committee also recognized Tagore's contribution to the English language.¹ The British very cunningly used the natural fondness of the people with their local languages and dialects to divert their attention from losing their own greater and continuous cultural and literary heritage and ultimately trapping into the English language and literary tradition. Since these regional and infant languages and literature could easily be defeated by the English language, as these did not have the required capacity to express the literary, academic and intellectual content, people were obviously swayed to pay more attention to English. By then, the educational set-up too was ready for the same. So the new generation Indians easily became the bearers of English Culture. This must be added that knowing a

¹ The Nobel Prize in Literature 1913 was awarded to Rabindranath Tagore "because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West." (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/summary/>). For related issues further can be seen in the book titled as *Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and the British Raj: Some Untold Stories* by A.B.M. Shamsud Doulah (Partridge Publishing Singapore, 2016); and also on: (<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item124197.html>) & (<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-the-arts/story/19831031-fresh-doubts-arises-about-circumstances-under-which-rabindranath-tagore-was-given-nobel-prize-771159-2013-07-16>)

language, whatsoever foreign or native, is always an additional boon, but losing one's own linguistic and literary heritage is a gross civilizational catastrophe, which we have inherited though not realized yet, by almost losing the Indian Persian literary legacy.

Though this is not the phenomenon supposedly has ended with the fall of the classic colonial era, but has been ceaselessly lingering on in different apparels. Margret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, candidly expressed in her article during the post 9/11 scenario and illustrated this centuries-old colonial mindset that *as long as we (the West) dominate technologically, our culture would prevail* (Hindustan Times, October 2001). But, what Thatcher said is not a new or so-called post 9/11 mindset; but has its historical background for many centuries, and has been repeated through the writings of western thinkers and policymakers time and again; either the “civilizing mission”(Conklin, 1998) of French's invasion on Egypt and later North African countries or the concept of “Oriental despotism” (Montesquieu, 2002) of Montesquieu and its incessant reflection in the writings of Machiavelli, Marx, Weber, J S Mill and later western thinkers. (Russell, 1966)

The Decline of Indian languages and literature

Finally, today we have inherited the general perception or somehow have now been believing that Persian, Urdu and Arabic are Muslim/Islamic languages and Sanskrit, Hindi as the Hindu, Brahmin languages. As a result, people try to avoid the languages on the ground of identity affiliations. This view and approach are now more fuelled by vicious identity politics. This has negatively impacted almost all modern Indian languages and their literature, especially poetry. The

fundamental reason for the degeneration of contemporary literature, especially poetry, is its divorce from the continuous literary tradition. These languages are substantially inherited from the Persian language and literature. For instance, it can be witnessed how this impacted the overall decline of Urdu and Hindi. Contemporary Hindi poetry is almost on the verge of demise. The stalwarts of Hindi, who though themselves were well conversant with Indian Persian literary tradition, vis a vis Arabic and Urdu, and thus could produce poetry of an inordinate standard even in its stage of infancy; yet commonly got trapped in the identity politics premeditated by colonial rulers. As a result, Hindi poetry gradually waned to decline, and at least it is evident in the contemporary scenario. It has lost its classic roots and rearing and now totally vanished into the English blank verse tradition instead of following the track of Indo-Persian tradition, especially Sanskrit prosodic scheme and Persian genres and diction. Similar syndrome happened with Urdu poetry and language, and precisely on the grounds of identical reasons. Similar misadventures could possibly be experienced in different modern languages of the Indian sub-continent.

In spite of the fact that the Indian sub-continent possesses seven most spoken languages among twenty most spoken languages of the world, the deplorable condition of literature, including publication and readership, can reveal the existent impairment (Summary by language size, 2019).

Hence I have a serious conviction that the replacement of Persian as the official language with vernacular i.e. Urdu/Hindi was a calculated colonial - imperialist design to finally replace all Indian languages and their literary traditions with English. This was fundamentally aimed to detach and disengage the future generations from their continuous civilizational legacy. The vernacular, too, was

deceitfully divided on the ground of script and deliberately attached to identities. Among all, this was the severest damage done to Indian civilization. Many other Asian countries faced similar situations and calamities and still struggling or regrettably unable to comprehend the misfortune in perpetuation. As a matter of fact, the political colonization probably ended in the sub-continent in 1947, but the linguistic and cultural legacy of the colonialism lingered on, rather growing up day by day.

Inter-Cultural Engagements

Though inter-faith and inter-cultural engagement was a norm of the pre-colonial era, yet Dara Shukoh (1615–1669) made a remarkable attempt to understand and explain the impact of the two dominant traditions of Faith in India, i.e. *Sanatan* and Islam, and the corollaries on the Indian culture, polity and society as a whole. Important examples of his search: *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain* (Persian) and *Samudrasangam* (Sanskrit), are an attempt to understand and explain these traditions. In Dara's opinion, a systematic method of acquiring knowledge was prevalent in the Sanskrit tradition. During the translation, compilation, contemplation and research on this book, he emerges as a serious scholar of religions and interfaith dialogue who attempted to study the similarities and differences of the two different religious faiths and traditions with each other. Besides, he also attempted to enhance an insightful and collective understanding of different faiths, beliefs and practices among the followers of different traditions. One such personality among most of the cultural icons of the pre-colonial era which represents the Indo-Persian knowledge tradition. Though Dara Shukoh is perhaps better known for his defeat in the war of succession, and what is commonly overlooked is his deep interest in knowledge traditions. His

characteristics of curiosity and inquisitiveness led to bonding with scholars, saints and Sufis, and consequently a deep study of *Sanatan* and other traditions along with Islam. He is credited with compilation and the Persian translation of 50 volumes of *Upanishads*, *Yoga Vashishtha* and other such texts, and also authored important books on Sufi tradition like *Sakeenatul-Awliya*, *Safinatul-Awliya*, *Risala-e Haq-Numa*. The most egregious examples of this curiosity are the books such as *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain* (Persian) and *Samudrasangam* (Sanskrit), which were in fact serious philosophical attempts to understand the flowing cultural streams, especially twin currents of *Sanatan* and Islam in the Indian subcontinent.

As there is a growing awareness of the image of Dara Shukoh as a liberal, there is increased curiosity about his contribution to the Indian knowledge tradition. There has been a limited mention and discussion about it in the history books, yet his personality always attracted people's attention. Diametrically opposite views are also held by scholars about this Mughal prince. However, Dara was not the first person to contribute to this field. This was the centuries-old tradition of this region for which Dara too contributed immensely. Generally, in the Asian traditions and particularly in Indian tradition, knowledge usually was not considered part of an identity. That is why Muslim scholars or *mullahs* were scholars of Sanskrit and other traditions in the pre-colonial period and similarly *pandits* as scholars of Arabic and Islamic learning. Baba Farid, Sheikh Nagori, Amir Khusraw, Abdul-Quddus Gangohi, Guru Nanak, Mahesh Thakur, Muhibbullah Allahabadi, Chandrabhan Brahmin, Dara Shukoh, Baba Lal, and Mazhar Jane-Jaan are some prominent names representing this general phenomenon in this tradition. Dara played an important role, which must be acknowledged in strengthening these traits of understanding the Indian heritage of

tolerance mutual harmony among other various streams of Indo-Persian thought and progress in the seventeenth century.

However, an incisive enquiry into the fortune and fate of Dara reveals that he was not only unfortunate to receive failure in the political struggle, but even otherwise he has been almost accused or credited for something which he probably never envisioned to; and that happens to be the extreme perceptions around his academic and spiritual adventures. At one side a group of pro-winning side Muslim clergy supported discredited him as a heretic on the ground of his writings. However, none of his writings supports or substantiates this view. Regrettably, the same claim has been received as a fact for all these centuries by a section to view him so. On the other hand, there are two other groups which consider him as 'liberal' or 'sanskritised' Muslim for the same reason that chose to be heretic or oppose the orthodox theological path.

In fact, he was neither, nor there has been any need for him to be the one, nor he individually aspired to, neither was it the tradition of the time any way desired for any one of any community, and he was none other than the heir Prince of the most powerful monarch. He was in fact following the tradition, prevalent since many centuries and was being nurtured by all Turk rulers since they started to rule in 12th century and the same existed before they started to rule. It was basically the Asian tradition even being practiced before Turks came to India, and Alberuni is one such example who learnt Sanskrit in Ghazni before he arrived, travelled and stayed in the sub-continent India for around ten years. Similarly, Khwaja Moeenuddin Chishti too learnt Sanskrit at Multan before shifting and settling in Ajmer. The current image of Dara is mostly the concoction of the contemporary historians who tried to paint him according to their own subjective ideas and

ideologies, which too is mostly the byproduct of the colonial politics and their scheme of promoting identity-based historiography.

The education system, too, was obviously based on the same philosophy, so almost all prevalent and contemporary education, including languages, were pursued at the educational institutions and individual pursuits. For instance, Mir Fat'hullah Shirazi, a migrant Iranian scholar and scientist of Akbar's era, introduced many new subjects, including science, as a result of the same, Ahmad Me'mar, an alumnus of Mulla Abdussalam Lahori's Madrasa, prepared the drawing of Taj Mahal, and built it. Akbar established a translation centre at Fatahpur Sikri, and Sanskrit texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata and other books were translated into Persian. These epics were translated by Mulla Badauni. Even we find evidence that Princes like Jahangir took an interest in the translations. Mullah Daud, Amir Khusraw, Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Baba Nanak, Mulla Badauni, Mirza Bedil, Chandrabhan Brahman, Bindraban Das Khushgo, Mirza Ghalib, like overall educated people were having expertise in different languages including Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, local languages, mathematics, philosophy, medical sciences, and other prevalent knowledge. They all were products of these Madrasas, and their books were also taught there as well. These are just a few examples to show that languages and disciplines of knowledge were not attached to identities. Even attributions to the Almighty had a grace which explains the profundity of understanding; for instance, at the beginning of *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain*, Dara Shukoh writes:

Be naam e Aan ke oo naami nadaarad

Be har naami ke khwani sar bar aarad

(I begin with the name of the one, who doesn't need a name, whatsoever the name you attribute to him, he pays attention to it.)

And most of the books by Brahmin or other non-Muslim start with the Arabic attribution to the Almighty, i.e. *Bismil-la-hir-rah'manir-Raheem* (In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most compassionate). For example, the Persian translation of *Ramayana*, Sumer Chand of Seventeenth Century, starts the book with *Bismil-la-hir-rah'manir-Raheem*. A prominent scholar of the Quran in 19th century Faz'le Rahman Ganj Muradabadi, translated the Quran in Hindawi and used the word *Manmohan* for *Allah* as the literal translation of the word Allah. The great Noble of Akbar-Jahangir's era Abdur Rahim Khankhanan and Raskhan's bhakti poetry for Krishna is known to everyone, and they enticed no denunciation ever.

Most of the rulers were also great patrons of books. During the Mughal period, Babur brought his personal library from Andijan (Uzbekistan) and also clasped Ibrahim Lodhi's library after the victory. He even complains about the humid weather of India being unsuitable for his books. Humayun possessed his own library. Faizi, the Court poet of Akbar, had six thousand books in his library, and most of them bear his signature, which were incorporated into the Akbar's library after his death. Mulla Badauni was Akbar's librarian, and Akbar had also appointed *Warraqs*, who used to turn pages of the books. This great library was inherited later by Dara Shukoh, and then by latter emperors. Due to the great uprising in 1857, and subsequently the fall of Mughals, this library too got dismantled. The invaluable manuscripts of this library later got place in British Library and libraries at London and Bodleian, Oxford besides National Museum,

National Archive, Rampur Raza Library, Khudabakhsh Library, Patna, Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad etc.

Earlier we see Sufis in Punjab, Gujrat, Rajasthan, Bengal, Deccan, and Kashmir played a major role in developing and enriching the local languages and culture. Baba Farid learned the local Punjabi language and composed poems in it, which is quoted in Guru Granth Sahib. Sheikh Nagori was sent to Nagor by his spiritual master Khwaja Gharib Nawaz. When he went there, he found it was the town of Jains, and he decided that he won't have non-vegetarian food, and even he asked his followers not to have non-vegetarian food on his Urs, and it is still followed strictly. Mian Meer, the spiritual mentor of Dara Shukoh, laid the foundation stone of the Golden Temple. These Sufi masters had inherited the teachings of universal love and compassion from the great Sufi masters and poets like Attar, Rumi, Saadi, Hafiz and Jami and taught the same to others. For instance, Attar says:

*Hame ja Talib e Yaar-and che hoshiyar, che mast
Hame ja khana e eshq-ast, che masjid, che kanisht*

(Everywhere people are yearning for the beloved, whether they are drunk or cognizant; everywhere there is abode of love, whether it is Mosque or Temple.)

Or Saadi of Shiraz says:

*bani Adam aa'za-ye yek paiykar-and / ke dar āfarīn-ash ze yek gowhar-and
chu 'ozwi be dard aawarad rūzgār / digar 'ozwhā-rā na-mānad qarār
to kaz mehnat-ē dīgarān bī-ghami / na-shāyad ke nāmat nahand ādamī*

(Adam's children are limbs of one body, as they in creation are made of one constituent.

Whenever a limb is hurt, other limbs will not be at ease.

And, you who are not sad for the suffering of others do not deserve to be called human)

And the Sufis teachings and writings are abundant with such messages.

As discussed above, to understand this tradition, one has to look carefully at the traditions and cultural attitudes of our pre-colonial history (times). It is necessary to reflect on those periods of our history when the ruling personalities strove to pay attention to these divisions, to bind the land together rather than create divisions and differences. One such personality was the Mughal Prince, Dara Shukoh, eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. There is a need to understand Dara's personality, character, policies, philosophy, and intellectual and literary contributions to know and acknowledge his contributions towards strengthening and enriching the incessant Indian knowledge tradition. History, though, generally records Dara Shukoh as the Prince who lost his trial for the throne in the War of Succession, but he was a great scholar of his time. He was a Sufi and Poet besides a scholar of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and regional dialects.

Traditionally, patronage and leaning towards literature were considered important among the princely Mughal elite. Some of them earned reputation for their expertise and distinction as writers and poets. The curious Dara took an interest in Sufism and monotheism, and this curiosity perpetually inspired him to be in touch with many saints and scholars of different faiths and traditions, including Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Kabirpanth, Christian and others. Several such pictures are

available in which Dara is shown interacting with Hindu ascetics and Muslim saints. *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain* (a book based on a comparative study of *Sanatan* and Islam) was his first attempt at a comparative study of religions; if he had chanced and lived longer, he probably could have attempted such studies about other streams of faith too. He is credited with the translation to Persian of 50 volumes of *Upanishads*, *Yogavashista* and other such texts, and also authored important books on Sufi tradition. The most egregious examples of this curiosity are the books such as *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain* (Persian) and *Samudrasangam* (Sanskrit), which were, in fact, serious philosophical attempts to understand the mainly flowing twin currents of faith traditions in the Indian subcontinent, i.e. Sanatan and Islam. In the same way, his attachment and association with the great Sufis like Hazrat Muhibullah Allahabadi, Mian Mir, Mulla Shah Badakhshi, Sarmad, great saints like Baba Lal and the pandits of Banaras also corroborate his deep interest in this. He is also considered an important poet of Indian Persian tradition.

In fact, there have been two ways of using religion or even a philosophical cult. The first way is followed by those who use it in the truest sense and spirit to proliferate love, sanity and knowledge or a trait; however there has been a section who misuses it for the sake of self-interest. Dara himself is one of those who followed the first way and got connected with the sincerest people of his time, and therefore he severely criticizes imposters and pretentious ones.

Generally, those people who use religion against others for vested material interest do not realize that they are basically causing irreparable harm to the religion or identity they claim to represent. For instance, Emperor Akbar, who too was keen on understanding different faiths and traditions, organized multi-faith discussions. Instead of simply representing and show-casing their respective

faiths, many of the clergies attempted to demean others. This, in fact, dejected Akbar, and a response to this, he once apparently tried the obliteration of religions by assimilating all. Similarly, many contemporary groups representing different faiths and identities are self-destructive and cause harm to the identities, they claim to represent. Many a time, including in the recent past and even in contemporary times, we have witnessed the fallout of such misrepresentations turning into extreme identity-based hate politics, and finally resulting into a catastrophe for instance, Nazism, Fascism and different faith-based extremisms. Unfortunately, India is at the imminent edge of the analogous disarray for the same and similar reasons. Akbar's primary aim was to build a united empire, and for the same reason, he wanted to have friendly relations with different religions and groups and marry in Rajput families. Two of the Mughal emperors, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, were sons of Rajput mothers. This was not the innovative policy of Emperor Akbar, but being accommodative has been the age-old policy of all stable empires.

There should not be any misperception between just being part of identity whatsoever, religious or cult and being a genuine believer of the same. It is generally observed that many of the individuals who apparently represent religions are seen spoilt into greed of material indulgence while misusing the identity, and even abusing it for identity politics and hatred. However, a careful look into such cases reveals that they are either not practicing or superficially practicing a lot of the religions or bereft of spiritual perception. In my humble view, a religion or faith system has a three-tier system. The primary stage includes faith or the concept of God and the rituals for the divine. The secondary stage includes the doctrine for the prescribed deed, ethics and behaviour including

conduct for the people; and the ultimate stage is spiritual realization, which includes itself different stages of realizations, but the observable part of such stage contains two apparent characteristics, i.e. renunciation of worldly greed and compassion for the fellow being. It is, therefore, the observational and emotional shallowness and dearth of devoutness may be noticed among mere or pure theologians and scholars because they visualize the first or initial stages as the complete religion and do not see beyond that or do not pursue the stages of spiritual realization.

Nonetheless, even the basic followers of a religious doctrine (i.e. followers of primary and secondary stages) too, on the ground of their earnestness of strictly following the rules and doctrine of religious ethics, may become a role model. However, there is always a higher vulnerability of succumbing to materialism or worldly lures, which would be quite natural. The chances of this vulnerability are mostly because of the lack of internal or spiritual training which spiritualists do follow. However, when such a person attains the spiritual awareness, and subsequently accomplishes the stages of renunciation and consciousness, and achieves different junctures of spiritual realizations and finally attains the highest stages, then it would be highly unlikely that such a soul would succumb to worldly lure or abhorrence.

Dara Shukoh was, in fact, in the quest and pursuit of spiritual realization. More interestingly, he was curious to know the different approaches and ideas espoused and assumed in different religions and traditions to accomplish the ultimate realization. His books and writings clearly reveal this earnestness, aspiration, and longing. He even clearly states the same in the preface of *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain*:

“It is, therefore, the interpretations of the two different parties are compared together. Besides, many other views are compiled because their knowledge would be essential and valuable for all those seeking the ultimate truth. Since the enlightened considered it as the compendium of knowledge and truths, it is titled as *Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain* (The Mingling of two oceans) (*Maj'ma-ul-Bahrain*, p. 80).”

He asserts the same in the preface of *Sirr e Akbar*:

“This seeker of the ultimate truth (i.e. Dara Shukoh), who is in pursuit of the Ultimate One, craved to translate the *Upanishads*, the treasure-trove of monotheism, into Persian. Even in the community, only a few scholars of this text left today. This translation I did without any change, just word to word, so that I can understand what is the secret hidden in it, which they try to conceal” (*Sirr e Akbar*, p. 5).

His frequent interactions and bonding with people like Shah Muhammad Dilruba, Sarmad, Baba Pyarey, Mian Bari, Muhsin Fani Kashmiri, Shah Fatah Ali Qalandar, Shaikh Sulaiman Misri Qalandar, Bhakta Ramanand, Mirza Salik Lahori is again a witness of his longing as a seeker of knowledge and spiritual consciousness. This association profoundly influenced his thinking. Many writers believe that Dara Shukoh also had good relations with the Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Har Singh (1630 - 1661). Shah Jahan is said to have ordered special herbs for Dara's treatment during his prolonged illness from a hospital in the Punjab run by Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru of Sikhs, as mentioned in his book *Sakinatul-Awliya*.

‘*Sarva Dharma Sambhava*,’ i.e., equal respect to all religious beliefs, has been the ageless tradition of India, which attracted followers of different faith and

tradition. Subsequently, they added to the colorfulness of the diversity of the land like Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki, and Baba Farid Ganjshakar and many others. Similarly, Indian traditions, faiths, knowledge and philosophy too has been spread through our missionaries, scholars, saints to different parts of the world especially to Asian societies like preachers of emperor Ashok, Pandits at Darul-Hikma at Baghdad, Jamaluddin Jamali, Guru Nanak and many others. There has been incessant multi-lateral cultural and literary interaction almost throughout the ages.

Conclusion

The Persian language has been virtually the link language as well as the language of literary and intellectual expression of a major part of Asia, especially of the Indian sub-continent, for many centuries during the pre-colonial era; and has played vitally in enriching its cultures and languages. The colonial mind realized this fact and set a web of intrigue among different identities of the sub-continent, especially among two major communities, i.e. Hindus and Muslims, which resulted in many civilizational disasters, including the decline and abandoning of Persian language and literature from public and private spaces. Besides, it is also important to understand what literary personalities and scholars of the pre-colonial era contributed to enriching the Indo-Persian Knowledge tradition. The uniqueness of such efforts and traditions lies in carrying forward the age-old knowledge tradition of the Indian sub-continent, or rather the Asian knowledge tradition, in a way that attracted all to comprehend it more deeply and incisively through unattended sources, texts and deliberations. Generally, in Indo-Persian tradition, knowledge, including languages, was not generally attached to identities. Amir Khusraw, Abdul-Quddus Gangohi, Guru Nanak, Mahesh Thakur,

Muhibbullah Allahabadi, Chandrabhan Brahmin, Dara Shukoh, Baba Lal, and Mazhar Jane-Jaanani are just a few names of this tradition.

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