

Article

Contours of Indian Elements in Persian Imagination: Literary and Linguistic Encounters in Pre-Modern India

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Abstract

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Persian, initially a foreign language, maintained a profound connection to India for centuries due to ancient Indo-Iranian ties dating back to the prehistoric and Vedic periods. With the arrival of Turks, Iranians, and Mughals from the 13th century onward, Persian had already established itself as a dominant cultural and intellectual lingua franca across much of Asia, from Afghanistan to Anatolia, a period scholars like Eaton refer to as the Persianate Age. In India, during the Ghaznavid, Ghurid, and Mughal eras, Persian became the court and administrative language, while also serving as a vital medium for literary, cultural, religious, and philosophical expression. This paper highlights the diverse influence of Indian cultural elements on Persian language and literature, emphasizing linguistic, literary, cultural, religious, and philosophical aspects, especially during medieval and early modern India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The encounter between India and Persia represents one of the most fertile zones of cultural and intellectual exchange in the premodern and early modern world. From the first Arab incursions into Sindh to the establishment of Persian as a language of power, learning, and aesthetics in the courts of the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals, the Indo-Persian world evolved as a shared civilizational space shaped by dialogue, translation, and adaptation. Persian, as both a cosmopolitan idiom and a bearer of Islamic literary tradition, found in India a new geography of imagination—one that transformed its linguistic texture, poetic metaphors, and conceptual world. The Indian landscape, flora and fauna, mythologies, and religious-philosophical vocabularies entered the Persian imagination not merely as exotic curiosities but as active resources for innovation and renewal in literary expression. This paper explores the ways in which “Indian elements” were incorporated into Persian literary and linguistic traditions, producing a distinctive Indo-Persian sensibility. It examines how poets, scholars, and translators navigated between Persian’s classical canon and the rich multilingual environment of India—where Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsha, and various vernaculars shaped cultural communication. The Indo-Persian encounter was not a one-sided process of imposition but a dialogic negotiation in which local

idioms, imagery, and intellectual traditions influenced Persian literary production. Works produced in India by poets such as Amir Khusrau, Faizi, Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, and later by figures like Ghalib, reveal a deep interpenetration between Indian cultural motifs and Persian literary conventions.

At a linguistic level, this synthesis gave rise to what may be termed a “Persian of Hindustan”—a variant marked by lexical borrowings, phonetic adaptations, and stylistic innovations that reflected the social and cultural realities of the subcontinent. The emergence of Indo-Persian as a literary dialect facilitated the development of Urdu and enriched the wider Persianate world. Moreover, Indian philosophical and religious ideas—drawn from Hindu, Jain, and Bhakti traditions—entered Persian texts through translation and commentary projects such as the Mahabharata (as Razmnama), Ramayana, and Upanishads during Akbar’s reign. These translations not only transmitted Indic thought into Persian but also reshaped the intellectual horizons of Islamic scholars and mystics. By foregrounding the theme of “literary and linguistic encounters,” this paper argues that Indian elements in the Persian imagination were not passive reflections of a conquered land but active agents of creativity and transformation. The Indian environment offered Persian poets new metaphors of nature, love, and mysticism; its religious pluralism inspired novel formulations of metaphysical unity and divine love; and its vernacular sounds altered the very rhythm and musicality of Persian verse. The Indo-Persian world thus stands as a testament to cultural hybridity—where language became a site of negotiation between cosmopolitan ideals and local sensibilities. In tracing these encounters, the paper situates Indo-Persian literature within a broader history of transcultural exchange, highlighting how Persian, when transplanted into Indian soil, acquired new meanings, new voices, and new worlds of imagination. It seeks to demonstrate that the “Persian imagination” in India was not simply Persian in origin but Indo-Persian in evolution—an enduring symbol of South Asia’s composite intellectual traditions.

2. THE IDEA OF THE ‘PERSIAN COSMOPOLIS’: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

The term “Persian Cosmopolis,” popularized by scholars such as Sheldon Pollock¹ and Muzaffar Alam², describes the diffusion of Persian as a cosmopolitan language of high culture, literature, and governance away from its place of origin. Much like the Latin Cosmopolis in medieval Europe or the Sanskrit Cosmopolis in early South Asia, the Persian Cosmopolis was not bounded by ethnicity or geography. It was sustained by shared literary conventions, moral ideals, and aesthetic sensibilities that united diverse peoples under a common cultural framework. Through imperial networks, trade routes, and scholarly mobility, Persian became the language of kingship, theology, philosophy, and belles-lettres across an immense territory. Sheldon Pollock’s pioneering work on the Sanskrit Cosmopolis provided the theoretical foundation for later articulations of the Persian Cosmopolis. In his framework, Pollock defines a “Cosmopolis” as a translocal cultural order sustained by a classical language that transcends political boundaries. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam extended this idea to Persian, arguing that Persian functioned as the language of high culture, administration, and diplomacy across much of Asia from the Ghaznavid and Ghurid periods onward. In their view, the Persian Cosmopolis was not merely linguistic but also intellectual—representing an entire world of thought, ethics, kingship, and aesthetics that linked elites from Isfahan to Delhi and from Herat to Hyderabad.

Richard Eaton³ has described the Persian Cosmopolis as an “ecumene” of cultural and political exchange, highlighting how the Persian language acted as a vehicle for ideas about governance, ethics, and cosmology that were absorbed and reinterpreted across diverse regions. This transregional world was not imposed from a single center but developed through dynamic interaction among local traditions. In India, for instance, Persian became a medium of both statecraft and spiritual expression, blending with vernaculars such as Urdu, Bengali, and Gujarati. Eaton emphasizes that this cosmopolis was marked by hybridity rather than uniformity—local idioms reshaped Persianate forms, resulting in unique regional expressions of Persian culture. Muzaffar Alam’s influential work *The Languages of Political Islam* (2004) situates Persian at the heart of Islamic political thought in South Asia. He argues that Persian was not simply a colonial or imperial tool but a vehicle for moral and philosophical discourse. Through Persian, ideas of *adalat* (justice), *sulh-i kull* (universal peace), and *akhlāq* (ethics) circulated among scholars, poets, and rulers, producing a shared moral and political vocabulary across the Indo-Persian world. Alam sees the Persian Cosmopolis as a realm of negotiation—where Indian

1 Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*. University of California Press, 2006.

2 Alam, Muzaffar. *The Languages of Political Islam in India, 1200–1800*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

3 Eaton, Richard M. *India in the Persianate Age: 1000–1765*. Allen Lane, 2019.

rulers, Sufi saints, and poets appropriated Persian idioms to express local religious and cultural concerns. Nile Green further expands the discussion by emphasizing the mobility and material networks that sustained the Persian Cosmopolis. In his works, such as *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (2019), Green portrays Persian as a language of modernity and mobility, circulating through manuscripts, merchants, and migrants. He challenges the notion of a static, elite culture by demonstrating how Persian also thrived in commercial, devotional, and popular contexts.

As a whole, the idea of the Persian Cosmopolis captures a vast, interconnected world where Persian served as a vehicle of cosmopolitan expression, intellectual exchange, and moral imagination. It was a shared cultural horizon that transcended geography, religion, and ethnicity—binding together a diverse array of societies within a common aesthetic and ethical framework. As scholars have shown, this Persianate ecumene exemplifies the power of language to create transregional solidarities, shaping the intellectual and political history of much of Asia for nearly a millennium.

3. INDIA, THE PERSIANATE WORLD AND THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE: A HISTORICAL ENCOUNTER

India's integration into the Persian Cosmopolis began with the Ghaznavid and Ghurid invasions in the 11th–12th centuries, when Persian replaced Arabic as the principal language of administration and court culture. The process reached its zenith under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, when Persian functioned as the lingua franca of the subcontinent's elite. Sultans, scholars, poets, and bureaucrats from Iran and Central Asia migrated to India, establishing madrasas, libraries, and literary circles that nurtured an Indo-Persian intellectual tradition. The Mughals, in particular, patronized Persian to such an extent that India became a leading center of Persian literary production — arguably surpassing Iran itself in volume and innovation. Persian was not merely ornamental; it was instrumental in shaping the intellectual and political vocabulary of early modern India. It served as the language of governance, diplomacy, historiography, and moral instruction. Administrative manuals like the *Ain-i Akbari* and historical chronicles such as the *Tarikh-i Firishhta* and *Baburnama* exemplify the Persianization of political discourse. In the realm of knowledge, Persian became a bridge between Islamic, Indic, and Greek intellectual traditions. Scientific, medical, and philosophical texts were translated into Persian, while Indian works in Sanskrit were rendered into Persian through imperial translation projects — the most notable being the Mughal translation bureau under Emperor Akbar, where texts like the *Mahabharata* (as *Razmnama*) and the *Ramayana* were translated. This dialogue of civilizations fostered an unparalleled spirit of intellectual pluralism.

Patronage played a pivotal role in sustaining the Persian Cosmopolis. Courts and Sufi centers provided a platform for cross-cultural exchange, where Persian adapted to Indian realities. The Indo-Persian literary tradition developed distinctive genres — such as the *masnavi*, *qissa*, and *tazkira* — blending Persian poetics with local themes. Translation became both a linguistic and philosophical enterprise. The process of translating Sanskrit works into Persian introduced new moral and metaphysical concepts into Islamic thought, while Persian models in turn influenced emerging vernacular literatures such as Urdu, Bengali, and Punjabi. Thus, Persian acted as a cultural mediator between the classical and the vernacular, the sacred and the secular, the foreign and the native. By the 17th and 18th centuries, while Persian was in decline in its western homelands due to political fragmentation, it flourished in India as the language of both empire and enlightenment. Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow emerged as intellectual capitals where poets like Sauda, Mir Taqi Mir, and Ghalib carried Indo-Persian aesthetics into new forms that would later influence Urdu. Even after the British replaced Persian with English as the official language in 1837, its legacy endured in education, etiquette, and literary imagination. The Indo-Persian heritage continued to inform South Asian thought well into the modern era.

4. INDIA IN THE PERSIAN IMAGINATION: EARLY REPRESENTATIONS

The representation of India in classical Persian literature reflects a complex interplay of admiration, curiosity, and cultural dialogue. For centuries, Persian poets, historians, and travelers constructed images of Hind and Hindustan that were simultaneously real and imagined — grounded in geographical awareness but elevated by literary symbolism. These depictions transformed India into a land of wisdom, spirituality, and wonder, forming an essential component of the broader Persian Cosmopolis that stretched from Iran to the Indian subcontinent.

The earliest references to Hind and Hindustan appear in Persian works influenced by pre-Islamic Iranian and early Islamic traditions. In the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi (d. 1020 CE), India appears as both a historical and mythical land—known for its powerful kings, precious gems, elephants, and vast learning. Firdausi's portrayal of India, though based on distant knowledge, reflects a deep cultural fascination. It embodies the Iranian conception of the East as a realm of wonder (*ajab*) and spiritual insight. In later centuries, as Persian became the lingua franca of power and culture in South Asia, representations of India became increasingly detailed and diverse. Works like Al-Biruni's "*Kitab al-Hind*" (11th century) offered ethnographic and scientific observations on Indian philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. Al-Biruni, writing in Persian and Arabic, demonstrated both intellectual respect and analytical curiosity, presenting India not as an alien civilization but as a sophisticated and rational world worthy of study. Similarly, Persian geographers such as Gardizi and Nizam al-Mulk mentioned India in terms of its political wealth, natural beauty, and scholarly heritage. The Persian term Hindustan gradually came to signify not only a geographic region but also a space of cultural refinement and moral depth.

Throughout Persian literary and intellectual traditions, India was imagined as a *dar al-hikmah* — a land of wisdom. The fascination with Indian knowledge systems—especially astronomy, medicine, and philosophy—deeply influenced Persian thinkers. Texts such as the *Kalila wa Dimna* (translated from Sanskrit Panchatantra into Persian via Arabic) shaped Persian moral and didactic literature for centuries. The Indian origin of this work was openly acknowledged and admired, symbolizing India's reputation as a source of philosophical and ethical wisdom. Indian spirituality also occupied a central place in the Persian imagination. Mystical poets such as Sanai, Attar, and Rumi often referred to Indian ascetics (Brahmans and yogis) as symbols of renunciation and divine knowledge. India, in their verses, became a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment—a space beyond material attachments, where truth and mysticism converged. However, this admiration often coexisted with a sense of exoticism. Indian landscapes, animals (especially the elephant and peacock), spices, and precious stones were recurrent motifs in Persian poetry. They represented both material abundance and the mystery of the Orient, reinforcing India's dual identity as a real geography and an imagined wonderland.

The Persian imagination of India evolved significantly between Firdausi (10th–11th century) and Amir Khusrau (13th–14th century). While Firdausi viewed India largely as an external space of marvels, Amir Khusrau Dehlavi internalized it as his homeland. Khusrau, born in India but educated in the Persian tradition, synthesized Iranian literary heritage with Indian sensibility, declaring:

"I am a Turk of Hindustan."

For Khusrau, India was no longer merely the "other" — it was the center of cultural and poetic innovation. His works such as *Nuh Sipihr* and *Khazain-ul-Futuh* praise the land's beauty, language, and diversity. He described India as "the paradise of the world" (*firdaus-i jahān*) and celebrated its linguistic richness, flora, fauna, and people. In doing so, Khusrau redefined Persian imagination from an outsider's gaze to an insider's pride. Literary metaphors like the garden of Hind, the jewel of the East, or the mirror of wisdom frequently appear in Persian texts to denote India's intellectual and aesthetic value. These metaphors reflect both poetic convention and genuine admiration, blending geography with imagination. Khusrau's linguistic innovation was not merely ornamental; it was foundational to the birth of Indo-Persian poetics. He experimented with the fusion of Persian and Hindavi, creating a linguistic bridge that reflected the plural ethos of medieval India. His verses often incorporated Hindavi words, idioms, and proverbs into Persian meters, producing a unique hybridization that enriched both traditions. In works like *Khaliq Bari* (a glossary of Persian, Arabic, and Hindavi words) and in his playful riddles and songs (*mukhammas* and *paheliyan*), Khusrau demonstrated that the coexistence of languages was not a matter of translation but of transformation. His Hindavi poetry, composed in vernacular meters and musical forms, anticipates the later development of Urdu as a composite linguistic identity. Khusrau's poetic language thus reflects a deliberate linguistic cosmopolitanism—a recognition that true eloquence (*fasāhat*) in India must speak in more than one tongue. His creativity was not linguistic hybridity for its own sake, but a conscious literary act that mirrored the multilingual reality of Indian society.

Amir Khusrau's synthesis of Persian and Indian elements laid the foundation for an enduring Indo-Persian literary tradition that reached its zenith under the Mughals. Poets such as Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, Faizi, and Bedil later inherited and expanded Khusrau's linguistic and aesthetic experimentations. Moreover, his influence extended beyond literature into music, linguistics, and mysticism, marking him as a polymath

whose creativity defined the very spirit of India's Persianate age. Through Khusrau, Indo-Persian poetics acquired its distinct voice—rooted in the Persian cosmopolitan ethos yet enriched by Indian vernacular life. His vision anticipated the later emergence of Rekhta and Urdu, where Persian sophistication and Indian earthiness found perfect balance.

From the early sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire represented one of the most significant phases of Indo-Persian cultural fusion. The imperial court served as both a political and intellectual center, where Persian — the language of power, literature, and refinement — interacted dynamically with Indian cultural forms. The result was a distinct Indo-Persian style, characterized by a blending of Persian literary conventions with Indian imagery, metaphors, and philosophical ideas. Persian had entered India long before the Mughals, but under their patronage, it reached an unprecedented level of institutionalization and creativity. The Mughal court not only promoted Persian as the official language of governance but also transformed it into a medium capable of expressing the plural, multilingual, and multicultural reality of the subcontinent.

Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) was a pivotal figure in shaping the cosmopolitan ethos of the Mughal court. His reign marked a conscious effort to bring together Persianate and Indian traditions within a shared imperial culture. Akbar's court at Fatehpur Sikri and later at Agra became a laboratory of translation, dialogue, and cultural experimentation. Akbar's doctrine of *Sulh-i kul* (universal peace) emphasized tolerance and coexistence among diverse communities. This policy extended to the cultural and linguistic spheres as well, where Persian became the bridge language linking Islamic, Hindu, and other intellectual traditions. It was in Akbar's court that Persian prose began to reflect the textures of Indian life — from metaphors drawn from Sanskrit poetics to references to Indian flora, fauna, and cosmology. Abul Fazl ibn Mubarak (1551–1602), Akbar's close companion and vizier, was central to this process of Indo-Persian synthesis. His monumental works — *Akbarnama* and *A'in-i Akbari* — not only document the imperial ideology but also represent the aesthetic and intellectual adaptation of Persian to Indian realities. The *A'in-i Akbari*, for example, integrates administrative detail with cosmological, ethical, and philosophical reflections drawn from Indian sources. Abul Fazl's prose combines the rhetorical elegance of Persian with the conceptual vocabulary of Sanskritic thought, thereby creating a new style of imperial historiography. His translations and commentaries on Sanskrit texts, undertaken under Akbar's patronage, exemplify what Sheldon Pollock terms the "cosmopolitan Vernacularization" of Persian in India.

The process of Indianization continued during the reigns of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), who inherited Akbar's Indo-Persian vision but infused it with new aesthetic dimensions. Jahangir's *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (Memoirs) reflects a highly personalized Persian prose that blends imperial authority with introspection and natural observation. His fascination with Indian art, botany, and landscape finds vivid expression in Persian descriptions that Indianize the idiom of royal autobiography. Jahangir's court also saw the flourishing of Indo-Persian painting, where Persian calligraphy coexisted with Indian visual aesthetics. Under Shah Jahan, Persian at court attained new levels of formality and rhetorical perfection. The imperial language became more ornate, reflecting the architectural and artistic grandeur of his reign. Court poets and chroniclers such as Inayat Khan, author of *Shah Jahan Nama*, continued to employ Persian as a vehicle for both imperial propaganda and literary elegance. Yet even in its refinement, Mughal Persian carried Indian resonances — in its similes, moral allusions, and its visual imagination shaped by Indian motifs. Prince Dara Shukoh (1615–1659) represents the spiritual culmination of Indo-Persian synthesis. His translations of the Upanishads (*Sirr-i Akbar*) and the Bhagavad Gita into Persian, as well as his original works such as *Majma'-ul-Bahrain* (The Confluence of the Two Oceans), embody a profound dialogue between Islamic mysticism and Indian philosophy. Dara Shukoh's Persian prose is rich with Sanskritic ideas and terms, reflecting a metaphysical universalism that sought to reconcile Sufi and Vedantic worldviews. Through him, Persian became not merely a language of empire, but also a medium of spiritual cosmopolitanism, capable of expressing the deepest metaphysical insights of both civilizations.

5. INDIAN GAINWORDS IN PERSIAN: LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE OF EXCHANGE AND INTERACTION

The Indo-Persian encounter was not merely a political or literary phenomenon—it was also a linguistic one. The convergence of Persian, the language of administration and high culture, with Sanskrit and the vernaculars of India, created an unprecedented space for translation, borrowing, and synthesis. This encounter, sustained over nearly a millennium, led to the creation of a multilingual lexicon that reflected India's plural identity.

The continuous processes of translation and adaptation between Persian and Indian languages served as instruments of cultural negotiation, religious dialogue, and aesthetic innovation. The Persian language, though originally foreign to India, underwent significant transformation in its South Asian milieu. As Persian interacted with local idioms, it absorbed numerous lexical items from Sanskrit, Prakrit, and regional vernaculars. These Indianisms in Persian are linguistic witnesses to the lived contact between Iranian and Indian worlds. Loanwords such as *pānī* (water), *bāzār* (market), *chandnī* (moonlight), *mandir* (temple), and *bāgh* (garden) entered Indo-Persian usage, often acquiring new semantic or poetic dimensions. Court poets and chroniclers such as Amir Khusrau, Abul Fazl, and Faizi seamlessly integrated these local terms into their Persian writings, enriching its expressive capacity and grounding it in Indian soil. These lexical borrowings not only demonstrate the permeability of Persian but also its adaptability as a cosmopolitan language capable of absorbing regional realities. Through such integration, Persian became not a foreign tongue imposed from above but a living medium of Indo-Islamic civilization.

Translation served as another major site of linguistic and cultural exchange. From the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal era, rulers and scholars patronized translations of major Sanskrit works into Persian, seeking both to understand India's intellectual traditions and to harmonize them with the Persian-Islamic worldview. The Mughal emperor Akbar's court became the most active center of this translation movement. Texts such as the Mahabharata (translated as *Razmnāma*), Ramayana, Yoga Vāsishta (as *Jug Basisht*), and Upanishads (later translated by Dara Shukoh as *Sirr-i Akbar*) were rendered into Persian by teams of scholars proficient in both Sanskrit and Persian. These translations were not literal reproductions; they were creative reinterpretations that sought conceptual equivalences between the philosophical languages of Hindu and Islamic thought. Abul Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari* and *Akbarnāma* also show how Persian prose was enriched by Sanskritic terms and Indic conceptual frameworks. The process of translation thus became a vehicle for epistemic exchange—where metaphysical ideas, poetic sensibilities, and linguistic aesthetics intersected.

While Persian absorbed Indian elements, the influence also flowed in the reverse direction. With the expansion of Persianate administration and literary culture across India, Persian vocabulary deeply penetrated regional languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, and especially Urdu. Urdu, often described as a linguistic outcome of Indo-Persian contact, developed as a *lingua franca* that blended the grammatical structure of Indo-Aryan tongues with the lexicon and idiom of Persian. Words such as *duniya* (world), *mohabbat* (love), *khushbū* (fragrance), *taqdeer* (destiny), *insāf* (justice), and *ilm* (knowledge) became naturalized in Urdu and later in modern Indian languages. The Persian impact extended beyond vocabulary into syntax, stylistic conventions, and literary genres. Ghazal, masnavi, and qasida became integral to South Asian poetic expression, and Persian idioms and metaphors were indigenized through regional linguistic creativity. The result was a unique hybrid linguistic culture, equally at home in Persian and in Indian vernaculars. Translation in the Indo-Persian context went beyond linguistic conversion—it functioned as an act of mediation between epistemologies. Translators were not merely conveyors of text; they were interpreters of meaning and mediators of worldview. For example, the *Razmnāma* did not simply reproduce the Mahabharata; it reframed the epic in the moral and ethical vocabulary of Persian-Islamic discourse. Similarly, the Yoga Vāsishta's translation integrated elements of Sufi metaphysics to render Vedantic concepts intelligible to Persian readers. In these acts, translation served as a bridge across civilizations, forging a shared intellectual lexicon that transcended linguistic boundaries.

6. INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL AND MYSTICAL THEMES IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

The encounter between Indian philosophical thought and Persian literary culture represents one of the most profound examples of intellectual cross-fertilization in the medieval and early modern world. As Persian became a dominant medium of literary and scholarly expression in South Asia—from the Ghaznavid and Delhi Sultanate periods through the Mughal era—it absorbed, adapted, and reinterpreted Indian metaphysical and spiritual ideas. This synthesis is particularly visible in the domains of cosmology, metaphysics, and mysticism, where Vedantic and Sufi worldviews found a shared language of transcendence, unity, and self-realization. The circulation of ideas through translations, dialogues, and hybrid texts such as *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* and *Majma' al-Bahrain* reflects how Persian authors internalized Indian modes of thought to create a unique Indo-Persian intellectual idiom. From the early medieval period, Persian scholars and travelers exhibited deep curiosity toward Indian cosmological systems. Works such as Al-Biruni's *Kitāb al-Hind* (11th century) provided the earliest systematic account of Indian philosophy in Persian and Arabic. His rigorous study of the Vedas, Upanishads, and classical Sanskrit traditions opened a gateway for the Persian-speaking world to

access Hindu metaphysical categories—such as Brahman, Ātman, Māyā, and Karma—through translation and interpretation. By the Mughal period, the translation movement under emperors like Akbar and Jahangir institutionalized these exchanges. The royal translation bureau (Maktabkhāna) produced Persian renderings of foundational Sanskrit texts, including the Mahabharata (Razmnāma), Yoga Vāsistha, and Bhagavad Gita. These texts introduced Persian readers to the cyclical cosmology of Hindu thought, the metaphysical unity of all existence, and the ethical implications of cosmic order (Dharma). Persian poets and philosophers engaged with these concepts not merely as foreign curiosities but as parallel expressions of universal truths, harmonizing them with Islamic philosophical and Sufi frameworks.

The dialogue between Vedānta and Sufism formed a central axis of Indo-Persian mystical literature. Both systems emphasized unity of being (wahdat al-wujūd in Sufi terms, Advaita in Vedantic philosophy), the illusion of multiplicity, and the inward journey toward divine realization. This conceptual affinity facilitated a fertile exchange of ideas between Muslim mystics and Hindu sages, especially during the Mughal period when intellectual pluralism was officially encouraged. Persian Sufis in India—such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Mulla Sadra, and later Dara Shukoh—interpreted Indian metaphysics through their own theological frameworks. Dara Shukoh's works epitomize this synthesis: his Majma' al-Bahrain ("The Confluence of the Two Oceans") explicitly sought to demonstrate the essential unity of Islamic Sufism and Hindu Vedānta. For Dara, both traditions pointed toward the same ultimate truth—the realization of divine oneness (tawhīd). His Persian translation of the Upanishads (Sirr-i Akbar, "The Great Secret") further reflects the Mughal-era aspiration to uncover the shared metaphysical ground between civilizations. Sufi poets writing in Persian—such as 'Abd al-Rahman Chishtī, Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliori, and others—also incorporated yogic and Vedantic imagery in their mystical treatises. Concepts like the chakras, the subtle body, and meditative stillness found analogues in Persian Sufi terminology describing the lata'if (subtle centers of the soul), fanā' (annihilation of the self), and baqā' (subsistence in God).

The 17th-century Persian text Dabistān-i Mazāhib ("School of Religions") stands as a remarkable example of early comparative philosophy. Written by an anonymous Zoroastrian or Persianate intellectual, it surveys a wide range of religious and philosophical traditions in India—Zoroastrianism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and others—with remarkable impartiality. The author describes the metaphysical doctrines of the Sāṅkhyas, Vedāntins, and Yogis alongside Sufi and philosophical schools of Islam. The Dabistān reveals how Persian intellectuals in India developed an ethnographic curiosity and a comparative framework that blurred sectarian boundaries and promoted philosophical pluralism. The work's language also shows how Persian had become capacious enough to accommodate Indian metaphysical vocabulary, often transliterating Sanskrit terms and offering Persian equivalents. This linguistic adaptation indicates not only translation but conceptual transfer, where Persian became a vessel for Indian philosophical discourse.

Perhaps the most emblematic example of Indo-Persian philosophical synthesis is Dara Shukoh's Majma' al-Bahrain (1655). In this text, the Mughal prince sought to establish a bridge between Islamic mysticism and Hindu monism, identifying the "two oceans" as Sufi tawhīd and Vedantic Advaita. He argued that the differences between these traditions were linguistic rather than substantive, asserting that terms like Brahman and Allāh referred to the same transcendent reality. Dara's comparative hermeneutics anticipated modern interreligious studies, as he juxtaposed Quranic verses with Upanishadic passages to reveal their shared metaphysical insights. This work not only reflects the ecumenical spirit of Mughal intellectual culture but also underscores the integrative power of Persian as a medium of philosophical dialogue. The influence of Indian metaphysical and mystical ideas persisted in Persian writings well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Poets and thinkers in Indo-Persian circles—especially in Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad—continued to reference Indian cosmological symbols and spiritual metaphors. The syncretic imagery of the soul's journey, the cyclical nature of existence, and the search for union with the divine became enduring tropes in Persian poetry. Furthermore, later Persian philosophers and Sufis in Iran and Central Asia also acknowledged the impact of Indian ideas transmitted through the Persianate world. This long-lasting exchange demonstrates that India was not merely a geographical periphery of the Persian Cosmopolis, but a dynamic intellectual center that reshaped the contours of Persian thought itself.

7. CONCLUSION

The exploration of "Indian Elements in Persian Imagination: Literary and Linguistic Encounters in Pre-Modern India" reveals a vibrant history of cultural synthesis that shaped both Persian and Indian intellectual

traditions. The interaction between Persian and Indian worlds was not a mere process of influence but one of creative adaptation, negotiation, and transformation. Persian writers and poets in the subcontinent—whether in the courts of the Delhi Sultans, the Mughals, or regional centers—absorbed Indian philosophical ideas, aesthetic concepts, and linguistic idioms to craft a uniquely Indo-Persian sensibility. This engagement produced a rich corpus of texts where Sanskrit thought met Sufi metaphysics, where Indian cosmology conversed with Persian poetics, and where language itself became a site of cultural dialogue. Through translations, lexicons, and literary innovations, Persian became not only a vehicle of governance but also a medium that internalized the spiritual and intellectual rhythms of India. The result was a composite literary culture that transcended rigid religious and linguistic boundaries, fostering mutual understanding and aesthetic pluralism. Thus, the Persian imagination in India stands as a powerful testimony to the subcontinent's syncretic heritage—one that celebrated hybridity, dialogue, and the creative possibilities of cultural convergence.

DECLARATIONS

Acknowledgement

This paper is based solely on the review and analysis of published literature, secondary data, and archival sources. No primary research involving human or animal subjects was conducted. All referenced materials have been duly acknowledged and cited in accordance with academic and ethical standards.

Ethical Consideration

This research is based exclusively on desk study, secondary sources, and published literature. No primary data was collected, nor were any human or animal subjects involved in this research. All sources have been appropriately cited. Efforts were made to ensure the highest standards of accuracy, transparency, and respect for intellectual property throughout the writing process.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that may have influenced the outcomes of this study. All interpretations and conclusions are those of the authors alone.

Author contribution

Dr. Mohd Rehmatullah and Shakilur Rahman Khan jointly conceptualized the research framework, conducted the literature review, analyzed relevant texts and case studies, and contributed equally to the drafting and revision of the manuscript.

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