Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian

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Arabic in India carries an almost absolute Islamic identity, to the extent that even the study of pre-Islamic pagan poetry is ascribed to a spiritual impetus. This is not surprising, for it is generally acknowledged that the Arabic language has a predominantly sacred character outside the Arabic speaking Middle East. However, the functional manifestation of the language in the subcontinent has great historical significance and has not been systematically explored. To this end, this paper presents a survey of the uses of Arabic in India from its arrival in the eighth century through the twentieth, under the following eight-part classification: liturgy, teaching and study, nomenclature, inscriptions, vocabulary assimilation, composition of religio-scholarly texts, composition of secular-scholarly texts, and marginal utilitarian uses. Details of the uses of Persian—the other major foreign language brought here by Muslims, which flourished side by side with Arabic for many centuries—are offered here as foil, inasmuch as they bring into sharper focus the scriptural face of Indian Arabic.

The first acquaintance of the residents of the Indian subcontinent with the Arab people came about when Arab sailors first docked at Indian ports in order to acquire spices in pre-Islamic times, perhaps as far in the past as 50 C.E. This early trade contact occurred two centuries before Arab was attested as a distinct language in the Arabian Peninsula in the third century. Trade contacts persisted, and at some point in time, through Arab traders, Indians must have gained rudimentary acquaintance with the Arabic language. In the seventh century, the Arabian Peninsula witnessed the birth of Islam, and the majority of Arabs became Muslim. One century later, in 711, the Arab-Muslim Umayyad commander Muhammad b. al-Qāsim al-Thaqafi invaded and conquered the western Indian province of Sind. Arab Muslims settled there, and with their colonization of Sind came India’s first substantial and sustained contact with both the religion of Islam and the Arabic language. At this time, Indians began to convert to Islam. The initial act required of any convert, the recitation of the Islamic creed of faith, “la ilāhā illâ ‘lāh, muhammadun rasūl ‘lāh” (There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God), had an Arabic linguistic frame, which meant that Indian converts to Islam came into contact with Arabic through their very first religious


experience. Arabic also had religious prestige as the language of Islamic scripture, believed by the majority of Muslims to be inseparable from the message;\(^3\) moreover, familiarity with the Arabic Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an was deemed necessary for the correct ritual practice of Islam.\(^4\) For these reasons, Indian exposure to the Arabic language was primarily through the medium of religion, and Arabic came to India as the language of Islam.

Non-sacred Arabic hegemony was promoted in many parts of the world by political, social, and economic factors. So much so, that in some of the lands conquered by the Arab Muslims, such as Coptic-speaking Egypt,\(^5\) Arabic almost entirely displaced and replaced the local languages. In India, however, this did not happen, mainly because Arab Muslims did not have political control over more than the western provinces, and this control was for a limited time. The major Muslim dynasties in India were of Turkic origin, and their cultural language was, in the main, Persian. Other than the colony in Sind, Arab Muslim presence in India was constituted by small and early Arab trader settlements of mostly Yemeni and Basran descent on the Malabar coast (details in section VIII), by limited contingents of Yemeni mercenary soldiers employed by various Muslim rulers, and by occasional Arab visitors. Thus, Arab Muslims never really had a major presence in India. The locals continued for the most part to use their own Indo-European and Dravidian languages, with Arabic playing a subsidiary (albeit religiously significant) linguistic role.

Historically, Arabic has been used in India almost exclusively by its Muslim population, and has been a key force in delineating and shaping Indian Muslim identity.\(^6\) Currently, it is used almost solely by the 13.19 million Muslims who form 13.43 percent of the total 1.03 billion Indian population.\(^7\) Conversely, almost all Muslims in India appear to have some acquaintance with Arabic. From the early eighth century, Arabic in India has borne an Islamic identity, which has continued to be elaborated and strengthened through the thirteen centuries of its use under Muslim, Hindu, and British rule. The succeeding dynasties of Muslim rulers—including the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, slave-Sultans, Khaljis, Tughlaqs, and Lodis in and around Delhi, the Bahmanis and Adil-Shahis in the Deccan, the Shah-Mirs in

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3. A fundamental reason for this perception is the direct connection made by the Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an itself between its revelation and the Arabic language. Cf. Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an 26:192–95 (my translation and emphasis):

\[ \text{إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ رَبُّ الْأَلَّٰهِينَ رَبُّ الْمَلَائِكَةُ رَبُّ الْقُرۡآنِ رَبُّ الْمَلَٰٓمَاتِ رَبُّ الْجَهَّالِدِينَ رَبُّ الْمَيِّتِينَ رَبُّ الْحِيِّينَ رَبُّ الْأَمۡيَالِ حَمۡلٌ عَلَيْهِم مَّثَلُ حَمۡلِ الْكِوۡسَةِ }\]

"Verily, it is the revelation of the Lord of all the worlds. The Trustworthy Spirit has descended with it upon your heart [O Muhammad], so that you be among the Warners, in a clear Arabic tongue." See also Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an 42:7 and 12:2: "an Arabic Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an." Kees Versteegh, in his study of the Arabic language, remarks that "In all Islamic countries, the influence of Arabic is pervasive because of the highly language-specific nature of Islam. Since the Revealed Book was inimitable, it could not be translated, and those who converted to Islam had to learn its language." He goes on to discuss briefly the role of Arabic in Africa, Iran, Ottoman Empire and Turkey, the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia. See K. Versteegh, The Arabic Language (Edinburgh: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001), 226ff. See also Arabic as a Minority Language, ed. Jonathan Owens (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000).

4. One of the many authors arguing for the necessity of the Arabic language to the practice of Islam is Anwar al-Jundi, al-F\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)usha lughat al-Qur'\(\text{\textsuperscript{\text{\textregistered}}}\)an (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Lubnani, 1982).

5. Arabic did not entirely displace the local language in other countries over which the Arabs held political dominion for lengthy periods, such as Persia. The reasons for the different reception of Arabic in Egypt and in Persia have not been fully explored.


Kashmir, the Sultans in Gujarat, the Ilyas-Shahis in Bengal, and the powerful Mughal emperors who ruled the entire Indian subcontinent—all these dynasties, even though the language of their court administration was one of the Indian languages or Persian, continued to patronize Arabic-Islamic scholars and to promote the study of Arabic for religious purposes. In 1947, after India gained independence from British rule and was partitioned, Pakistan and later Bangladesh developed vis-à-vis Arabic in different directions—such as the proposals voiced in Pakistan by various political groups in the 1950s and 1970s that Arabic be adopted as the national language—which fall outside the scope of this article. In India, in the decades following Independence, Arabic usage was also modified in minor ways, but its Islamic identity was preserved and continues to be preserved today. Considering the future of Arabic usage in India, among the factors inhibiting it is the decline of Persian and Urdu and with it the decline of the Arabic-script reading populace. Some positive influences are India’s growing economic prosperity (and subsequent rise in education) combined with Islamic revivalist trends. It will be interesting to see how the conflicting forces play out.

Let us compare the history of Arabic in India to that of Persian. Persian flourished in the subcontinent from the twelfth through the nineteenth centuries (especially from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth), largely with court patronage. It had a prominent place in Indian society at all levels, in both its Muslim and non-Muslim segments, with mainly literary and government functions, as well as Sufi religious ones. The earliest formal relationship between India and Persian was formed with the establishment of Ghaznavid power in Punjab in the early eleventh century, when a high literary tradition of Persian, primarily poetic, took root. By the time of the conquest of north India in the twelfth century by the Turkish Ghurids, Persian had evolved as a literary language throughout Central Asia, and under the patronage of the Delhi Sultans, Persian writers, scribes, and poets flourished through the early fifteenth century, particularly when Sikander Lodi (r. 1488–1517) completely Persianized the administration. When Chingiz Khan invaded the Perso-Islamic world in the thirteenth century, many Persian speakers migrated to northern India, and a coherent Perso-Islamic identity (in opposition to Arab culture) was linked positively with the term “Ajam.” Under the Mughals, particularly Akbar (r. 1556–1605), there was an efflorescence of Persian literary culture in a large part of India, and Persian became the first language of the king and the court. Akbar formally declared it the language of the Mughal administration at all levels; it thus became an important tool for career advancement, particularly in the civil service. Persian also became a second language, perhaps even something approaching a first language, for many Indians. But with the waning of Mughal power and patronage, Persian declined rapidly in India; particularly when the rising British colonial power replaced it with English as the language of administration and education in India in 1835. Its use in the beginning of the twenty-first century has narrowed to a tiny number of scholars.

A word should be added here about the sources for this study. In addition to synthesizing data from disparate multilingual secondary works such as those listing madrasas (religious schools) of India and bibliographies of Indian-Arabic texts, this paper stems from research conducted in varied primary source materials. Some of these original sources are Arabic books and poetry composed in India, manuscript catalogues of Indian libraries, madrasa curricula, inscriptions on monuments and tombs, and catalogues of inscriptions and coins. Additionally, I have included findings from field work conducted in India for brief periods over the past several years, including interviews with Indian Muslim scholars of Arabic, visits to madrasas and monument sites, observation of Muslim nomenclature, and examination of Arabic vocabulary incorporation.

With brief remarks pointing out the analogous or divergent uses of Persian where relevant, the following pages present a detailed survey and classification of the uses of Arabic in India.

I. LITURGY: QUR'ĀN, RITUAL PRAYER (ṢALĀH), DUʿĀʾ, TASBĪḤ, AND RELIGIOUS POETRY

One of the most common uses of Arabic in India is liturgical. This includes Qur'ānic recitation, litanies (tasbih), prose prayers (duʿāʾ), formulaic expressions connected with the ritual prayer (ṣalāḥ), Śūfī chants (dhikr), and the chanting of religious poetry (qāṣīda, naʿt, munājāt, and marthiya).

The recitation of the Arabic Qur'ān is considered by Muslims a meritorious act and forms an important part of their religiosity. In India, Muslims recite the Qur'ān avidly, but generally without understanding the literal meaning. Nevertheless, they still see it as an act that brings the reciter closer to God and wins him or her divine grace (baraka) and light (nur).

Qur'ānic recitation in India takes place in homes, masjids, madrasas, and other venues, at different times of the day or night, individually or communally, at religious and social gatherings or as part of a daily religious routine, throughout the year, but most especially during the month of Ramadān, audibly or inaudibly, in sophisticated and melodious recitation (tartil or tajwid), or in plain, elementary recital. Since a significant number speak Urdu (in 2003, roughly 25 million) or other Indian languages written in the Arabic script, they can, if they are literate—thus, roughly half of all Indian Muslims—de facto read and write the Arabic script. Since Qur'ānic recitation in the original Arabic is an integral part of the mandatory ritual prayer (ṣalāḥ), those who can read and those who cannot all consider it a religious obligation to memorize sūras. They most commonly learn by heart the shorter sūras, including al-fātiha, al-nās, al-falaq, al-ikhlāṣ, al-kawthar, al-naṣr, and al-qadr. They also recite al-fātiha for the benefit of a deceased soul and upon visits to the shrine of a saint.

Uniquely in the Indian subcontinent, Qur'ānic sūras are subdivided into 557 thematic rukūṭ (lit. bowing). They are so named because they signal the moment of the rukūṭ within the tarāwīḥ prayer performed nightly by Sunni Muslims in Ramadān; through the course of the month, the prayer leader recites the entire Qur'ān, dividing his recitation according to these markers—roughly, one rukūṭ per tarāwīḥ rakʿa. Muslims outside South Asia

11. Literacy among Indians in general is 75.3% male, 53.7% female (2003 estimate); Muslim literacy rates are lower, at 67.6% male, 50.1% female. Census of India 2001. Until the twentieth century, literacy rates were sometimes as low as 10–20%
12. The only person to have written about the tarāwīḥ-related division of the rukūṭ appears to be M. Amir Ali, “Organization of the Qur'ān” (retrieved July 15, 2004, from http://illaam.net/PDF/QuranOrg.pdf). Some of the fol-
generally follow purely length-oriented ḥizb divisions. The rukūʾ are also important in the communal Qurʾān dawr (lit. cycle or turn) recitation held in several Indian Muslim communities, where each person present audibly recites in turn a rukūʾ of the Qurʾān while the audience listens and follows along. Rukūʾ divisions are marked only in the Qurʾān editions published in India and Pakistan, and they are denoted by the last letter of the word, ‘ayn. (A major Indian-Pakistani Qurʾān publishing house is the Taj Company, and the rukūʾ divisions may be observed in their Qurʾāns.)

Arabic litanies (tasbih or wurd, pl. awrād) are frequently employed. These include Qurʾānic verses, such as in kullu nafs ḥāfīz (Each soul has a protector), wa-idhā marid fa-huwa yashfīn (If I become ill, He is the one who cures me), and alā bi-dhiqr l-lāhī taqāʾin l-qulūb (Indeed, it is by remembering God that hearts are comforted). They also take the form of pious, non-Qurʾānic invocations, such as lā hawl wa-lā quwwat ilā bi-1-lāhī l-ʿalīyyī l-ʿaẓīm (There is no strength or power save through God Most High Most Mighty) and allāhumma ṣallī alā muḥammadī wa-alā ālī muḥammadī wa-bārik wa-sallim (O God, bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad and give [them] grace and well-being). Invocations of the names of Sūfī saints are also used as litanies, such as yā ʿAbd al-Qādir (O ʿAbd al-Qādir!), and in the case of Shiʿite Muslims (particularly, but not exclusively), the names of the Five Pure Ones, such as yā Muḥammad (O Muḥammad!) and yā ʿAlī (O ʿAlī!). Other common litanies are short Arabic phrases in praise or supplication of God, such as subḥān l-lāh (May God be praised!), al-ḥamdu l-lāhī (All thanks and praise are due to God!), or astaghfir l-lāh (I ask God for forgiveness). These phrases and verses are repeated over and over, often forty, or one hundred, or one thousand times, or in another number having symbolic significance. Sometimes, a rosary (also called tasbih, like the verbal noun) is used to count the number of recitations; at other times, the fingers of the right hand are used; occasionally, no count is made.

The liturgical recitation of Arabic prose prayers (duʿāʾ) composed by medieval Middle Eastern savants and later, Indian ones, is a common practice. Both tasbih and duʿāʾ, although they may be recited at any time during the day or night, are most often performed at specific times: (i) following the ṣalāh, (ii) as part of a morning liturgical ritual, or (iii) just prior to sleeping at night. Before, within, and after the prayer ritual, worshippers recite formulaic Arabic phrases. These expressions differ somewhat according to the denomination of the worshipper. Before the ṣalāh is the Arabic call to prayer (adḥān and iqāma) that contains phrases mostly culled from the shahāda; its gist is somewhat comprehensible even to the lay person. After the ṣalāh, Arabic duʿāʾ and tasbih are recited. These are considered optional and have a wide range.
Chanting of Arabic religious poetry is customary in private or public gatherings, and at various times. Most often, this religious poetry is composed in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad—in Arabic and other languages—and is called naʿt (lit. description), salām (lit. greeting of peace), or qasida (lit. ode). The birthday of the Prophet on the twelfth day of Rabiʿ al-Awwal is a favorite occasion for recitation of naʿt. Arabic panegyrics are also composed and sung for the Shiʿa Imams and the Ṣūfī saints. Another kind of religious poetry that is often composed in Arabic and chanted is the munājāt (Arabic “private dialogue”). In the Dāʿūdi Bohra (Ṣīṭe Iṣmāʿīlī Ṭayyibi) community, munājāt poems are composed to commune with God and are often recited in Ramaḍān. In the Twelver Shiʿite and Nīzārī Khoja communities, they also include poems addressed in a plea for succor to the Imam. Poetry mourning Ḥusayn (marthiya) is usually recited in Indian languages, but Arabic elegies are also performed.

Ṣūfī orders such as the Naqshbandis and Chishtis often use Arabic in their ritual remembrance of God (dhikr), which contains, among other things, repetitious recitation of the names of God and of certain sūras, especially those which begin with the word “Say!” (qul). Ṣūfī orders also use a great deal of Persian poetry in their dhikr sessions. They sing it in concert in the courtyards of Ṣūfī shrines, such as the mausoleum of Salīm Čhishti in Ajmer. The ghazals and mathnawis of Rūmī, Ḥāfiz, and Jāmi, are also popular, as well as the Persian and Urdu poetry of Indian Ṣūfī shaykhs, particularly Amīr Khurshid, and others such as Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāgawri, Amīr Ḥasan, and Nūr Qūfoli ʿĀlam. The Ṣūfī-oriented Indian qawwāli (similar to samaʿ in Central Asia and Turkey) is a musical recitation of poetry, usually in Urdu and Punjabi, but sometimes fully in Persian, or containing opening verses in Persian and Arabic. Amīr Khurshid is credited with the founding of the qawwāli genre in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century. Its repertoire includes songs of ḥamd (praise of God), naʿt (praise of Muḥammad), manqabat (praise of ʿAlī), marthiya (elegy on Ḥusayn), and ghazal (love poem with two simultaneous registers, secular and spiritual).

Thus, the use of Persian in Indian Muslim liturgy is mostly Ṣūfī and poetic, versus that of Arabic, which, although making use of the poetic tradition, as well as prose prayers and pious litanies, is based primarily on Qurʾānic scripture.

II. TEACHING OF ARABIC AS A LANGUAGE OF RELIGION

The religious need of Indian Muslims to learn Arabic gave rise over the centuries to a large number of religious schools catering only to Muslim students, called maktab and madrasa. (The terms are somewhat fluid, the word madrasa sometimes being used to denote a maktab; other terms used are hifz-khāna for Qurʾān memorization schools, and jāmiʿa or dār al-ʻulām for higher education institutes. In premodern times, the term madrasa was also used for

secular schools with both Muslim and Hindu students.) Maktabs imparted primary learning, focusing on Qur'ān recitation and memorization of suras, and, by extension, a basic knowledge of the Arabic language, particularly the script. They also taught Shari'ah precepts, particularly those relating to the ritual prayer (salāh), the ritual purification (wudū'), the two calls to prayer (adhan and iqāma), and formulae recited within the ritual prayer. At more advanced levels, they taught Qur'ān interpretation and prophetic Traditions (Hadith). Maktabs continue to flourish in India today, in masjids or independent institutions, with the inclusion in modern times of a rudimentary secular component, comprising basic arithmetic and elementary literacy in the local vernacular. In addition, today many Muslim children who otherwise go to secular school or do not go to school at all also receive part-time religious education at home by professional mullahs/maulvis or parents, or at after-school part-time maktabs. This home instruction is entirely focused on religion, the Qur'ān, and Arabic.

Madrassas have generally been for more advanced religious learning and Arabic has been an important component of their curriculum. Many have “Arabic madrasa” as part of their name, such as the Madrasa 'Arabiyya Jāmi'a Imām al-Úllim in Zaydpur, and Madrasa 'Arabiyya Dār al-Ta'līm in Muhallapura Śūfipur, both in Uttar Pradesh. By the tenth century, the first ad hoc madrasas in India were established in Sind in the towns of Mansura and Multan, and were associated with the local masjids. In the last decade of the twelfth century, the Turk invader Muhammad Ghūrī (d. 1206, founder of real Muslim dominion in India) established formal madrasas in the town of Ajmer in North India. Soon thereafter, his successor’s successor Sultan Ilutmish (d. 1236) established the first madrasa in Delhi and one in Badaun, and in the following decades, madrasas sprang up all over northern India. Then, over the next seven centuries of partial or full Muslim rule, until the deposition of the last Mughal emperor Bahādur Šah Zafar in 1857 by the British, madrasas proliferated in all parts of India into the hundreds, either associated with, or independent of, masjids. In the nineteenth century, the new colonial power promoted Western-style secular education, particularly English, and the Arabic language (and Persian) diminished in importance. Many madrasas were adversely affected, but several new ones such as Deoband and then Nadwa (details later) were instituted by Islamic salafi revivalists deliberately to counter the colonial approach and bolster traditional religious education. Paradoxically, most of the important madrasas existing today were established during the British Raj. In these institutions, in the words of a modern scholar, “Arabic, being the language of the original sources of Islam, was to be the major focus of study. It was, so to speak, not only a language but the major linguistic symbol of Islamic identity and Muslim resistance to modernity.”

The curriculum followed in these madrasas through the centuries focused on Islam as a subject and Arabic as a tool. Until the fifteenth century, the principal subjects of study in madrasas were the religious sciences (in Arabic) of Qur'ān exegesis, Hadith, jurisprudence, Sufism, theology, history, the related subjects of Arabic grammar and literature, and some logic and philosophy, also in Arabic. Approximately the same curriculum was followed all over India. The course was based on Arabic texts with works from the classical (Middle

17. See Ishāq, Hindustān ke ahamm madars, 25 (Śūfipur), 41 (Zaydpur).
Eastern) canon being studied, such as Taṣfīr Ibn Kathīr, Zamakhshāri’s Kashshāf, Taṣfīr al-Bayḍāwī, al-Muwāṭṭa’ā, al-Ṣaḥīḥayn, al-Ḥadīṣa fi al-furū’, Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ, ‘Awārif al-
ma‘ārif, Fuṣūs al-ḥikam, Ḥadīṣa al-naḥw, Sharḥ mi‘āt ʿāmil, and al-Ḵāfya. A few modifications

to this curriculum were made in the fifteenth century, when a couple of medieval
Arabic science texts were added, and again in the eighteenth century by Shāh Wālī Allāh
(d. 1760). Some years later, Mulla Nīzām al-Dīn (of Sihāli near Lucknow, d. 1748) pro-
posed a new Arabic curriculum, later to become famous as the Dārs-i Nīzāmī.19 He con-
firmed several Arabic religious and grammatical texts already in use, and, for the first time
in Indian madrasa history, added Arabic texts on jurisprudence, logic and philosophy com-
piled by Indian savants, such as Mulla Jiwan of Amethi (d. 1718), Mir Muḥammad Zāhid
al-Harawī (d. 1700), and Mulla Mahmūd Jawnpūrī. This curriculum was adopted almost
immediately all over India and continues to be used to this day with some amendments,
including the addition of non-religious subjects such as mathematics and English. In the late
eighteenth century, salāfī madrasas purged the syllabus of Ṣūfī texts (Arabic and Persian).
Shī‘ite madrasas follow different curricula with regard to religious texts, but usually the texts
used for the study of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, perhaps even some literature and phi-
losophy, are the same as those prescribed by the Dārs-i Nīzāmī.

The number of full-time Arabic madrasas in 1996 was 757.20 The best known madrasas
of India today are in the northern part of the country in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Deo-
bandh in this state is the home of the famous madrasa named Dār al-ʿUlāmī21 (founded
1866), which has around two thousand students from India and other countries of South and
East Asia, a large library (133,070 printed books and 1,563 manuscripts), and focuses almost
completely on religious education.22 A modern Indian scholar calls it a “mother institution”
for Indian Muslim educational centers.23 Another well-known madrasa in this state is the Dār
al-ʿUlām Nadwat al-ʿUlamāʾ24 in Lucknow25 (founded 1893), with 1,500 students, seventy
professors, and a strong research orientation. It focuses on religious learning, particularly
Arabic, but includes some secular sciences as well. Its focus is on subjects, as opposed to
the text-based approach of other, traditional madrasas. Both the above are Sunni institutions,
the Deobandh madrasa a strongly salāfī one. Two important Twelver Shī‘ite madrasas are also
in the same town of Lucknow, the Madrasat al-Wāʾīzīn26 (founded 1919) and the Jāmīʿa
Nāẓimiyā27 (founded 1890). In Western India, the leading Muslim educational institution

19. For details of the Dārs-i Nīzāmī, see Qamar al-Dīn, Hindustān ki dīnī darsgāhān, 345–52; Desai, Centres
   of Islamic Learning, 14–15; and Francis Robinson, The Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South
20. Qamar al-Dīn, Hindustān ki dīnī darsgāhān, 70.
21. An important monograph on the Deobandh madrasa is Metcalf, Islamic Revivalism. See the Deobandh
   Arabic curriculum in Kaur, Madrasa Education, 121–24.
22. Asaf Fyzee calls the Deobandh madrasa an institution devoted to “pure religious learning.” A. Fyzee,
24. Ibid., 63–65. An international conference on Arabic literature was held at the Nadwa in 1981; its proceedings
   were published as al-Adab al-islāmī: fikraṭuhā wa minḥājuhū, ed. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ḥasanī al-Nadwī (Lucknow:
25. See F. U. Farooqī, Lucknow: A Centre of Arabic and Islamic Studies during the Nineteenth Century (New
27. Ibid., 61.
is in Surat, the Jāmiʿa Safiyya\(^{28}\) (founded 1813) of the Dāʿūdī Bohra Tayyibi Shiʿa denomination, with 149 professors and 717 students (440 men, 277 women) from India and outside India in 2006, and a large library. In Central India, the foremost madrasa is the Dār al-ʿUlm Tāj al-Masājīd\(^{29}\) (founded 1948) in Bhopal. South India, especially the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, also contain several important madrasas.

The method of teaching Arabic in these madrasas is grammar-centered and text-oriented. The focus is on reading and understanding classical Arabic texts. Speaking skills are not emphasized, but stylized prose writing skills (\(\text{inshāʾ} \)) are given some attention. Generally, modern proficiency-based techniques are not used, although there is a slow move towards their utilization. Rote memorization is favored over analysis.

The British colonial government in India de-emphasized religious madrasa education; they focused on the creation of institutions of secular learning which they claimed would make the world’s academic and scientific progress accessible to the Muslims of India. Arabic in these institutions was initially somewhat marginalized and “orientalized,” both in terms of teaching method and modified curriculum. The change of direction was often administered by Muslim modernist reformers rather than directly by the British. Thus, three modern-style Muslim universities (which were open to non-Muslim students) came into being: Aligarh Muslim University,\(^{30}\) the first Muslim institution of secular learning, was founded in 1875 in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, by the reformist Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan; it attained the status of a university in 1921, and currently has two full departments of Islamic Studies, viz., Arabic studies and theology. The Jamia Millia Islamiyya\(^{31}\) has a more clearly Islamic bent, and aims to offer modern secular education simultaneously with religious education. It was founded in 1920 in Aligarh, and moved to Delhi in 1925. The Jamia Osmania University\(^{32}\) in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, was established in 1917 by the Nizām of Hyderabad; it has a department of Islamic studies in which Arabic is taught, and where research in Islamic studies (mostly Arabic-based) is encouraged. The issues related to the teaching of Arabic in these universities and in other institutions in India have been the subject of several conferences and monographs.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, the Arabic language is offered as an academic subject in a few

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31. See the Arabic curriculum of the Jamia Millia Islamiyya in Kaur, Madrasa Education, 77–78.

32. See the Arabic curriculum of the Jamia Osmania University in ibid., 128–30.

33. See Mashāki al-taʾlim al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya fi al-maʿāhid al-hindīyya maʿ al-tarkīz al-shāhid ʿalā al-manāḥij wa-al-nuẓum wa-al-ahdāf, ed. Muʿīn al-Dīn al-ʿAẓāmi, also titled Proceedings of the Seminar on the Problems of Teaching Arabic in Indian Institutions with a Focus on Systems, Aims and Methods (Hyderabad Deccan: Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, 1982); Usūl wa-turaq tadris al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya fi muḥktalif al-mustāwiyāt, ed. M. al-ʿAẓāmi, also titled Proceedings of the all India Seminar/Workshop on the Principles and Methods of Teaching Arabic at Various Levels (Hyderabad Deccan: Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, 1985); Muhammad Sali, A Diagnostic Study of the Difficulties of Pupils in the Learning of Arabic in the
non-denominational universities. This phenomenon is less significant from a sacred language point of view, but it is interesting to note that the students who learn Arabic in these universities are most often heritage students who do so for religious reasons.

Let us take a quick, comparative look at the teaching of Persian in India. Increasingly from the thirteenth century, Persian was taught in maktabs and madrasas as well as Şûfi khângâhs (lodges). Madrasa pupils studied the Persian literary classics, such as Sa’dî’s Gulistân and Bûstân, Hâfîz’s Diwân, Jâmî’s Yûsuf wa Zulaykha, and Rûmî’s Mathnawî. They also read ethical texts such as Naṣîr al-Dîn al-Ṭûsî’s Akhlâq-i Nâsîrî, and historical works such as Abû al-Fadl’s Akbar-nâma, as well as treatises on theology, medicine, tales, prosody, and rhetoric. Epistolography was a key Persian language subject. At the preliminary and secondary stages, the study of Persian preponderated, and, in fact, the medium of instruction in many madrasas was Persian. From the time of Sikandar Lodi in the fifteenth/sixteenth century, the introduction of non-religious themes into the syllabi at middle levels had stimulated a wide application to Persian studies. Large numbers of Hindus joined madrasas to acquire training in the Persian language and literature, with the intention of pursuing civil service careers. Şûfi khângâhs also played a critical role in popularizing the Persian language. Devotees studied Persian to be able to read Şûfi texts, particularly the teachings of the Şûfi masters called malfûzât. Some khângâhs served almost as full fledged madrasas. There was provision for teaching not only Persian and Arabic Şûfi texts, but also texts in both languages on Hadîth, Qur’ân exegesis, jurisprudence, logic, and grammar.

In the nineteenth century, after the end of the Mughal period, the study of Persian in Indian madrasas declined rapidly. When English replaced Persian as the official administration language, the career incentives for studying the latter disappeared. Madrasas which had earlier combined religious and civil service training now functioned mainly as religious institutions. In contrast, the demand for Arabic continued to be strong among Indian Muslims for spiritual reasons. In a 1996 study of religious schools in India, the number of Persian madrasas in India is listed as 12, compared to the 757 Arabic madrasas mentioned earlier. In a side comparison, this study lists 264 Urdu madrasas and 2,275 Sanskrit pathshâlas. A glance at

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34. Forty-one Indian universities out of a present total of around 194 offer Arabic at B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. levels; students are normally permitted to register for an Arabic course, provided they can find an outside professor to tutor them. See S. A. Rahman, “Arabic in India: Retrospects and Prospects,” Muslim and Arab Perspectives International Islamic Magazine 3 (1996): 157. See also the Arabic curricula of these universities in Kaur, Madrasa Education, 124–26.

35. See the list of Persian texts studied in Awrangzeb’s time from a 1688 work titled Khulâsât al-maktab (MS), listed in Kaur, Madrasa Education, 111–12. A list of the most common Persian texts studied in madrasas in the Mughal period is provided in Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian,” 163. See also Desai, Centres of Islamic Learning, 16.

36. Desai, Centres of Islamic Learning, 11; Kaur, Madrasa Education, 112.


some State Board madrasa curricula, as well as the Central Waqf Board madrasa curriculum, reveals the focus of the course to be on Arabic-related material in the fields of scripture (and scripture-related), grammar, and belles-lettres; Persian texts on grammar, belles-lettres, and poetry form a small, often optional part of the syllabus.  

III. ARABIC ISLAMIC NOMENCLATURE

Side by side with names of Persian or Indian origin, Muslims in India and converts to Islam often adopt Arabic personal names. In the vast majority of cases, these Arabic names have a religious association: they are often names of important religious personages such as Muḥammad (or Aḥmad), ʿAli, and Fāṭima, or names having some religious context, such as Tasnīm (name of a river in Paradise). Other names such as Anjum (stars) or Ṛafīq (companion) are not connected with religion. Parallel to the adoption of the name Maria by women in Spain, many Indian Muslim males who are not named by one of the Prophet Muhammad’s names commonly adopt Muḥammad as their first name and another, relatively less common one such as Ḥasan or Ḥalīm, as their second. They are usually called by both names together (viz. Muḥammad Ḥalīm) or by the second name only.

Compound names are common, usually in an idāfa construct, often with a “servant of” first term, frequently with one of the names of God as the second part: ʿAbdullāh (servant of Allāh, male), Amatullāh (servant of Allāh, female). Probably due to the fact that most Indian Muslims do not understand Arabic grammar and vocabulary well, they sometimes inadvertently adopt the names of God—such as Raḥmān (the Merciful) and Jabbar (the Most Powerful)—without a “servant of” prefix. In other compound names, the second term is often the name of the Prophet Muḥammad or one of his family, such as Ḥulām Rasūl (servant of the Messenger), Banda-i-ʿAlī (servant of ʿAlī), or ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn (servant of Ḥusayn). As seen in these examples, the terms for “servant” are either in Arabic (“ʿabd” and “ʾama”) or in other languages such as Persian (“ghulām” and, less commonly, “banda”), with the result that there are several compound names formed from two languages. Sometimes the first part is an active participle, such as Dhākir-Husayn (one who remembers Ḥusayn, pronounced Zākir-Husayn), or a verbal noun such as Faḍl-al-Raḥmān (grace of the Merciful, pronounced Fazlur-Rahman).

Also prevalent are pseudo-Arabic names that contain two Arabic words in a construct form whose semantic sense is unclear. The following are a few examples: Abū al-Kalām, the name of an Indian Muslim freedom fighter, meaning “Father of Speech”; Islām al-Dīn, the name of a man from Bihar, meaning “The Islam of religion”; Samī Allāh, the name of a man from Uttar Pradesh, meaning “God’s namesake,” or, if actually “Samiʾ Allāh” with an ‘ayn, “The One Who Hears Allah.”

In contrast, Persian first names are more often associated in India with the Parsi community, Zoroastrians who migrated from Persia in the eighth century. They often select names of ancient heroes such as Rustam and Jamshid from the Shāhnāma tradition, and of

41. See the curricula of the Central Wakf Board and the State Boards of West Bengal and Bihar in Kaur, Madrasa Education, 355–98.
42. Given names are almost always Muslim, and often Arabic. Trade and place names are not distinctively Muslim, and often, though not always, carry the relative adjectival suffix “wätä” (lit., “belonging to”), such as Kānwāla (glass trader), and Ujjainwälā (family originally from Ujjain).
characters such as Shîrin (sweet one) from poetic love mythology. They also use descriptive names with a literary substratum, such as Dilnawâz (gracious one) and Mehrû (moon-faced one). Indian Muslims take some Persian names such as Shîrin, but do not adopt the names of the Persian kings.

Titles in India have frequently been in Arabic. More prevalent than the few secular ones adopted by kings and ministers—such as Nâşir al-Dawla (one who aids the state) and Malik al-Sharq (king of the east)—are titles of religious significance. The Arabic word “din” (religion) has been and continues to be used as a favorite second term of the compound title. It is also quite common in personal names, usually as a namesake of an earlier savant. Religious titles include titles of kings and ministers, but mainly consist of titles conferred on Muslim savants: Niẓâm al-Dîn (order of religion), Farîd al-Dîn (unique in religion), Ghiyâth al-Dîn (refuge of religion), Sayf al-Dîn (sword of religion), Burhân al-Dîn (proof of religion), and Quṭb al-Dîn (pivot of religion).

In contrast, Persian titles of Indian rulers are usually related to sovereignty, such as ʿAlamgîr (conqueror of the universe), Jahângîr (conqueror of the world), Jahânpanâh (sucor of the world), Shâh Jahân (king of the world), Awrangzêb (ornament of the throne), Bahâdur Shâh (brave king), and Thurayyâ Jâh (one with the lofty station of the Pleiades). Mughal emperors often had both “something of din (religion)” titles in Arabic and ones related to kingship in Persian. Titles denoting nobility are often also in Persian, such as Mîrzâ (prince, noble), Bêg (lord, prince), and Begum (lady).

Thus, comparing Arabic and Persian nomenclature in India, Arabic names and titles are most often related to religion and are from the religious tradition, whereas Persian ones are more often kingly or literary.

IV. ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE:

QUR'ĀN VERSES AND OTHER

Indian Muslim rulers utilized Arabic to inscribe religious texts—particularly Qur'ān verses—on masjids, mausoleums, madrasas, coins, forts, palaces, and regal paraphernalia. The common people also used Arabic for epitaphs, as well as for dedications and ornamentation on various religious buildings. Much of this material has been catalogued.

43. An overview is provided by Burton-Page, “Kitâbät (i) inscriptions (10) India,” Ep.
The earliest Arabic inscription in India is from the eighth century in a masjid in Kovalam (South India). The few early Muslim inscriptions were solely in Arabic. From the thirteenth century, with the establishment of Persianate Muslim power in North India, Muslim inscriptions, with Qur'ānic verses and the like, began to proliferate. Other than Persian mystical poetry, the religious content continued to be inscribed in Arabic, while secular components such as names and dates were mostly replaced by Persian (and later, Urdu). In the twenty-first century, Muslim communities continue to employ Arabic religious inscriptions.

The thousands of monuments built by Muslims throughout India are lavishly adorned by religious Arabic inscriptions, particularly Qur'ānic verses. These monuments include the Taj Mahal at Agra (built 1630–1652) where the sura of Yāsin is inscribed, and the mausoleum of the Dā'ūdi Bohra Dā'ī Sayyidnâ Tâhir Sayf al-Dîn, the Rawdat Tâhira in Mumbai (built 1965), the only place in the world where the entire Qur'ān is inscribed on marble in letters of gold. Dedication plaques of masjids, mausoleums, forts, and palaces usually contain a verse or two from the Qur'ān, often in elaborate tughra calligraphy. Plaques on religious buildings are often entirely in Arabic. Persian masjid dedications are also present, and they typically contain the name of the builder and the date of construction. Fully secular Persian inscriptions are located on cannon guns, noting such things as the date of their manufacture, and their capacity.

Arabic inscriptions on epitaphs and coins are also mostly religious. Epitaphs on mausoleums and graves are regularly in Persian, Urdu, or another vernacular, but, as a rule, they contain some Arabic religious texts, especially Qur'ānic verses. Some of the religious content of epitaphs is in Persian, particularly lines of Sūfī poetry. Coins struck by Muslim rulers often have a similarly dual, secular Persian and religious Arabic, component. The year and denomination are often in Persian, whereas the Islamic creed of faith, the kalimat al-shahāda, is in Arabic, as are optative phrases of prayer following the name of the ruler, such as “khallad alâh sultan mulkih'” (May God preserve the power of His kingdom forever).

V. ARABIC RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY INCORPORATED AND INTERJECTED INTO INDIAN LANGUAGES

Much of the Arabic vocabulary that has been incorporated into Indian languages over the centuries has to do with religion, moral values, and issues discussed extensively in the Qur'ān. Heaviest absorption appears to be into languages used to a great extent by Muslims, in particular Urdu. The following sample Arabic terms have been simultaneously assimilated into four Indian languages, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, and Marathi: din (religion), hajj (the Hajj pilgrimage), ḥājjī (one who has made the ḥajj pilgrimage), îmân (belief), jannat (heaven), jahannam (hell), ḥaqiqat (reality), ḥaqq (right), ḥikmat (wisdom), dunyâ

46. Since Independence, the government of India appears to have deliberately de-emphasized the Islamic Indian heritage; several monuments with Arabic inscriptions—such as the Red Fort in Delhi—are falling into decay due to inadequate maintenance.
47. Arabic words incorporated into Marathi are listed in Muḥammad Ajmal Khân, “al-Kalimât al-‘arabiyya wa-al-fârsiyya flal-lughât al-hindiyiya,” pt. 4: “al-lugha al-marâthiya,” Thaqafatu'l-Hind 13.1 (1962): 88-95; he has earlier published similar articles—which I have been unable to locate—listing the incorporation of Arabic into other Indian languages.
(this world), risāla (message), salām (greeting), shayṭān (satan), ṣadaqa (alms), zulm (oppression), ‘adālat (justice), ghusl (ritual bath), fasād (corruption), qabr (grave), qalam (pen), kafan (shroud), ladhdhat (pleasure), mātam (mourning), maqām (station), mawt (death), waḥfa’ (loyalty), wa’da (promise), yaqīn (certainty).  

Persian religious vocabulary of non-Arabic origin has also been incorporated into Indian languages (such as roza, fasting, and namāz, ritual prayer) as well as a large number of secular Persian words (such as dēhât, villages, and gul, rose). Moreover, because all official correspondence in Mughal times was in Persian, people learned the polite forms of address and phrases used in that language, and soon these Persian forms, whether in the original or translated, came to be used in Punjabi, Gujarati, and other regional languages.  

Persian was so predominant that the integration of Arabic into Indian languages took place primarily through its mediation—thus Arabic vocabulary that had earlier been absorbed into Persian came into Indian languages as Arabo-Persian words. Evidence of Persian as a vehicle for Arabic assimilation is found in the fact that the Arabic vocabulary absorbed into Indian languages sometimes has a modified lexical meaning not existing in the original Arabic, but present in the Arabo-Persian word (e.g., makān, meaning “house” rather than “place,” furṣat, meaning “leisure time” rather than “opportunity”). Some scholars believe this mediation to be absolute. The extra step in the transition, however, does not change the fact that the Arabic vocabulary incorporated into Urdu or other Indian languages is heavily religion-oriented.  

Religious Arabic phrases are habitually interjected into Urdu (and other Indian-language) speech. These phrases usually contain an “Allah” component, such as al-ḥamdu lillāh (praise be to God), shukra‘a‘ lillāh (thanks be to God), mā shā‘ allāh (what [wonders] God has willed!), inshā‘ allāh (if God wills), and jaza‘ā‘ allāh (may God reward you!). Additionally, the introductory parts of Muslim speeches and sermons are often in Arabic and may be brief, one-sentence openings or longer, multi-paragraph ones. These typically contain the name and praise of God (basmāla and hamdālā), and benedictions on the Prophet (tašliya); Qur‘ān and Ḥadīth quotations are used heavily in religious communications, both written and oral, such as religion classes and the Friday sermon.  

Many Arabic words which have more general meanings in Middle Eastern Arabic take on a religious connotation in India. Şahīfa, which can mean several things in Arabic, including a leaf in a notebook, a page, a newspaper, or a prayer book, signifies here the last sense only. Ziyārat, which means visit, connotes here a visit to the shrine of a saint. Majlis, which means sitting or assembly, indicates here a religious assembly. Other words of general meaning, in both Arabic and Indian languages, can denote a religious meaning in the latter. An example is the word qaṣīda, which—in contrast to its dictionary meaning of the genre of monorhymed, monometered ode, whose themes include love, wine, and praise of political patrons—is often used in India to denote a religious poem in Arabic, particularly praise of the prophet or Imams. (It also denotes a secular praise poem in Persian, Hindi-Urdu, and Sindi.) Similarly, the word kitāb, which means any book, often represents here a religious book, picking up on the designation of the Qur‘ān as The Book or Kitāb. In many cases,
Arabic words are automatically considered sacred by virtue of their being Arabic. Particularly for those who have not studied the language in depth—which constitutes the majority of Indian Muslims—any Arabic word or phrase is sacred, or, at the very least, belongs in the sphere of the sacred. Moreover, incorporating Arabic (and Persian) words and phrases into Indian-language speech is considered by Muslims a mark of refinement and religious learning.

VI. COMPOSITION OF RELIGIOUS WORKS IN ARABIC AND OF WORKS IN INDIAN LANGUAGES BASED ON ARABIC RELIGIOUS TEXTS

A glance at the contents of relevant bibliographies demonstrates that a large percentage of the Islamic works composed in India are in Arabic. Conversely, and more germane to the topic, it also demonstrates that the majority of Arabic books in India have been composed on subjects of religious import. Approximately eighty-five percent of the Arabic books of India listed by Brockelmann, for example, are on the subjects of Qur‘ān and Ḥadīth studies, jurisprudence, Sūfism, theology, and the lives of saints, while only 15 percent are books on secular subjects—philology, philosophy, belles-lettres, and medicine—and these too are sustained by the Islamic ethos (as will be explained in section VII). In The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature, Zubaid Ahmad lists 360 Arabic books by Indian scholars in the religious sciences (jurisprudence 87, theology 75, Sūfism 74, Qur‘ān 55, Ḥadīth 45, history and hagiography 24), and 217 in secular fields imbued with the Islamic heritage (philology 99, philosophy 56, belles-lettres 22, medicine 22, and mathematics 18). The Arabic-Islamic works take the form of original religious books, commentaries on classical religious texts (usually on Qur‘ān and Ḥadīth, and commonly in the form of glosses and superglosses), and religious poetry. Some are by Arab immigrants, but the majority is by scholars of Indian ethnicity, some of whom trained in Mecca or Baghdad, and many of whom were Sūfis. Also abundant are Indian-language commentaries on, and translations of, classical Arabic religious texts.


The best-known Indian Qur'ān commentaries in Arabic include the two-volume *Tafsīr al-raḥmān wa-tayṣīr al-mannān* (popularly known as *Tafsīr-i raḥmānī*) by a scholar of Arab Nawa'īt descent, 'Alā' al-Dīn Mahā'imī (d. 1431), and a four-volume commentary that uses only undotted Arabic letters following the Indian penchant for stylized Haririan Arabic writing, titled *Sawātī‘ al-ilhām* by the court poet of the Mughal emperor Akbar, Fayḍī (later Fāyḍī; d. 1595). Several Arabic glosses on the *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* were also composed.\(^53\) Qur'ān commentaries in other languages include the sixteen-volume Urdu work *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* of the reformist Abu al-‘ʿAlā‘ Mawdūdī (d. 1979), and the first Persian commentary in India, *al-Bāḥr al-mawwāj* of Qāḍī Shihāb al-Dīn Dawlatābādī (d. 1445). Translations of the Qur'ān include the Urdu *Tārj̄umān al-Qur'ān* by the freedom fighter Abūl Kālām Āzād (d. 1958),\(^54\) and the earlier Persian translation of Shāh Wālī Allāh, considered by the well-known scholar of Muslim South Asia, Annemarie Schimmel, to be one of the best Qur'ān translations into Persian. Compilations of Ḥadīth are also numerous. Among the most important are a Ḥanafī tract which has attracted over a thousand commentaries\(^55\) titled *Māshārīq al-anwār* by Ḥasān al-Ṣaghānī of Lahore, and an encyclopedic collection of Ḥadīth arranged according to subject that is still one of the most widely read Ḥadīth works in India titled *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunān al-aqwa‘l wa-al-aqī‘āl* by the prolific author ‘Ali al-Muttaqī (d. 1568) of Būranpūr. Additionally, several glosses were composed on the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* of Būkhārī and Muslim and on Mālik’s *Muwassā‘a*.\(^56\) Among the best-known *fiqh* works is the multi-authored work on Ḥanafī law commissioned by the Mughal emperor Awrangzēb (r. 1754–1760), *al-Fatāwā ‘ālamlīyya*.\(^57\) The *Tāḥāqīq arādī al-hind* by Shaykh Jālāl Thānēsārī deals with *fiqh* questions (on property and such) specific to India. Several other works in Arabic on the principles (*uṣūl*) and specifics (*furū‘*) of jurisprudence were also composed. In theology, an important work is the *Ḥujjat Allah al-bālīgha* of Shāh Wālī Allāh. Sūfī masters also composed their *Khiļāfāt-nāma‘s* in Arabic. Some Persian Sūfī works were translated into Arabic: Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq al-ʿAydarūs translated the work *Safīnāt al-awwiliyya* of the Mughal prince Dārā Shikōh (d. 1659), under the title *Tuhf̄at al-asfīyya*\(^58\).

Of the Arabic poetry that was composed in India,\(^59\) a large proportion was in praise of the Prophet Muhammad and his family. The prolific poet and author Ghulām ʿAli Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1785) of Aurangābād in the south was given the honorific “Ḥassān-i Hind” (the Ḥassān of India) in recognition of his lyrical panegyrics on the Prophet in the tradition of the Prophet’s poet Ḥassān b. Thābit, including a famous *lāmiyya*.\(^60\) Several poets of the Qutbshāḥī Twelver Shi‘īte Deccan kingdom of Golconda in South India expended a large proportion of their literary energies in praising ʿAli b. Abī Ṭālib and the Shi‘a Imams; the

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57. Compiled c. 1760 to 1828 by a group of scholars led by Shaykh Niżām.


Hijazi poet Sayyid 'Ali b. Ma'sum (d. 1705), whose family immigrated to the Qutbshahi kingdom, composed panegyrics on Muhammad and 'Ali. In Western India, several of the religious leaders of the Dā'ūdi Bohra Tāyībi community, especially the Dā'īs 'Abd 'Ali Sayf al-Din (d. 1817) and Tāhir Sayf al-Din (d. 1965), were notable poets, and composed poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, and the Dā'īs, elegies for Ḥusayn, and poetry in communion with God called munājāt. A poem by Tāhir Sayf al-Din titled "The philosophy of the intellect" (falsafat al-'aql) is an eloquent exposition of the rational human being's need for divine guidance.

A large number of libraries in India house Arabic (and Persian) works by Indian and Middle Eastern scholars, including thousands of manuscripts, some very valuable. Some libraries are affiliated with madrasas and universities, or with shrines of saints (dargāh), and others are independent, public or private. Some of the most important in North India are the Rampur Raza Library in Rampur (6,000 Arabic mss), Mawlānā Āzād Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (c. 12,000 Persian and Arabic mss), and Kutubkhāna-i Naṣīrīyya (Twelver Shi'iite), Lucknow (c. 30,000 Persian and Arabic mss). Eminent libraries in Western India are the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Tonk, Jāmī'ī Sayfīyya Library (Dā'ūdi Bohra), Surat, Ḥaḍrat Pir Muḥammad Shāh Dargāh Library, Ahmedabad, and in Mumbai, the Jāmī'ī Masjid Library, the Library of Bombay University, and the Tāyībi Dā'ūdi Bohra Da'wat library. In Eastern India, important libraries include the Khudā Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, the Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, and the Oriental Public Library, Bankipore. In South India, three in Hyderabad are notable: the Sālār Jung Museum Library (Twelver Shi'iite), the State Central Library, and the Kutubkhāna-i Sa'diyya. Many smaller libraries also exist, and some that existed through the centuries of Muslim rule in India have been dismantled or absorbed into other institutions.

Several publishing houses take a special interest in publishing editions of Arabic and Persian texts. The foremost such publisher is the Dā'īrat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, Hyderabad-Deccan (founded 1888). Institutions that sponsor publishing houses include the Institute of Islamic Studies, Muslim University Aligarh, Osmania University, Hyderabad; Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras; Government of Bihar Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Arabic and Persian, Patna; a few are associated with madrasas, such as the Dār al-Muṣannifīn (also called Shibli Academy), Azamgarh (founded 1915). Presses of the University of Lucknow, University of Delhi, and Madras University also publish studies on Arabic works. Two well-known English-language academic journals

62. For details about most of the existing libraries named here in the text, see Desai, *Centres of Islamic Learning,* 95–125.
64. See *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore,* 34 vols. (Patna: Superintendent, Govt. Print., Bihar, 1908ff.).
66. For details, see Abidi, "Arabic and Persian Studies."
related to Islamic studies are published in India: *Islamic Culture* and the *Journal of Islamic History*. Original Islamic compositions in Persian are mostly in the Şüfi domain. The “malfüzät,” utterances of Şüfi masters (shaykhs) recorded by their disciples, comprise a new genre of Persian mystical literature. Although some compilations of Şüfi utterances had been made earlier in other lands, Hasan Sijzi of Delhi gave the genre a definite literary form. His *Fawâ'id al-fu'âd*, a summary of what he had heard from his master, Niżâm al-Dîn Awliyâ', inspired masters of many different mystical orders, and a considerable body of malfüzät literature appeared throughout India. Persian Şüfi poetry was also composed by Indians, including Şüfi savants and Mughal courtiers; some of these have been listed in the section on liturgy. A smaller (in volume) oral genre, not specifically Şüfi, was that of sermons (tadhkir) delivered in good Persian prose, studded with classical poetry, in the courts of kings as well as in army camps and bazaars. The fable (dästän) was also a spiritual, moral genre in Persian. Additionally, some Hindu spiritual works were translated into both Arabic and Persian, such as the *Hathagoya*, a work on bodily and spiritual discipline.

Comparing Arabic and Persian Islamic writing in India, Persian works comprised commentaries and translations of Arabic texts, and a copious body of poetic and malfüzät Şüfi texts; religious composition was one of the many parts of the Indian Persian library. Arabic works, on the other hand, comprised all the above genres, but also contained works on Hadith, jurisprudence, and theology, as well as religious poetry of a non-Şüfi bent. Religious composition formed the larger part of the Indian Arabic library.

VII. SECULAR-SCHOLARLY USAGES INFLUENCED BY RELIGION

Secular-scholarly and secular-literary uses of Arabic in India that are manifested in the production and study of non-religious Arabic works are also underpinned by a religious motivation. The proto-Wahhabi Damascene theologian Ibn Taymiyya had remarked that “the Arabic language is not just the communicative medium of Islam; it is also an expression of the rational, ethical and belief systems which Islam embodies.” In the perception of Indian Muslims, since Arabic is the sacred language of the Qur'ân, anything composed in Arabic is religious, and therefore part of religious learning. Accordingly, non-religious Arabic learning in India also stems from its religious essence. Arabic scholarship is equated with Islamic scholarship, and experts in the Arabic language are often the same scholars considered authorities in religion. As such, both the language and its scholars are regarded with veneration, and the Arabic literary heritage is deemed to be the Islamic literary heritage.

68. *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad Deccan, quarterly, 1927ff.; first published by the Niżäm’s government; from 1948, published by the Islamic Culture Board, Hyderabad, Deccan; from 1997, published by the Academic and Cultural Publications Charitable Trust, Hyderabad; currently edited by Shahid Ali Abbasi; articles in English on Islamic cultural issues, including topics related to Arabic language and literature, by scholars from India and worldwide. Includes some editions and translations of texts.

69. *Journal of Islamic History*, Delhi, publication of the Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies, Society of Islamic History, 1995ff.; papers in English and Arabic on Islamic history, from early Islam to modern times; articles by contributors from India and outside India, particularly from scholars affiliated with universities in the Middle East.


72. See the editorial detailing this aspect in the first issue of the journal *Islamic Culture*. 
Indian litterateurs explicitly connect their secular Arabic literary efforts to Islam. In his study of Arabic belles-lettres in India, Ahmad Idris explains that since Arabic scholarship developed around Islamic studies, authors presented their work as a service for religion, connecting the subject of the book with religion in one way or another. He quotes the following (somewhat convoluted) remarks by the poet Ahmad al-Rasülpürl in the introduction to his poetic *Dīwān*, explaining that his (secular) poetry is a religious effort:

It is not concealed that the science of Arabic is among the sciences of the Islamic religion, just as it is not concealed that from the earliest times, the Muslims of India expended effort in the path of studying the Arabic language and publishing literary data. Why ever not, when between Islam and knowledge of the Arabic language there is a relationship any person who wishes knowledge of religion and Shari'a cannot do without.

Moreover, it is the religious scholars in India who have produced the (relatively much smaller) body of non-religious Arabic literature, presumably as part of their religious effort. Through the centuries, and in addition to their religious compositions, they have continued to compose Arabic literary works that are not overtly influenced by religion: elegies, panegyrics, and love lyrics (*ghazals*) in the field of poetry, and quasi-picaresque novels called *maqāmāt* in the field of prose, such as *al-Maqaṣmāt al-hindiyya* by Abū Bakr b. Muḥsīn (d. 1715) and *al-Manāqib al-ḥaydarīyya* (*maqāmāt*) by Abī Ḥamīd b. Muḥammad al-Shīwānī. They have composed innumerable works in Arabic on other subjects, such as medicine, philosophy, and grammar.

Indian Muslims also consider the study of all texts Arabic to be a religious exercise. Madrasa students pay particular attention to the study of Arabic grammar and rhetoric as these are vital in deciphering the Islamic scriptures and theological texts. They also read poetry and bellettrist prose, as this promotes understanding of the literary features of the Qur’ān and its “miraculous” nature. They particularly favor the collected *Dīwān* of al-Mutanabbi and the *Ḥamāsa* anthology of Abū Tammām, and often memorize many or all of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī. They have also translated Arabic secular works such as the *Kalila wa Dimna* into Indian languages, and also into Persian, and written studies on earlier Arabic belles-lettres in different Indian languages, particularly Urdu. They continue to study Arabic works on various secular subjects such as philosophy, logic, medicine, mathematics, and history, considering these to be important for promoting religious understanding, being part of the Islamic ethos. In his monograph on Indian madrasas, Ziyauddin Desai discusses the religious orientation of the curriculum, the subjects studied, and the role of Arabic, as follows:

74. Ibid., 1, my translation.
75. See examples of such poetry in Idris, al-Adab al-ʿarabi fi shibh al-qārra al-hindiyya.
78. See, for example, Qâdî Shihâb al-Dîn Dawlatâbî (d. 1445) wrote a commentary on Ibn Ḥājib’s (d. 1249) *Kāfiya*; he also composed *al-Irshād flī al-nabh*, which later became a standard grammar book in Indian madrasas.
By the very nature of the curriculum in which religious sciences occupied the prominent position—the Quran being considered the source and fountain-head of Islamic learning—Arabic not only formed one of the important subjects of study but in the higher classes even the prescribed text books on non-religious sciences were in Arabic. Thus, most of the text books in Quranic Commentary, Tradition, Theology and Islamic Law (Fiqh) as well as on Logic (Mantiq), Philosophy and similar subjects were in Arabic. This emphasis necessitated the accent to be laid on the study of Arabic Grammar and Syntax. The Arabic belles-lettres did not occupy that prominent a place; nevertheless, selected books on Arabic literature were taught as part of the course.80

Furthermore, the Arabo-Persian nastaʿliq or (less commonly) naskh script is used to write various Indian languages.81 Sometimes it is adopted by the entire language user group, as in the case of Urdu, Kashmiri (Purik), Pashto, and Sindhi, and at other times by particular user groups, as in the case of Gujarati (Lisân al-Daʿwat), Tamil (Arwi), Malayalam (Mappila), Punjabi, Konkani, and Sanskrit, the latter for a short time in the nineteenth century. This usage has a religious association as well, being confined for the most part to Muslims—in the case of Urdu to a large extent, and in the case of languages like Tamil and Gujarati almost exclusively.

The production of Persian non-religious work in India, literary and otherwise, was an enormous enterprise. Some of the genres that proliferated were works on history, philology, and lexicography (sixty-six dictionaries produced between the tenth and nineteenth centuries). Persian poetry (panegyrical or qasîda, and love poetry or ghazal) was a particularly important part of the cultural landscape, and there were no booksellers in Agra, Delhi, and Lahore in Mughal times who did not sell anthologies and collections of Persian poetry. With its expanding territory, Persian writing was gradually Indianized. Much has been written about the sabk-i hindi (Indian Style) of Persian literature, but the discussion has centered on rhetorical issues to the exclusion of religious ones. In the late Mughal period, literary salons formed an integral part of Indian culture. Comparing Persian and Arabic non-religious composition in India, the composition and study of secular Arabic works appear to be limited (relative to the explicitly religious), and linked to religious ends, whereas the composition and study of Persian works appear to stem mostly from cultural motives.

VIII. MARGINAL NATURE OF NON-RELIGIOUS, PURELY UTILITARIAN USAGES OF ARABIC

There do exist in India a small number of purely secular, utilitarian usages of Arabic, but these are so limited in application that we can consider them marginal.

For a brief period from the eighth century forward, Arabic was the spoken language of a small Arab migrant community called the Nawâʾit or Naityas (from the Arabic nūṭī,
meaning mariner). They settled on the southwestern Malabar or Konkani coast of India in the areas which today fall south of Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, and Goa. These Arab settlers soon became culturally and linguistically assimilated into the fabric of Indian society without really influencing the use of Arabic in India. For many generations, they have spoken Daldi, which is a sub-dialect of Konkani, which, in turn, is a dialect of Marathi, an Indo-Aryan language; they are not more familiar with Arabic than their neighbors of Aryan and Dravidian descent. The Mappillas of Kerala went the same route, now speaking Malayalam, as well as the Ilappais or Labbais of Tamil Nadu, who now speak Tamil.

From the late twentieth century, another small group gained an interest in learning basic Arabic for communication purposes, viz., Indians (both Muslim and non-Muslim) who work in the Arabian Gulf countries. Connected to the Gulf States phenomenon, another somewhat curious usage of Arabic in India is the publication since 1957 of a non-religious Arabic journal, Thaqāfatu’l-Hind (Indian Culture), by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (incidentally, from 1968, the Council has had a Hindu President). The purpose of the journal is political and economic, to address the growing financial interest of India in the Arab Gulf States through the promotion of cultural understanding. The cover page of the journal states that “the objects of the Indian Council, as laid down in its constitution, are to establish, revive and strengthen cultural relations between India and other countries by means of (1) promoting a wider knowledge and appreciation of their language, literature and art; (2) establishing close contacts between the universities and cultural institutions; and (3) adopting all other measures to promote cultural relations.” Thaqāfatu’l-Hind publishes articles on such diverse topics as Indian Muslim history, Shakespeare, Gandhi, Nasser, and the Hindu scriptures. It has also published several articles on relations between India and the Arab world. Almost all its articles have been translated by its editors into Arabic from other languages such as English or Urdu.

In comparison with the marginal use of secular Arabic, non-religious, non-scholarly usages of Persian were strong from the thirteenth century. As early as the fourteenth century, Amir Khusraw remarked that Persian speech and idiom enjoyed uniformity of register throughout the four thousand parassangs of India. Particularly during the reign of the emperor Akbar, and until the end of Mughal rule (thus from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries), Persian flourished in mundane and intellectual, cultural and bureaucratic, milieus almost throughout the entire subcontinent. As the officially sponsored language of the Mughal court and Mughal India, Persian was a second language for a large percentage of Indians living in Mughal India, Hindu and Muslim alike.


# ARABIC AND PERSIAN USAGES IN INDIA COMPARED

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<tr>
<th>USAGE</th>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th>PERSIAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Inscriptions (monuments, masjids, coins, epitaphs, etc.)</strong></td>
<td>Qur'ān verses. Islamic creed of faith (shahāda).</td>
<td>Usually secular: dates, provenance, etc. Some Şūfi poetry.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Vocabulary (assimilated into Indian languages)</strong></td>
<td>Much religious (and some secular) words incorporated. Religious Arabic phrases interjected into everyday speech and formal prose. Some Arabic words with general dictionary meanings have special, religious connotations. Mark of refinement and learning. Assimilation largely through Persian.</td>
<td>Religious and secular words incorporated. Mark of refinement and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Utilitarian</strong></td>
<td>First language for tiny groups of Arab settlers in 8th, 9th c. on Malabar coast. Migrant workers to Gulf States in 20th c. leading to interest in study of Arabic as a language of communication.</td>
<td>From 16th c. to 1835, official language of Mughal administration, thus most of Indian subcontinent. Language of high culture, spoken and studied by almost all educated elite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>Primarily Religious</td>
<td>Primarily Cultural/Bureaucratic. Secondarily Religious (Şūfi)</td>
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The Mughal scholar Jamāl al-Dīn Injū (d. c. 1686) had placed Persian alongside Arabic as the language of Islam. However, unlike the case of Arabic with its broad, multiple, but almost solely religious usages, the religious significance of Persian in India was mainly confined to the sphere of Śūfī writings and rituals. Moreover, its limited Islamic identity was overshadowed by its use as the language of high culture and government administration. The dichotomy in the Indian usage of Persian and Arabic along the lines of religion vs. culture/bureaucracy becomes even clearer when it is known that many Mughal litterateurs who composed in both Arabic and Persian used Arabic for religious writings and Persian for secular ones. An example is Akbar’s court poet Fadī, who wrote his Qur’ān commentary in Arabic, as mentioned earlier, and his love-epic Nal-Daman in Persian. What is more, the cultural hegemony of Persian ended definitively with the end of the Mughal Empire in the nineteenth century, a milestone year in its decline being 1835, when the British replaced it with English in public administration.

The religious Śūfī use of Persian in India had earlier suffered a blow in the late Mughal period itself, with the reformulation of Śūfism. Akbar’s (r. 1556–1605) syncretic religious policies had evoked an orthodox reaction, represented by theologians like ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Dīlawī (d. 1642), who reintroduced in India an emphasis on the study of Ḥadīth; and Naqshbandiyya Śūfīs like Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), who brought Indian Śūfism close to non-Śūfī Sunni Islam. The conflict of eclectic and orthodox trends of Mughal culture is to some extent reflected in the essentially personal trial of strength between Dārā Shikhō and Awrangzēb, resulting in the latter’s victory and the establishment of a theocratic regime.

The Awrangzēbian de-emphasizing of Śūfī Islam was further bolstered when, from the late eighteenth century onward, parts of the Indian Muslim populace came under the growing influence of Arabian Wahhābī salafī thought. Indian scholars such as Sayyid Ahmad Bārēlwī (1786–1831) and Shāh Wali Allāh traveled to the Hijāz for the Ḥajj, studied there for a while, and returned bearing this influence. The salafīs emphasized a return to “pure” (Qur’ān- and Ḥadīth-oriented, Arabic) Islam, and rejected what they perceived as impure accretions. Among these professed heresies were practices connected with Śūfism. Since Śūfī scholarship and ritual in India were linked with Persian literature, certain Indian Muslim reformers, even while using Persian in their own writings, began discouraging the study of Persian as something alien to Islam. They contrasted it negatively with Arabic, which they venerated as the language of the Islamic scripture. At the end of his novel Tawbatun Naṣūḥ (A True Repentance), the Urdu writer Naẓīr Ahmad (d. 1912) had his protagonist repent of his worldly ways, this repentance being manifested in his burning of all his Persian books. But the best example is perhaps that of the influential early eighteenth-century intellectual Shāh Wālī Allāh, who, after his fourteen-month trip to Arabia, shifted his scholarly focus squarely to (Arabic) Ḥadīth. Even though a Śūfī master himself, he appears to have become puristic in this second stage of his life, and he was the inspiration for the formation of the salafī

87. Cf. some details in Azīz Ahmad, “Hind: Islamic Culture,” EP.
Deobandh school (his son’s students were among its founders). In his *Luminous Essay* (*al-Maqāla al-wādiyya*), he writes the following strong words:

Arab lineage and the Arabic language—both, for us, are sources of pride, because they bring us closer to the best of prophets and apostles... Thanks may be rendered to God for this great favor by not abandoning the customs and traditions of the first Arabs, who were the [forefathers of the Prophet].

Among us [Indians], he is fortunate who cultivates an association with the Arabic language, [its] morphology, syntax, and works of literature; who obtains an understanding of the Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān. As for Persian and Indian language works... reading them is error upon error... [At the very least], one should realize that what they contain is worldly knowledge...

The difference in the relative perceptions of Arabic and Persian in the nineteenth century—the first through the lens of scriptural religion, the second through the combined lens of Ṣūfī Islam and Mughal high culture/administration—is the main reason why, after the end of the Mughal period, Persian almost disappeared in South Asia, even as a classical language of learning, while Arabic maintained its position.

89. Paradoxically, Shāh Wall Allāh was also the inspiration for the founding of Aligarh Muslim University by the secular reformists.