



# MARATHI LANGUAGE, PERSIAN ELEMENTS IN

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**MARATHI LANGUAGE, PERSIAN ELEMENTS IN.** Marathi (Marāti, earlier form: Marhāti), the southernmost Indo-Aryan language, is spoken by more than 40 million speakers, including inhabitants of Bombay and the state of Maharashtra (Mahāraṣṭrā) in west-central India. The name of both the region and the language is derived from Maharathas or Maharatta, a tribe of immigrant Aryans (Velankar, 1984, 28). Having an unbroken literary tradition of over eight centuries, some 80 percent of Marathi vocabulary is drawn from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, and the local languages of ancient India (Beloch; Kusumawati, 1970, 17). The Persian influence in Marathi is fully treated by Abdul Haq (1936, 554-76).

Persian language and culture entered Maharashtra with the conquest of 'Alā'-al-Din Moḥammad Shah Kaliji (r. 1296-1316) and increasingly influenced the Marathi language and culture. Later, Moḥammad b. Toḡlaq Shah I (r. 1325-51) deported a large portion of the population of Delhi to his new capital Deogir (Dēvgiri, renamed Dawlatābād), which strengthened this process. The establishment of the independent Bahmanid dynasty in the Deccan by Ḥasan 'Alā'-al-Din (r. 1347-58) and even its subsequent dissolution into separate kingdoms at Ahmadoagar (Aḥmadnagar), Bidar, Golconda, Golbarga, and Bijāpur further accelerated the Persian influence. The tolerant attitude of the Muslim rulers and their efforts to win over the upper class Hindus extended and deepened their impact on life and language (Velankar, 1984, 18). The



period of Persian influence, as a whole, was quite enduring, coinciding with the time of Muslim domination in the Deccan as well as the period that followed the political ascendancy of the Marathas in the wake of the disruption of the Mughal empire centered around Delhi. Though this influence varied in intensity and extent from time to time, it has left its permanent imprint on the Marathi language and has impinged itself at several important points in its structure (Haq, 1936, 533).

The first exact sign of Persian influence on Marathi is seen in a Marathi inscription from the Bhimeshwar temple located south of Bombay, incorporating Persian (including Arabic loanwords therein) words such as *sāzgar* “harmonious,” *jam’iyat* “crowd, forces,” and *hejrat* “exile, departure”; Haq, 1936, 577). This impression was too deep to be reverted by Śivaji (r. 1674-80), a Maratha ruler who, just a few years before assuming kingship in 1674, issued orders to prepare a dictionary of official terms having their roots in Marathi or Sanskrit only. The attempt proved abortive, for the force and temptation of the Persian and Perso-Arabic phraseology could not be resisted (Haq, 1936, 555-56). On the contrary, the Maratha rulers, including Śevaji himself, freely used Persian terms in their official correspondence in Marathi and even conferred titles purely in Persian on their high-ranking officials, such as *hokumat-panāh*, *sar-keyl*, and *Śamsir* (*šamšir*) *bahādor* (Haq, 1936, 556). In the 1930s, the movement to purge Marathi of Arabic and Persian words was revived, but again met with resistance by intellectuals.

As Haq has noted, the strengthening of the influence of Persian on Marathi was due to a number of factors. Since Persian was the official language in the days of Muslim rule, the Marathas aspiring to government offices learned and freely used its terminology. Even non-official notables dealing with courts and offices used Persian legal and bureaucratic terms. Persian also found powerful agents of acceleration in the songs and phrases which the *faqirs*, a class of Muslim itinerant missionaries, brought with them as they moved around in the wake of the Islamic conquests. Conversion to Islam and inter-marriages also spread Persian words and manners. Finally, Islamic arts and craft, particularly architecture, civil engineering, and the making of arms, flourished in the Deccan and naturally led to Marathi absorbing Persian terms related to them. Thus Eknāt, a famous Marathi poet (d. early 17th century), used many Persian words and idioms in his Marathi writings. His poem *Arjadāst* (*aržadāšt*) starts with a Persian phrase and contains a good many Persian terms such as *bandagi* “servitude,” *bandinevāj* (*banda-navāz*) “kind to inferiors,”



*harāmzādi* (*ḥarām-zāda*, “illegitimate,” *kārkon* “toiling, industrious,” *savār* “horseman,” *zamindār* “landlord,” *zebardast* “skilled,” *čubdār* “mace-bearer, sheep-seller,” *parvānagi* “official permit,” *rowšan* “bright, wise” (Haq, 1936, 362-66).

Marathi retains many Persian and Arabic-Persian idioms and expressions in their original forms, such as *adab* “culture, literature, good manners,” *erāda* “will, determination,” *kār-kāna* “factory,” *gonahkār* “guilty,” *čarm* “leather,” *zabāni* “orally, oral,” *divān-kāna* “bureau,” *sarfarāzi* “honor,” *bāg* “garden,” *nāfarmāni* “disobedience,” *vakil* “lawyer, representative,” *bāng* “shout,” *bazm* “banquet,” *deldār* “beloved, courageous,” *pušāk* “clothes,” *naqša* “map, program,” *andāza* “measure, quantity” (for more, see Haq, 1936, 576-77).

Persian interjections have also been retained, with some slight modifications, such as *albat* (*albatta*) “of course,” *šābāš* (*šād-bāš*), “felicitations,” *afsus* “regret, alas,” and *bi-šak* “undoubtedly” (Haq, 1936, 580).

Examples of Marathi borrowings from Persian with various phonological adjustments include: *šahar* (< *šahr*) “city,” *šifāras* (< *sefāreš*) “recommendation,” *bājār* (< *bāzār*) “market,” *ešq* (< *‘ešq*) “love,” *dukān* (< *dokān*) “shop,” *hushār* (< *hošyār*) “clever,” *kāgad* (< *kāgād*) “paper,” *khurchi* (< *korsi*) “chair,” *jamin* (< *zamin*) “land,” *darvāja* (< *darvāza*) “gate, door,” *meherbāni* (< *mehrabāni*) “kindness,” *jahirāt* (< *zāherāt*) “advertisement,” *hazār* (< *hazār*) “thousand” (Molesworth, 1857, 1975).

The influence of Persian on Marathi extends to the calqued idioms and expressions. Persian has influenced the determination of the proper names of important personages in the history of the Maratha aristocracy and the mode of address and subscription of correspondence in the Marathi language. The *farmāns* “royal decrees” (see [Farmān](#)) of Maratha rulers in the Marathi language usually imitate those of the Mughals written in Persian. Moreover, a powerful strain of mysticism akin to the Persian is perceived in the works of a large number of Marathi poets (Haq, 1936, 562-78; Kusumawati, 1988, 18, 29).



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