

Upanikhat-i garbha: a Mughal translation into Persian of a small Sanskrit treatise of embryology

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In 1657, a few months before being defeated by his younger brothers Aurangzeb and Murād Bakḥsh in the Battle of Sāmūgarh, near Āgrā, Muḥammad Dārā Shikōh completed the translation of fifty Upaniṣads into Persian. This anthology, which also includes a Sanskrit-Persian glossary of technical terms, was to be entitled *Sirr-i akbar*, “The Great Secret”. According to the Mughal Prince, the translation required only six months to be completed. This *tour de force* could not have been achieved without the work of a team of skilled *paṇḍits*, obviously of Advaita Vedānta allegiance.

One text of the compilation, the *Garbha Upaniṣad*, is a small treatise on impregnation and embryology. In Sanskrit literature, it represents an early and clear depiction of the rebirth process. Our reading of its Persian rendering, made in Delhi two millennia after the post-Vedic original, is an illustration of the work of an early modern translation team under court patronage. In my paper, after a brief description of the production context, I will highlight the discrepancies between the Sanskrit and Persian versions and show, with a few examples, the translation methods of the Prince and his team.