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**Patronage in Literature, Translation and Printing\***  
**Some Remarks on the 1809 Edition of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* Published in  
Print with the Support of the East India Company**

**ABSTRACT:** *Dabestān-e mazāheb* is an interesting example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century text on various faiths and creeds of the Indian subcontinent. The present case study looks at possible explanations for its popularity claimed for it in the editorial note found in the first printed edition (1809) while simultaneously analysing reasons behind selection of this particular text for a print publication in the light of patronage extended by the East India Company to translation and printing of selected Indian writings. The process in this case is well documented in the correspondence of British officials such as Sir William Jones, but as to the reasons for the printing even more may be deduced from the highly ornate Persian peritext appended at the end of the 1809 edition by the book's editor, Nazar Ashraf. The note provides an interesting testimony to the evolving fusion of the long tradition of manuscript writing and the advancements in printing which the paper explores.

**KEYWORDS:** patronage, print in 19<sup>th</sup> century India, the East India Company, Persian literature in India

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While studying the emergence and development of print in the Indian subcontinent, an important theme that seems worth investigating is the indigenous portrayal of print, with the advantages and impediments that this relatively new media had to face in the area under study. Many important aspects of print culture have been already discussed in detail by Ulrike Stark in *An Empire of Books* (2007), especially in the context of the rise of new institutions such as private publishing houses which challenged traditional systems of circulation of knowledge. Some other core features regarding dissemination of printed books may be identified by scrutinising factual evidence and pursuing various case studies. The aim of the present paper is to delve into the circumstances of patronage extended to the print publication of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* (“School of Religious Doctrines”) published in Calcutta in 1809, with many details pertaining to the matter well documented at the peritextual layer, i.e., by way of Nazar Ashraf’s editorial note inserted at the end of the book. Other interesting facts regarding the popularity of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* (henceforth Dabestan) have been recorded in the proceedings of the Royal Asiatic Society (Johnston 1843) and the text’s early English translation by David Shea and Anthony Troyer published in the same year. Drawing on such data, this paper proposes to analyse the phenomenon of popularity of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* and the reasons that led to the high demand for the book as attested by its numerous reprints in the Indian subcontinent. A study of this phenomenon provides an additional piece in the puzzle of the larger attempt of reconstructing the image of the world of early print in India and hopes to contribute to the establishment of a more comprehensive understanding of factors leading to the gradual popularisation of print. Such notion, however, should be approached only by taking into consideration the socio-economic changes that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India. The main purpose of the present paper, however, is to provide data related to the single case of the 1809 act of print of *Dabestān-e mazāheb*.

*Dabestān-e mazāheb*, an anonymous text composed in Persian, describes religious beliefs and observances of various groups and sects inhabiting Indian subcontinent. The date of its composition may be

located somewhere between 1645 and 1658. The author, who refers to himself merely as “the author” (*nāma-negār*) and “the writer of the acts” (*kerdār-gozār*) (Mojtabā’i 1993: 532), profusely comments on the original sacred texts of various religions and their followers, often including conversations with the adherents of those faiths as well as his own observations concerning them. In the documents and the secondary literature related to the text the question of the book’s authorship remains open till date. It was first suggested by Sir William Jones that the author of *Dabestān* was a Kashmiri traveller named Mohsen Fani (Troyer 1843: 7) and this belief was upheld by A. V. Williams Jackson in the special introduction to the 1901 edition of *Dabestān*. The editor of a much later, 1983 iteration of *Dabestān-e mazāheb*, Rezāzāde-Malek, on the basis of a thorough analysis of various passages in *Dabestān* and the results of some other scholarly investigations,<sup>1</sup> launched a theory that the author of the text is a poet known as Moubad or Moubadšāh (Mirzā Zu’lfeqār Āzar-Sāsāni), an adherent of the Āzar-Keyvān<sup>2</sup> sect (Rezāzāde-Malek 1983: 40). According to Rezāzāde-Malek, many poems authored by Moubad stylistically match certain poetic passages found in *Dabestān*. Furthermore, historical data regarding Moubad’s life matches the course of travels undertaken by the author of *Dabestān* (*ibid.*). In a more recent study, Daniel Sheffield confirms these findings, inferring his observations from the agenda of the attested travels of the author of *Dabestān*, who moved from Patna to Agra and later to Kashmir, where he stayed for approximately two decades before relocating to Lahore, and the area of the modern-day Afghanistan and Iran<sup>3</sup>.

The book is divided into twelve parts called *ta’lim* (‘teaching’) with some further subdivisions called *nazar* (‘view’). The twelve parts

<sup>1</sup> For detailed analysis of various claims of authorship of *Dabestān* see Rezāzāde-Malek 1983: 7–76.

<sup>2</sup> An illuminationist, syncretic sect of Zoroastrianism, incorporating many ideas of the Persian Muslim philosopher Šāhāb al-Din Sohrawardi (1155–91)

<sup>3</sup> For more information see Daniel Sheffield’s lecture “*Dabistan-i Mazahib* in Historical Perspective” (<https://www.facebook.com/gangajamuniheritage/videos/876358896500394>, accessed on 4.05.2021).

describe beliefs and practices of the following religious groups: Parsis, Hindus, Tibetans, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sādeqiye,<sup>4</sup> Vāhediye,<sup>5</sup> Roushaniye,<sup>6</sup> Elāhiye<sup>7</sup> (*din-e llahi*), sages (philosophers) and Sufis. The Prologue to *Dabestān* contains the praise of God (as was the norm in Islamic texts) as well as an interesting quatrain comparing the world to a book:

*'ālam ču ketābist por az dāneš-o dād,  
sahhāf qazā va jeld-e u bad'-o ma'ād,  
širāze šari 'at-o mazāheb ourāq,  
ommat-e hame šāgerd-o payāambar ostād*  
(Rezāzāde-Malek, R. (ed.) 1983, vol. 1: 4)

The world is like a book full of knowledge and law,  
[Divine] Decree is the bookbinder and the binding—the beginning  
and the end,  
Spine is the sharia and the doctrines—the pages,  
The community of all people is the disciple,  
and the prophet is the master.<sup>8</sup>

This elaborate simile, comparing the world and its constituting elements to a book and its various parts, is a striking literary example of the concept and the image held by the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century poet regarding the value and importance of his own book and of any book in general.

<sup>4</sup> A monotheistic religion founded by Musaylimah, a contemporary of Muhammad, the founder of Islam.

<sup>5</sup> Religion which became popular in Central Asia, originating from the XIII century religious teacher named Vāhed Mahmud.

<sup>6</sup> Religion and movement popular especially among Pashtuns, founded by the Sufi poet and warrior, Pir Roshan (1525–1585).

<sup>7</sup> Religious, political and cultural movement initiated by Akbar (1542–1605) which is considered an attempt to establish a bridge between Hinduism and Islam.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise stated all translations from the Persian are mine.

The world possesses qualities such as knowledge, justice and law that are present in a book, says the poet. The quatrain may point to the book in question, i.e., the book in which it is found, or to any other book that can provide the reader with knowledge, including the ultimate *Book* or the *Qur'an*. Another important element of this simile is the figure of the bookbinder (*sahhāf*) who is compared to the Divine Decree (*qazā*), the predestination being an article of faith in Islam. Traditionally the word *sahhāf* is used for a person who sews the pages together and binds else sells books, being thus responsible for their circulation. The attention paid to the proper shape and form of the book is foregrounded in this image and serves an important purpose. Firstly, it elevates the social role of the binder by putting him on the same level as destiny. Secondly, it emphasizes the very act of proper binding. This act is elevated by the author in a rather indirect manner. The poet says: "A book's binding does not merely mark the beginning and the end of the book, but also of the world." Moreover, proper binding calls for a considerable expense that needs to be made good and requires some form of financial support. The same may be said about other elements related to the making of the book, like the spine which is just as important in the process of manufacturing a book as the religious law or sharia in the life of a pious Muslim. The concept of the pages, as it is put forward in the third line, is equally meaningful. They apparently represent the assemblage of doctrines of faith and religions found in the world. In this manner the Prologue foreshadows the multitude of creeds which are thus paralleled in the descriptions found on the pages of *Dabestān-e mazāheb*. The last line of the stanza reveals certain religious authority that is being attributed to the book, for the Prophet is positioned as the master and teacher as far as all faiths described in *Dabestān* are concerned. This is again highlighted in the epilogue. Its author states that his own role resembles that of a compiler of various utterances, books and observations. Also, his mention of the Prophet provides the book with certain safety net in case of plausible charges levelled by the objecting religious authorities.

The formulas praising the merits of the book occur frequently in Persian manuscripts. They describe books' fine qualities, educational

values and benefits that may profit the reader. The particular formula quoted above is however more intricate in its message, since the importance given to the bookbinder is a rather unique feature of this particular text and is not attested to in other poems with similar functions. Various works, for e.g., *Zarātošt-nāme*, or many Middle-Persian texts like *Māh-ī Fravardīn rōz-ī Xurdād*, foreground the role of the scribe and the copyist, and express gratitude to them, especially when involving religious works that promise abundant rewards in the paradise for all those who read or copy the book.

*Dabestān-e mazāheb* enjoyed great popularity both in Iran and the subcontinent as may be interpreted from the existence of numerous manuscripts extant today as well as the number of printed editions. The list of the latter was compiled by Aref Nushahi (2013: 484–486) in *Ketābšenāsi-ye āsār-e fārsi-ye čāp šode dar šebhe qārre-ye hend* (“Bibliography of the Persian works published in the Indian subcontinent”) and includes the following:

- Kolkata 1809, published by Sir William Bayley (Governor General of India), edited and corrected by Nazar Ashraf; with a glossary of difficult terms used in the book, pp. 543 + 3;
- Mumbai 1846, Lakhman Printing House, pp. 334;
- Mumbai 1848, no pagination provided;
- Mumbai 1851, no pagination provided;
- Mumbai 1861, by the order of Seyyed Miran Sahib, Nabuya Printing House, pp. 327;
- Mumbai 1875, ordered by Ebrahim ebn-e Nurmohammad, Karkhana Hari Printing House, pp. 327;
- Lakhnau 1877, Naval Kishore Press, pp. 396;
- Lakhnau 1881, Naval Kishore Press, pp. 396;
- Kanpur 1904, Naval Kishore Press, pp. 396;
- Lakhnau 1904, Naval Kishore Press, pp. 396;
- Mumbai 1908, press unknown, pp. 543;
- Delhi 1995, Liberty Art Press, pp. 132;
- Mumbai nd, ordered by Qazi Ibrahim ibn-e Qazi Nurmohammad.

The first, partial English translation of *Dabestān-e mazāheb*, by Francis Gladwin, came to be published in the New Asiatic Miscellany in Calcutta, in 1789. In the Preface, the translator mentions that the reason for the print publication is the inaccessibility of the book, which is considered a “literary curiosity of great value” (Gladwin 1789: 86). The text was praised by the President of the Royal Asiatic Society as a literary specimen which “has thrown such light on the ancient history of Iran, and of the human race, as he [Sir William Jones] had despaired of ever obtaining” (Gladwin 1789: 86). What compelled Francis Gladwin to render this text into English is mentioned in the Preface of another translation of *Dabestān*. According to Anthony Troyer, Gladwin’s translation came about through the advocacy of Sir William Jones, who had read *Dabestān-e mazāheb* in Persian, in 1787. He then decided to share his considerable enthusiasm and fascination for the book with his peers as indicated in his letter to J. Shore. Quoted by Troyer in the Preface to 1843 edition of *Dabestān*, it reads:

The greatest part of it would be very interesting to a curious reader, but some of it cannot be translated. It contains more recondite learning, more entertaining history, more beautiful specimens of poetry, more ingenuity and wit, more indecency and blasphemy than I ever saw collected in a single volume; the two last are not of the author’s, but are introduced in the chapters on the heretics and infidels of India. On the whole, it is the most amusing and instructive I ever read in Persian. (Troyer 1843: 4–5)

In words of high praise Sir William Jones points out several reasons for the popularity of *Dabestān-e mazāheb*. The notion of an “instructive” text which describes religious practices of various groups inhabiting Indian subcontinent reflects the attention paid by the East India Company to works that fostered better understanding of the society under their rule and could be of help to the judiciary, etc. One may assume, in accordance with Sir William Jones’ words, that the act of overseeing the printing of this text was an act of patronage found suitable due to the text’s didactic value. Moreover, moderately simple syntax combined

with captivating subject matter provided an interesting reading material for the students of Persian. Those would have been the main, decisive factors, as suggested by Gladwin. Apart from such pragmatic objectives, several literary merits of the stories and poems found in it are specifically mentioned by the author of the letter. However, it is still not entirely clear what were the official reasons for supporting a translation which undoubtedly generated considerable costs that were ultimately borne by the East India Company, especially as we know of only two agents engaged in the venture, namely David Shea and Anthony Troyer.

Exactly twenty years after the already mentioned first English translation by Francis Gladwin, published in *New Asiatic Miscellany*, the first known stand-alone, printed version of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* appeared. This venture was set in motion by Sir William Bayley, later the Governor General of India. The reasons for the print are provided in the editorial note authored by Nazar Ashraf. Not much is known about the latter apart from William Bayley's words — conveyed by Troyer — that this “learned Muhammedan gentleman of the district of Juanpur ... was for many years employed in judicial offices in the district of Burdwan, and in the court of Sudder Diwani Adawlet, in Calcutta” (Troyer 1843: 189). Apparently Ashraf collected all available manuscripts of *Dabestān* thanks to the funds provided by the East India Company and prepared a critical edition, supervised personally by Sir William Bayley who himself was a scholar of Persian language and literature. The editorial note is particularly interesting because of its style and content. It is written in a highly ornate, flowery Persian prose, rich in Arabic vocabulary, with quotations from the Qur'an, a poem by Jami and some distinctive blessing formulas.

The whole editorial note is divided into three parts. First comes the elaborate praise of God, who has drawn the hidden signs on the *lawhe-ye vojūd-e bashar* (“The Tablet of Humanity's Existence”), a tablet that according to Islamic tradition is preserved in heaven and contains information about the past and the future, a record of divine destiny. But then Nazar Ashraf makes an interesting claim that *Dabestān* reveals the truth of things by means of “inquiry into the names” referring here

to the names, called also “attributes,” by which God is described and known<sup>9</sup>. In this manner two textual items are brought together and compared: *lawhe-ye vojud* and *Dabestān-e mazāheb*. The first is the authoritative record of “divine pre-ordainment” or “predestination,” while the second contains the list and description of religious practices and observances. Next, the editor claims that “the important unities are obliterated in the nature of God and the multitude of differences among religions and creeds is simply the manifestation of God’s attributes.”<sup>10</sup> Such a formulation suggests certain openness on the part of Nazar Ashraf regarding the topic of other religions vis-à-vis Islam, whereby the oneness of God is further upheld by way of introducing the following quatrain:

*hamsāye vo hamnešin-o hamrah hāme ust,  
dar delq-e gedā vo atlas-e šah hāme ust,  
dar anjoman-e farq-o nahān xāne-ye jam ’ bellah hāme ust,  
samma bellah hāme ust.*

(Ashraf 1809: 543)

A neighbour and a companion, all are Him,  
in a beggar’s garb and the satin of a shah, all are Him.  
In the assembly of differences and the hidden abode of common things  
by God, all is Him, for sure, by God, all is Him.

Clearly the pronoun *u* indicates God as the entity that encompasses all, may they be the poor or the rich, all are united in Him. In the text that follows the quatrain, the poet directs his “praise towards all the good and pure people, holy spirits of the prophets, including Muhammad, all of whom are the guides on the roads, and who had walked before both the particular and the general paths.”<sup>11</sup> This might seem like an allusion

<sup>9</sup> “elām ol-qoyubi ke louhe-ye vojud-e bašar rā dar dabestān ta’lim-e asmā be noquš-e edrāk-e haqāyeq-e ašyā monaqqaš farmude va ‘onvān nehād” (Ashraf 1809: 543).

<sup>10</sup> “vahdat-hā-ye e’tebāri-ye hāme mostahlek dar zāt-e ust va kesrat-hā-ye extelāf-e mazāheb va mašāreb mazāher-e sāf-e u” (Ashraf 1809: 543).

<sup>11</sup> “va salavāt-e tayyibāt va motahabbāt-e zākiyāt, nesār-e arvāh-e moqaddase-ye anbiyā va rosol alā nabinā va ‘alihumma al-salavāt va al-salām ke hādiyān-e sobol

to the roads of various religions, which according to the *rubaiyat* quoted above leads to the same, one God that encompasses all, especially since the term used for the roads is *tarāyeq*<sup>12</sup>, which usually appears in the context of Sufi brotherhoods and religious groups of various sorts.

In the second part of the note Nazar Ashraf introduces himself as the most insignificant among the poor servants who has taken upon himself the duty of editing *Dabestān-e mazāheb* because of the general lack of knowledge about it. This resorting to humbleness is an example of Persian *adab*<sup>13</sup> whereby no person ever puts himself above others but downplays his own achievements so as not to cause other people to experience unease. Such notion is well attested in Persian literature where poets and artists present themselves publicly as untalented and their poetry as verses of little literary values and merit. The editor offers the printed text, the corrected version of *Dabestān*, as a gift “to the noble rulers of the country of the study and the illuminators of the throne of research in this land.”<sup>14</sup> He explains further the circumstances that led to the materialization of the printed iteration of *Dabestān*, mentioning in the dedication the person who oversaw his work:

In the service of the lord of blessings, who is the highest dignitary among the scholars of his time, the unique jewel of the community of the good lords, the ornament of the assembly of professionalism and prosperity of the brilliant society of people well versed in the worth and usefulness of things (critics), the one who knows the secrets of science and fate, William Bayley Sahib (may his prosperity continue on the paths of memory).<sup>15</sup>

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va piš-xarāmān-e tarāyeq-e joz’-o kolland” (Ashraf 1809: 543).

<sup>12</sup> sing. *tariqa*, plur. *tarāyeq*

<sup>13</sup> *adab* — ‘the behaviour in accordance with the norms of the society,’ ‘culture,’ ‘politeness,’ ‘decorum’ (acc. to *Amid Dictionary*).

<sup>14</sup> “bande-ye ahqar-e az’āf be vazife-ye hič nadāni movazzaf, Nazar Ašraf, dar hazrat-e kešvar-xodāyān-e qalamrou-e tahqiqāt va arā’eq-ārāyān-e šahrestān-e tadqiqāt ‘arz mi-dehad” (Ashraf 1809: 543).

<sup>15</sup> “cenānke ruzi dar in ma’ni be xedmat-e xodāvand-e ne’mat, sardaftar-e dānešmandān-e zamān, jouhar-e fard-e zomre-ye arbāb ahsān, zib-e mahfel-e kārđāni

The formula used in the printed edition of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* resembles those found often in manuscripts. The same careful and adulatory way of addressing a person was usually employed when a poet dedicated his work to a patron. Re-appearing in a printed book, this short formula brought together the world of print and the world of manuscripts. The expressions used previously—and characteristic of the culture and tradition of patronage in manuscript production—were seamlessly adapted to the reality of the new media which was the print. Instead of a king or a prince, the addressee of this formula was William Butterworth Bayley. Activities of new institutions like printing press intermingled with the previous tradition of producing handwritten copies and came to co-exist as seen in this example of the designated patron and addressee of the traditional blessing formula. This process has been interpreted by Cezary Galewicz as retention, appropriation, adoption and transformation of textual practices “present in manuscripts, oral and memory cultures of reading” (Galewicz 2020: 240). The printing of the text here might have not been personally funded by Bayley who was only a representative of the body which provided financing for the whole enterprise, yet the institutional patronage of the East India Company was in a way transferred to the person who was its representative. The role of the publisher and the editor of *Dabestān* must not be underestimated for it sheds light on the whole process of dissemination of printed books. The way the same took place in case of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* may be illustrated with what Eisenstein (1979: 71–72) meant by “cross-cultural interchange” or “cross-fertilization” due to the collation of other similar texts that emerged during the process of printing.

The main motive for publishing *Dabestān-e mazāheb* in print—according to Nazar Ashraf—was the fact that the manuscripts in circulation contained many errors which the print could reduce and eliminate. The corrected printed version, based on the meticulous study and

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va kām-kāri-ye rounaq-e anjoman-e qadr-šenāsi va baxtyāri-ye ‘āli hemam, romuz-dān-e ma’āref vo hokm-e ma’āli-e manāqeb William Bayley Sāheb, dāmat doulate sebil al-zekr” (Ashraf 1809: 544).

comparison of several available manuscripts, could be delivered to the interested readers with ease and in abundance. This is mentioned in the passage that reads as follows:

... it was advised that copying this book in the form of print was due to errors and doubtful places in the previous versions. Because examples and arguments provided by the esteemed lords are necessary and important, as this book describes practices and beliefs of people in a clear way, thus due to the advantages of all that, the book was printed. Therefore, everybody can gain full benefit and pleasure from its study.<sup>16</sup>

Nazar Ashraf mentions numerous errors present in the manuscript copies he has had the opportunity to study while preparing his critical edition. In the note appended to the published text he says that he has managed to remove most errors and doubts by consulting a manuscript obtained from Delhi (or the city of Shahjahanabad as Delhi was known in those days). The process of edition may be thus described as the careful comparing of manuscripts resulting in the printed version, which according to the editor was as close to the original text as possible. Another obstacle that might have posed some trouble for the reading and understanding of *Dabestān* was the perplexing vocabulary derived from the sacred books of the adherents of the described faiths or the explanations of the religious followers themselves. To remove such difficulty in comprehending certain words, Nazar Ashraf came up with the idea of compiling a brief list of difficult lexica that could be placed at the end of the printed book. He decided to provide a concise glossary, basing his explications “on the respectable and reliable dictionaries and

<sup>16</sup> “eršād šod ke nosxat bar dāštan-e čonin ketāb be sabab-e aqlāt, mahall-e taraddod va ta’mel ast alā ānke dar qāleb-e tab’ kešide šavad. Čun emsāl-e amr-e xodāyegāni-ye mamduh, vājeb va ahm va xāli az favā’ed-e asnāf-e ommam nabud, lehāzā ensoxe-ye mazbure rā ke mamlu az osul-e har tāyefe va fariq va modavvan az mo’taqedāt-e jami’ mellal va nehal beltafsil va al-tafriq ast, jahat-e ešā’at-e favā’ed va azā’at-e farā’ed, matbu’ sāxt tā hamegānān az motāle’e-ye ān xatt-e vāfi va bahre-ye kāfi dar yābad” (Ashraf 1809: 544).

explanations provided by the followers of those religions”<sup>17</sup>. The editorial note ends with an Arabic formula:

*al-toufiq bil-ḥaqq*  
*wa al-rišād wa al-hidāyat*  
*‘ilā al-ṣawāb wa al-sadād*  
 (Ashraf 1809: 545)

The prosperity comes from the Truth (God),  
 so does guidance and instructions  
 leading to rightfulness and truth.

The whole text describes the reasons behind the printing, the process of editing and the goals set out for the editor of the book. It is an important document stating clearly why it was considered necessary to bring out *Dabestān-e mazāheb* in print, the main reason being the prevention of having errors spread as, according to Nazar Ashraf, the uniformity of print could eliminate discrepancies that might appear during manual copying of the book. Hence, to ensure the perfect facsimile of the text, the medium of print was employed here as it enabled innumerable iterations of the once corrected text. However, while preparing the printed version it was important to keep in mind the prospective reader and marketing strategies of book printing in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. The editor states clearly that the book will be read by experts, people who know the value of the text (Ashraf 1809: 544). This seems to be at odds with the notion of target audience envisaged by other commercial printing ventures and described by Stark as “mass reading public” and “common reader” (Stark 2007: 17). Moreover, both the editor as well as the person seen as the leading patron of the printed edition of *Dabestān* held positions in the British judiciary in India. One may conclude that the printed copies were to be used by the officials well versed in Persian, namely

<sup>17</sup> “az kotob-e mo’tabare-ye loqāt va estefsār va estimān az ‘olamā-ye ān foroq-e mahmā, emkān-e tahqiq va tazqih nemude” (Ashraf 1809: 545).

people who could benefit from book's content as mentioned briefly by Sir William Jones. Judges and other company officials could thus improve their understanding of the laws and the religious and cultural practices of the people of the Indian subcontinent, dissemination of such knowledge being the main reason for printing the book. This statement is in agreement with Ogborn's (2007: 217) claim that "printing was understood as a technology for securing the power of the imperial state through existing forms and paperwork." It could enable a more efficient governance and help solve conflicts that emerged between the Company and the local populace. According to Bayley, one of the core issues of the East India Company regarding the information available to its employees was the fact that its officers were rather "confused about the organisation of Indian society and the way local kingdoms used to work" (Bayley 1996: 52). William Bayley and Nazar Ashraf, too, were bound to have had faced difficulties adjudicating on some of the court cases before them and were probably lacking in an authoritative source of law that could be used as a ground for formulating the verdicts. To avoid similar dilemmas and resolve this state of affairs a new practice was officially introduced as early as 1773. It consisted of "placing written questions about 'the custom of the country' before selected Indian informers" (Travers 2007: 127). Printing of *Dabestān-e mazāheb* supports the notion that the use of the information preserved through local customs could be helpful in solving certain judicial difficulties.

*Dabestān-e mazāheb*, just like many other texts printed at the expense of the East India Company, was closely studied before decision to publish it was reached. Arguments put forward prior to the printing of selected works in the Persian original or the English translations are recorded in the *Proceedings of the Meetings of the Asiatic Society*. Each case was judged and discussed thoroughly during the meetings, yet it is hard to establish a pattern that could put *Dabestān-e mazāheb* in a more general perspective of the textual production sponsored by the Company. It was observed earlier by Sir William Jones that *Dabestān-e mazāheb* provided a good example of an introductory text highlighting the more general beliefs and practices

of Indian people. Since it was an encyclopaedic source that appeared as a compilation of information regarding various religions and their traditions it was assumed that it could be of interest to the colonial legislators, judges and general readers interested in the religions of India. The presence of a glossary listing technical vocabulary at the end of the book made the text a potentially useful material for the instruction in Persian language. Writing style was not difficult or complicated though some notions might have been hard to translate. Nevertheless, it was (and still is) much easier to read than many other specimens of Persian poetry written in Indian style, like, for example, those by Bidel or Sā'eb Tabrizi.

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