

“Grammatica Linguae Indianae Vulgaris sive Mogolanæ”: Missionary and historical context of the Hindūstāni grammar of the French Capuchin François-Marie de Tours (? – 1709)

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The purpose of this paper is to provide new insights on the history of grammatical reflection on Hindūstāni and to highlight the role, until now almost ignored, played in this context by the Catholic missionaries at the beginning of the 18th century.

It is commonly held that the first grammar of this language was due to Joan Joshua Ketelaar (1659–1718), an officer of the Dutch East India Company, whose manuscript -dated 1698- was partially translated from Dutch into Latin and published by David Mill, Professor at the University of Utrecht, in 1743. This grammar has been studied particularly by Tej K. Bhatia and Kazuhiko Machida, who published the original text, an English translation and a comprehensive study of it in 2008. However, these authors were not aware that almost contemporary to Ketelaar, who did not use the devanāgarī script, other Europeans were engaged in lexicographical and grammatical studies of Hindūstāni.

In recent years scholars such as Ronald Stuart McGregor and David Lorenzen have noticed again that a *Thesaurus lingua Mogolanae* was composed by the French Capuchin François-Marie de Tours (?–1709) in Surat at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This Hindūstāni dictionary failed to be published in printed form but was later used by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil Duperron (1731–1805), who made a copy of it, kept today in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In the same repository ended up also the original manuscript of the dictionary that François-Marie de Tours had offered to the Roman Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* in 1704. This extensive *Thesaurus* has not yet attracted a substantial attention by scholars, even if it could be mined as a source on the linguistic and social history of India between the 17th and the 18th century.

Despite some interest being paid to the *Thesaurus*, no scholar until now has ever realized that François-Marie de Tours presented to *Propaganda Fide* not only a dictionary but also a grammar of the Hindūstāni language. I have discovered the manuscript of the *Grammatica Linguae Indianae Vulgaris sive Mogolanæ* in the Archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*de Propaganda Fide*) in 2006, while I was working at my doctoral dissertation on the missionary conflict called “Malabar Rites controversy”. This text, composed in Latin and arranged according the categories of that language, is the first European grammar of the Hindūstāni language ever using the devanāgarī script. Together with Donatella Dolcini, Full Professor of Hindī at the University of Milan, I am preparing an edition of this grammar.

As a historian and not a linguist, my paper will explore the historical context within which François-Marie de Tours composed his studies of Hindūstāni. I argue that the *Thesaurus* and the *Grammatica* were part of a missionary strategy aiming at demonstrating the expertise of the Capuchin missionaries viv-à-vis their Jesuit competitors in India. François-Marie de Tours offered his linguistic endeavours to *Propaganda Fide*, hoping that they might be printed, in the very moment in which he presented also a memorandum against the customs and rituals, allowed by the Jesuits to their Tamil converts that eventually became known as “Malabar Rites”. In order to obtain a ban of these rites and to win a jurisdictional dispute with the Jesuits over the pastoral care of the Tamil Christians in the French settlement of Pondichéry and the titularity of the parish of Surat, the Capuchins sought to demonstrate that they were missionaries as learned and effective as the ones of the Society of Jesus. The latter had developed a Christian literature in several South Indian languages, the Jesuit Roberto Nobili (1577–1656) had probably been the first European to learn Sanskrit in the modern age and later on his confrères Heinrich Roth (1620–1668) and Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681–1732) composed grammars of that language. François-Marie de Tours would oppose to the Jesuit linguistic achievements, both in Sanskrit (defined by him as “lingua scientifica”) and in the vernacular languages of South India (each one being considered as a “lingua gentilitia”), a tool that would foster the missionary activity in India. This instrument was the “Lingua Indiana sive Mogolana”, a “cosmopolitan” idiom spoken ubiquitously throughout India. Eventually the Malabar Rites were condemned and later on the Society of Jesus was suppressed even in India. However, the Capuchin jurisdictional and theological victory did not lead also to a cultural hegemony in the Indian Catholic missions. My paper will cast light on a linguistic endeavour that deserves to be acknowledged and studied carefully, also to balance the Jesuito-centrism that is often found in the studies on the history of the early modern Catholic missions.