

THE HISTORY OF REPRESENTATION IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: THE GENESIS OF A NEW LINGUA FRANCA

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ABSTRACT

The South Asian Subcontinent has experienced invasions from different directions. In the ancient period we see Sanskrit and Pali, Prakrit and proto -Hindi languages evolve. With the advent of the Muslim conquerors, Persian the cultural language of the Ajam, became the court and official language. There was a natural intermingling of both peoples with different language tradition and a local dialect first called Hindavi emerged. The word Urdu meant Cantonment in Turkish. Where exactly in South Asia Urdu began to be used and recognized has become a matter of scholarly contention, which is traced here. The British invasion and the subsequent foundation of Fort William in Calcutta in 1800 led to the dissemination of both Urdu and Hindi and the political interplay of languages. This article delves into the role of the colonial power in promoting a language or a set of languages. It further dilates as to how lending a religious veneer to a certain language by design can further bolster its power positioning, particularly if the language is common among the lower denomination of the economic strata. Urdu was variously known as Hindavi, Deccani and the later more exalted epithet; Urdu i Mualla. The Islamization of Urdu and the Sanskritization of Hindi unravel efforts aimed at bifurcating languages along socio-religious lines preponderantly by the colonial agency. Thus, the apparent patronage for indigenous languages on the part of the Orientalists turned out to be a colonial venture driven by the ulterior motive to prolong colonial foothold in the Indian Subcontinent and to mitigate chances of rebellion. The article deliberates upon the making of a new lingua franca in the then Subcontinent which was home to a host of multicultural and multiethnic communities.

Keywords: Lingua Franca, Hindavi, Urdu i Mualla, Deccani, Fort William College, Multicultural, Multiethnic, Sanskritization, Islamization, Marginalization.

INTRODUCTION

Language and society are intertwined and hence language readily evolves into a social construct. Both language and society function in tandem and cast an impact over different facets of society just as the multifarious constituents of society inform the use of language. Societal subjectivities are reciprocated in line with the hierarchies being generated from the power centres. The historical perspective on the inception of colonial language as a mode of representation in the colonized world is significant as it unravels the eon-old binary opposition between the regional languages and their role in fostering geopolitical solidarity, pitted against the backdrop of colonial language. The colonial language disrupts the collective solidarity and consensus vis-à-vis indigenous languages, thereby forcibly achieving a political ascendancy. The representation of the marginalized segments brings out the friction between dichotomies such as colonizer/colonized, master/slave, black/white, centre/periphery and so on and so forth. Hence the peculiar identity constructed almost invariably as a lower denomination in the polarities between the colonizer and colonized, results in a friction, delineating 'other' as a site of resistance. The hegemony exercised by the colonizer precipitates into a perennial struggle between the 'self' and the 'other' which according to Edward Said furnishes the Occident as an antecedent against the Orient; almost as a 'surrogate' self, drawing strength from this friction (Said, 1978).

Representation becomes a colonial venture as the colonizer takes it upon itself to represent the 'other' who according to Edward Said lacks the ability to 'represent' and hence calls for representation by the colonizer (Said, 1978). Representation becomes a political enterprise where a handful, placed at the helm of affairs tend to 'represent' the underprivileged and marginalised. The colonial mode of representation turns out to be 're-presentation', reconfiguring the colonized 'other'. Howard Zinn

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(1922-2010), a renowned writer and historian puts in *Declaration of Independence* (1991), that the power nexus between politicians, business tycoons, media moguls, bureaucratic and military top-brass is a strong influencer; wielding power that none can challenge. Their control is stronger than the soldiers patrolling the roads (Western, 2008). States employ different instruments to exert power, of which language is one. Here is a brief overview of the linguistic friction played up by the colonial agency to entrench its stronghold over the masses.

Deconstructing the history of language conflicts; Dr. Muhammad Reza Kazimi dilates upon the role of Urdu as a rich repository of Muslim culture (Kazimi, 2002). He argues that despite its preeminence, Urdu was portrayed as a 'minority language', against the backdrop of conflicts, spanning almost a century. Starting from the Hindi-Urdu conflict in 1867, through to the Urdu-Bengali conflict in 1952 and then the Urdu-Sindhi conflict in 1972; Urdu was underscored as a minority language, despite irrefutable evidence that it was the language of the Pakistan Movement (Kazimi, 2002).

Historically speaking, the esteem which was conferred upon Urdu in the 17th century was the result of the efforts of Ibrahim Adil Shah hailing from Bijapur; one of the five sultanates in Deccan in 1625 (Rehman, 2011). Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1625-72) along with Abul Hasan Qutub Shah; another literary icon of the times patronized art and literature. Hence small wonder that the literati of the times thronged the courts of Ibrahim Adil Shah who was also a music aficionado and compiled an anthology on music, aptly prefaced by a poet laureate of his court; Maulana Zuhuri in Persian (Bailey, 1932). With tensions brewing in the Islamic West after the Middle Ages, the Indian subcontinent launched a Persian movement fostering literary genres in Persian. Indians thus became more adept at Persian art and literature than their Iranian counterparts (Nadvi, 1995).

It is interesting to note the steady progression of Urdu during the Mughal age in general and during the reigns of Emperors Shahjahan and Aurangzeb in particular. Amidst the political expeditions of Aurangzeb into Deccan, Urdu gradually metamorphosed from an interface of Deccani and Urdu; seamlessly retaining its distinct identity by amalgamating the linguistic varieties of North and South. In the aftermath of the Mughal invasion of Deccan, the top-notch of the Muslim populace was exposed to Urdu which later became the medium of communication in the Mughal court of Delhi; albeit much later. Urdu was employed as a colloquial language, prevalent in daily parlance whereas Persian was deemed as the higher diction meant for literature and art. Persian was still being employed by the governors of Deccan as a prestigious language. The status of Persian gained momentum as religious figures comprising the sages and Sufis flaunted their facile articulation of Persian. The spiritual patronage added impetus to the proliferation of Persian art and literature and therefore, Urdu came late in the courts as Persian preceded it.

From late 17th to mid- 18th centuries, Urdu underwent a steady fruition. It escalated from the streets to the corridors of power. Wali Deccani (1667-1743) earned the appellation of *Baba-i-Rekhta*, meaning 'Father of Urdu Poetry'. Wali Deccani was known to have promulgated the standard Urdu idiom in currency during the Mughal 'camp' age, especially during Aurangzeb's territorial ventures in Deccan. Wali Deccani's endeavours to promote standard Urdu was a milestone in standardizing and institutionalizing Urdu not only as a language but also in terms of literary finesse. This heralded an era of Urdu poetry; receiving wide acclaim from the court. Subsequently Urdu achieved the status of the language of the court and achieved literary renown (Saksena, 2002). The contribution of the literary elites to Urdu standardized its orthography and entrenched its position further.

Sirajuddin Ali Khan Arzu (1687-1756) produced a magnum opus; the treatise on Persian linguistics titled *Muthmir*, which interestingly became the prelude to modern Urdu Prose (Rehman, 2011). The treatise became the stepping stone of modern, Persianized Urdu prose. Arzu's other notable work was *Navadir ul Alfaz*; a corrective measure to set aright the anomalies in a previously compiled dictionary *Gharaib ul Lughat* by Abdul Wase Hansvi. *Gharaib ul Lughat* is known as the first formal Urdu dictionary; which however absorbed thousands of Arabic and Persian words.

The two language movements; be it the Sanskritization of Hindi or the Persianization of Urdu were driven by specific objectives. The Persianization of Urdu was considerably a class movement while the resultant Sanskritization of Hindi turned out to be more of a communally incited, political movement. The demarcation of distinct language domains like Urdu and Hindi became so pronounced that both stand out as distinct language entities today, to the extent that the standard varieties and even the colloquial ones employed on electronic media are mutually exclusive. Yet at the mass level; the diction used by the common people in Karachi is akin to that spoken in Delhi. The same reason can be

adduced for the wide acclaim received by dramas, movies and TV shows of both countries among their masses.

Urdu however witnessed a transition from being Persianized and Arabicized in the 18th century. The Islamic seminaries for the most part adopted Urdu for dissemination of religious knowledge, making departures from the glorious Persian tradition. Maulana Qasim Nanautvi (1833-1877) being at the helm of affairs in an Islamic seminary in Deoband, laid down Urdu as the language of instruction in place of Persian. Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905), likewise adopted Urdu as a medium of instruction in his seminary. Urdu was gradually being bracketed with Islam and moral rectitude. This attitude of Islamization of Urdu bolstered its Muslim identity and furnished a high linguistic class known as a '*Ahl-i-Zaban*' or the rightful 'owners of the language'. The power positioning of Urdu was somewhat akin to an aristocratic ascendancy, making Urdu a 'linguistic capital'. It was as though this capital merited protection and only the 'owners of the language' could vouchsafe the standard and correct idiom.

Banaras was the epicentre of the emerging movement; urging the government to substitute Urdu with Hindi and introducing Devanagari in place of Arabic script. G. Cambell however had banned Urdu altogether in the province (Urdu-Hindi Controversy, 1867). Dr. Kazimi argues that this ban however was not placed because Cambell thought of Urdu as the minority language. Conversely he considered it flowery, 'hybrid' and 'anachronistic' (Kazimi, 2002). Urdu thereafter fell into disuse at courts, academic institutions and in official circles. The East India Company further added to the linguistic rift by chalking out language domains, laying down that Hindu jurisprudence was to be inscribed in and derived from Sanskrit. Professor John Gilchrist treaded an extra mile by producing English-Hindi dictionary which further emboldened the status of Hindi amidst the prevalent language crisis (Parekh, 2013).

The avowed support to Hindi and Devanagari script in official domains elevated the status of Hindi. This led to the resentment of Muslims who were compelled to vie for the lost status of Urdu by launching defence movements in the favour of Urdu. Interestingly the case of Bengali was conspicuous for the writers like Deena Nath Gangoly and Naveen Chandra Roy, who wrote in Bengali, ironically chose to espouse the case of Hindi as the national language. Likewise, just as Urdu was associated with Islam, Hindi was being conditioned with Devanagari script and was cleansed of Arabic and Persian influences (Rehman, 2011). Simultaneously Urdu was also being cleansed of Sanskritic remnants; thereby seamlessly incorporating Persian and Arabic expressions. The status of Urdu was entrenched by its unique position at two levels. At one level, Urdu was different from the vernacular and other regional languages. Also, Urdu rose to prominence being a new language, distinct from Persian, hitherto the language of the court. Even Sanskritic idioms which had been in common currency in the past were obliterated. Linguistic devices which were even remotely reminiscent of Hindi were carefully substituted by Arabic and Persian diction (Rehman, 2011). This however resulted in the latent influence of Persian becoming the litmus test of literary acumen and intellectual finesse. Thus aspirants took pains in order to employ Arabic and Persian expressions. The greater the frequency of using Persian and Arabic, the higher was the presumed rank of their scholarship. Such practices however overshadowed the status of Urdu against the backdrop of Persian and Arabic. Persian was thus the lingua franca that crossed borders and built bridges; readily employed by the ruling elite of the Muslim India.

Conversely in the aftermath of British colonization when Persian was abolished as the language of the court, the queer interface among the foreign and indigenous elements fostered a new lingua franca; a motley of Turkish, Arabic and regional languages. Interestingly these Muslim rulers or governors who were placed at the helm of affairs were usually of Turkish descent and did not share Persian roots. Yet they adopted Persian as a marker of power and privilege, while Urdu incubated among the lower segments of the socio-economic strata. Urdu morphed into a colloquial, 'pidgin', acting as a convenient means of communication among the multifarious ethno-linguistic communities of the then Mughal empire. Persian however evolved as a sophisticated, urban language with its characteristic courtly life; flourishing in the higher echelons of the Mughal court.

Persian rose to literary eminence surpassing Sanskrit because the ruling elite patronized it and sought ownership of its literary legacy. It is interesting to note how Persian rose to a higher status while Urdu simultaneously developed as the language among the common people. Those who trace the origins of Urdu to the Mughal era in general and Shah Jahan's reign in particular neglect the advent of the Mughal era dated in the 16th century. Mir Amman Dehlvi belongs to the school of thought who attribute

Urdu to Shah Jahan, during whose reign Delhi was the capital. He also named a shopping area after Urdu, calling it *Urdu-i-Mualla*. Or the 'exalted army'. Rauf Parekh notes how Mir Amman Dehlvi explicated regarding the status of Urdu in the preface to *Bagh o Bahar*, a classical masterpiece of Urdu prose by him. This was further accentuated by Muhammad Hussain Azad, Syed Ahmed Dehlvi and stalwarts like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Syed Ahmed Dehlvi composed a comprehensive Urdu dictionary, *Farhang-i-Asifiya* and asserted that Urdu lexicon consisted of words from the languages of the Sanskrit family. The verbs, infinitives and propositions were largely Indian while adjectives and nouns were primarily Arabic and Persian with the exception of a few other languages. Urdu boasted of a lexicon and phonetics which were easy for the foreigners to decipher making it a lingua franca in the Subcontinent due to its cosmopolitan appeal.

Interestingly Babar, the first Mughal emperor's manuscripts boast of a promising Urdu vocabulary, hence demonstrating that Urdu existed even before it was known as 'Urdu'. Still the other school of thought contends that Urdu evolved as a camp language, reproduced in succeeding centuries. Chiranji Lal produced *Makhzan-i-Muhavraat* and resonated the camp theory as the basis of Urdu's origins. Hakeem Shamsullah Qadri and Imam Bakhsh Sehbai also adduced camp theory in the favour of the origins of Urdu (Parekh, 2011).

Exhaustive research conducted by G.A Grierson led him to rectify the camp theory notion, duly mentioned in his renowned *Linguistic Survey of India*. Grierson remarked that Urdu evolved from the vernacular spoken in the upper Doab as well as in Rohilkhand (Parekh, 2011). Grierson elucidated this line of thought in the footnotes highlighting how his research steered him away from the view upheld by Mir Amman Dehlvi.

The latter saints and scholars who were well-versed in Persian, adopted Urdu as a medium of expression to expand the diametrical stretches of their outreach. This further galvanized the role of Urdu, forming a bridge to connect the sublime courtly appeal with the popular diction of the mundane life. Urdu rose in eminence at a brisk pace because of its utilitarian value among the masses and the literary patronage it received from scholars and saints alike. Urdu despite its varied connotations, loosely translates to 'a camp' in Turkish which attests to the genesis of Urdu sprouting from the linguistic interface among multicultural and multilingual communities such as the Persian, Indians and the Central Asian troops (Parekh, 2011). In an interesting instance of core-borrowing and language shift, 'horde' turns out to be an improvisation of 'Urdu'. The army however was stationed at Delhi, laconically termed as *Urdu-i-Mualla*; the exalted army (Fatehpuri, 2001). The soldiers spoke in Persian while the local denizens took to Braj dialect of Hindi of the times. Shams-ur-Rahman Farooqi and Hafiz Mahmood Sherani illustrate how 'Urdu' as an expression was in use preceding the Mughal age (Fatehpuri, 2001). Entailing divergent socio-political and historical norms within its folds, Urdu bore multiple connotations distinct from what it implied later.

T. Grahame Bailey, however lays down that it was primarily Punjabi emanating from Prakrit descent which became the pioneer of the then Urdu. It is important to note that Braj was not the language of Delhi. Instead the local inhabitants of Delhi employed *Khari Boli* which developed into the language of Hindi art and literature. Persian despite being in currency among the soldiers paved way for other vernaculars owing to increasing interaction among the troops. Also, intermarriages acted as a catalyst behind the soldiers' need to learn local languages. In the 12th century, old *Khari* was the medium of communication, akin to the former old Punjabi, yet replete with Persian. This new, emerging variety came to be known as Delhi-Urdu.

The soldiers also comprise Mehmoud Ghanznavi's troops deployed in Lahore during the 11th century. This led to the proliferation of Punjabi and Urdu as a ready means of communication. How Urdu slowly emerged and Persian gradually diffused before the colonial agency banned it, is not easy to gauge. Yet Persian did remain in use in high echelons and thrived as the language of the court. Despite the soldiers being in Delhi, T. Grahame Bailey argues that Urdu's origins can be traced back to Lahore and not in Delhi. He further contends that what transpired in Delhi had occurred in Lahore long time back. The intermingling of the troops called for a common language which was invariably going to be either of the two most commonly employed languages; Persian or Punjabi. Subsequently the earlier stage in the metamorphosis of Urdu marks a variety which was redolent with Punjabi and Persian both. Dr. Shaukat Sabzwari has a divergent view on the genesis of Urdu. He contends that Urdu's origin can be traced back to Pali and that both the languages are akin to each other (Fatehpuri, 2001).

The conquest of Deccan and Daulatabad by Muhammad Tughlaq in the 14th century followed by the revolt by Bahmani dynasty against him changed the linguistic contours of the region. This was a particularly uneasy time and the soldiers who fought from Tughlaq's side readily adopted Urdu for the smooth-functioning of their communication. Not only did Urdu become the first language of most of the soldiers, it also witnessed an increase in the number of speakers from other languages such as Marathi, Kanarese and Telugu. The subsequent conquests paved way for an increase in the number of Urdu speakers so much so that the conquerors preferred Urdu as a common language. Thus, it is small wonder that only in Deccan 3 million people spoke Urdu.

The genesis of Urdu can also be traced to Shahjahanabad; a language readily adopted by the Sufi saints and mystics, the poet-philosophers whose mutual articulation produced a new language by the name of Urdu; variously named as 'Rekhtah', 'Dehalvi', 'Hindustani' and 'Deccani' (Bailey, 2008). Even Amir Khusrau (1255-1325) alludes to his own literary musings in 'Hindvi' recorded in his Persian works. Khusrau flaunts his command over 'Hindvi'; along with Persian. Amir Khusrau's masterpiece, the *Nuh Sipihr* refers to this newly found language already in use in Delhi, variously named as 'Hindvi' and 'Dehlvi' (Bailey, 2008). Khusrau's legacy of Hindvi comprises a few 1000 lines which have undergone drastic change with the passage of time and are not reflective of the language in use in his age (Bailey, 2008).

Hindi or Hindvi signifies anything belonging to India or Indian per se on the literary level. Subjecting it to a close linguistic scrutiny, it can be traced back to the Ghaznavids down to Sirajjudin Arzu. The Muslim writers made use of 'Hindvi' as an appellation, primarily conferred upon the dialects spoken in Punjab, Delhi and Doab, which metamorphosed into a distinct language titled Urdu (Fatehpuri, 2001). The undivided India was a seedbed of multicultural ethnicities, linguistic varieties and cultural pluralities since the advent of civilization. Sanskrit in contrast to Urdu was the sacerdotal language meant for the Brahmins; trickling from above and directly influencing the people belonging to lower tiers of the economic strata. Therefore, the literary traditions which flourished in the Indian subcontinent thrived along the higher notch of the ethno-linguistic spiral; a privilege that did not trickle down to the general masses. Urdu can thus be looked at as a tapestry of divergent ethno-linguistic trends emerging from as various as Asiatic, Persian and Indian epicenters.

It is imperative to dwell deeper into the Urdu-Hindi disparity and trace whether Urdu and Hindi share the same linguistic make up; i.e. is Urdu analogous to Hindi if inscribed in Devanagiri or is Hindi akin to Urdu if written in Arabic script. Dr. Tara Chand while commenting on the creation of modern Hindi also sheds light upon the Islamization of Urdu and Hinduization of Hindi. He traces this back to the Fort William College. Lallo Lalji, a linguist and a renowned Urdu writer of the times took upon himself to produce another language known as 'Hindi'. He selected a few Urdu books which were purged of the Arabic and Persian words; substituting them with uncommon Sanskrit words, forming the basis of a new language known as modern Hindi (Fatehpuri, 2001). Dr. Muhammad Reza Kazimi quotes Dr. Tara Chand who agrees with Farman Fatehpuri in that both deem Hindi as being hitherto a nonentity until Lallo Lalji was vested with the task to Sanskritize existing Urdu books (Kazimi, 2002).

The rift between the Orientalists and Anglicists demonstrates that the Orientalists supported Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit in order to mitigate chances of rebellion. For example Sir William Jones (1746-1794), a famous Orientalist encouraged the use of indigenous languages as opposed to his counterparts; the 'Anglophiles' of the times like Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) who made expressly pungent remarks about indigenous language and culture (Kazimi, 2022). Although the Orientalists had been tasked with promulgating Urdu, particularly the genre of prose, the same Fort William college had thus vested Lalji to Sanskritize existing Urdu books and promote Hindi (Kazmi, 2002).

Allama Syed Sulaiman Nadvi concedes that Sind is the birthplace of Urdu. He further dilates on Urdu resulting from an intercommunion of the Hindus and Muslims. He observes that the interface between the Hindus and Muslims continued at close quarters and thousands of words of the languages in use by Hindus and Muslims were mutually intelligible. Undoubtedly it took sometime until Urdu assumed its standard form. Yet if the origins of Urdu are to be bracketed with Muslim advent; then its origin is invariably Sind as Sind was the gateway for the Muslim rulers. Nadvi further contends that it was this intermingling among Muslims and Hindus which brought about an increased intermixing of Arabic and Persian with Indian languages (Nadvi, 1967).

The language disputes further deepened the cleavages between the Muslim and Hindu communities in the nineteenth century. Against the backdrop of the War of Independence in 1857,

Muslim population was at the receiving end of the British Crown's rage. The Hindus benefited from this and steered the course of the crisis to entrench the position of Hindi against Urdu. The situation further aggravated as Anthony MacDonnell acceded to power as the Deputy Governor of United Provinces. He outrightly banned Urdu as the language of the courts in the province (Hardy, 1972). This was considered by the then secretary of Aligarh with a pinch of salt. He galvanized the Urdu speakers to raise their voice against the ban on Urdu. Nawab Mohsinul Mulk was left with no option but to forgo his position from Urdu Defence League in order to reinstate his position as Secretary Aligarh College. Nawab Mohsinul Mulk also launched *Anjuman Taraqqi e Urdu* to reinforce the status of Urdu in the wake of incessant attacks (Crowcroft, 2017). The struggle of Muslims to support the cause of Urdu bore fruit and Urdu was reinstated as the official language along with Hindi.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to note that the unerring struggle of the Muslims for Urdu led to officially adopting Urdu as the national language in the newly founded, independent state of Pakistan. Maulvi Abdul Haq, who earned the appellation of being 'Father of Urdu' elucidated the significance of Urdu laying down that Pakistan was indebted to Urdu for its existence (Ayres, 2009). The linguistic factor was highlighted as the staple element of the Two-Nations Theory arguing that the Urdu-Hindi dispute was the root cause of independence struggle (Ayres, 2009). This marks the advent of the 'language ideology' in the partition of the subcontinent where the conditioning of Urdu with Arabic further refurbished the religious veneer attached to it and continues till to date.

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