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Let It All Hang Out—in Urdu!

A fascinating two-facedness seems to prevail when it comes to the English and Urdu print media in Pakistan. One is prim and proper; the other lets it all hang out.

On May 24, Dr. A. Q. Khan, the Pakistani nuclear engineer, published a column entitled “May 28, 1998,” in the English language daily, *The News* (Karachi), where he is a regular contributor.¹ The title commemorated the date of Pakistan’s nuclear explosions. After a brief introduction, describing Z. A. Bhutto’s role in that project and the state of things after his death, the column consisted entirely of excerpts from the congratulatory letters Dr. Khan had received at the time from various Pakistani dignitaries, civil and military.

The same day Dr. Khan also published a column in Urdu, in the Urdu journal *Jang*, with the title: “28 May – Kis Bat ki Khushi?” (“28 May – Happy about what?”).² Both journals are published by the Jang Group, which also owns and runs four television channels. The Urdu column was most likely written first—Dr. Khan writes Urdu felicitously—and then translated by Dr. Khan or someone else into English. In either case, the two were carefully crafted to cater to distinctly separate readerships.

Here is the introductory section in *The News*:

Even before India exploded its first nuclear weapon on May 18, 1974, Mr. Bhutto had warned about this happening and had vowed to respond appropriately, even if Pakistanis had to eat grass to protect their sovereignty. I started the programme at Kahuta in July 1976 after coming back from Holland. Within the short span of eight years this country was in a position to explode a nuclear weapon at short notice. The government took 14 years to actually demonstrate this capability.

Had Mr. Bhutto been alive to see those tests, he would have exploited our invaluable position and achievement for the benefit of the people and the country. However, once the giant was eliminated, the pygmies did not benefit from this achievement, and we managed to turn it into something of a curse. In addition to the many difficulties brought down on us, the worst thing we did to ourselves was the freezing of foreign currency accounts. Not only did it hurt our economy, but we also lost international trust. We are still suffering the after-effects.

And here is the same in *Jang* (in my translation):

¹ http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=240983

² <http://www.jang.com.pk/jang/may2010-daily/24-05-2010/col1.htm>

Much before India's nuclear test on May 18, 1974, Mr. Bhutto had repeatedly warned the world of the threat, but Western leaders were secretly making India a nuclear power to get it prepared against China. When, in July 1976, I was given the responsibility of making the Pakistani atomic bomb, I never once stopped to look back. In the brief span of eight years, my able and patriotic co-workers and I made this poor and backward nation first a nuclear power and then a missile power. On May 28, 1998, Pakistan conducted its atomic explosions. It was a time when India, by conducting its atomic explosions on May 11, had us lined against a wall, with its guns aimed at our breasts. The fact is we had a nuclear bomb ready at Kahuta by the middle of 1984, and on December 10 of that year I had informed Gen. Ziaul Haq in writing that we could explode the bomb at a week's notice. But for political reasons he postponed the matter, and after him no one found the necessary courage until the time came when India grabbed us by the neck. It was indeed a miracle that despite many opponents and our backwardness we had built nuclear bombs. It is most unfortunate, therefore, that on review after twelve years we find to our grief that we had allowed to go to waste the many opportunities created by our extremely important achievement. Only one particular section of the society benefited from it, and that section, in the guise of [Gen.] Musharraf, squeezed tight the country's throat.

Had Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto been alive then he would have transformed this country. We would have for sure progressed like Malaysia and China, and our status internationally would have been very high, particularly in Islamic countries. In fact, we would have been the undisputed leader of the Muslim world. Unfortunately, when that giant of a man passed away, pygmies got a chance to revel. They acted as suited their size, and turned our great achievement into a curse instead of a great boon. Besides countless wrong decisions, the worst and most accursed was their decision to freeze, and then plunder, all bank accounts held in foreign currency. The world then lost trust in Pakistan, and we are still suffering the consequences. No civilized country or people could imagine that any country would indulge in such robbery. Now the same robbers are going around raising slogans of democracy.

Anyway, we failed to put our house in order on May 28, 1998. We did not establish new industrial institutions; we failed to get Islamic countries to invest in Pakistan; and we did not put aright our social and educational structures. The truth of the matter is that our condition is now much worse. An ignoramus professor who belongs to a minority group and lives off foreign fellowships speaks continuously against that miraculous achievement; he also utters all kind of nonsense about me. It too is our country's great misfortune that such people live in luxury here but are not true to their salt. The fault lies not with the nation but the rulers, who did not possess the ability to draw benefit from that achievement. And so, like blind people, we go on doing a bhangra as we celebrate the "Day of *Takbir*."

Leaving aside issues of verbosity and self-aggrandizement, one can clearly see in the two introductions a depressing two-facedness frequently found in Pakistani print media. The English journal presents a face that is obverse of the one revealed in Urdu. Here, of course, the publisher (or the author) crafted two faces of the same person.³ But even otherwise, what is not allowed in the English papers *The News* and *The Nation* is gleefully put on display in the columns published in their sister journals, *Jang* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*, respectively. Pakistani Urdu journals feel no qualms when it comes to nasty personal attacks, ugly innuendoes, blatantly sectarian or communal remarks, rabble-rousing language, and much more in that vein, not to mention grand conspiracies, and amazing prophecies. *Urdu men sab chalta hai!*

³ On another occasion last year, Dr. Khan thrilled his Urdu readers with the disclosure: “According to the media, [Barack] Obama had earlier said, ‘Tear down the Ka’ba, for it is the root of every trouble.’” His English readers, however, were denied that excitement.