

## 4 A HISTORY OF URDU LITERATURE

3. Urdū was called *rekhta* because it consisted of Hindi into which Arabic and Persian words had been *poured*.

4. It is a musical term introduced by Amir *Khusrau* to mean a harmonising of Hindi words with Persian melodies.

5. It means a wall firmly constructed of different materials, as Urdū is of diverse linguistic elements. This is the opposite of (2).

**The Most Important Urdu Poets.** Urdu poetry is such a maze, that a useful purpose may be served if the leading poets are indicated. There will be diversity of opinion about such a list, for people differ in temperament and in attitude towards modern thought. No finality is claimed for the views here expressed, but they may be a guide. The names of poets from the Deccan may occasion surprise, for their greatness is not realised in north India. The old *tazkira* writers say little about them and only Vali is generally known.

1. THE GREATEST POETS. The groups are in order of rank, the names within each group in order of date. (a) Mir, *Gālib*, Anis. (b) Vali, Saudā, Nazir of Agra, Iqbāl. (c) Dard, Mir Hasan, Dāg, Hālī, Akbar.

2. THE BEST GAZAL WRITERS in order: Mir, Vali, Dard, *Gālib*, Muṣṣafī, Ātish, Dāg, Amīr Mināi.

3. THE BEST QAṢĪDA WRITERS in order: Saudā, Zauq, Nuṣratī.

4. THE BEST MARSĪYA WRITERS in order: Anis, Dabir, Mūnis, *Khalīq*, Zamīr; and the Dakhnī writers Hāshim 'Alī, Mirzā.

5. THE BEST MAṢNAVĪ WRITERS in order: Mir Hasan, Aṣar, Mir, Nasīm, Mūmin, and the Dakhnī writers *Gavvāsi*, Nuṣratī, Ṭabī, Vajhī.

6. POETS WHO EXCELLED IN GENERAL POETRY in order of date: King Qulī Quṭb Shāh, Nazir of Agra, Hālī, Akbar, Kaifī of the Deccan, Iqbāl. During the past 50 years perhaps the best, apart from poets already mentioned, have been Āzād, Jalāl, Taslīm, Ismā'il, Shād.

The greatest poem of the last 100 years is probably Hālī's *Musaddas*, unless we regard Anis's Elegies as one poem.

## I

## THE HISTORY OF URDU

**How Urdu Began.** Much has been written on the origin of Urdū. The word 'urdu' itself is Turkish and means 'army' or 'camp'; our English 'horde' is said to be connected with it. The Muslim army stationed in Delhi from 1193 onwards was known as *the Urdū* or *Urdū e Mu'allā*, the Exalted Army. It is usually believed that while this army spoke Persian, the inhabitants of the city spoke the Braj dialect of Hindi. There is no reason however to think that Braj was ever the language of Delhi. The people of the capital spoke an early variety of that form of Hindi now known as *Kharī Bolī*,<sup>1</sup> which is employed to-day in all Hindi prose and in most Hindi poetry. The idea that the army spoke Persian also requires reconsideration.

Mahmūd of *Gaznī* annexed the Panjab in 1027 and settled his army of occupation in Lahore. The famous scholar, Alberuni of *Khivā* (973-1048) lived there for some time while he studied Sanskrit and prosecuted his researches into Hinduism. Mahmūd's descendants held the Panjab till 1187, when they were defeated by their hereditary foes under Muhammad Gorī who had already sacked *Gaznī*. The first sultan of Delhi was Quṭb ud Dīn Aibak, a native of Turkistan, but a servant of Muhammad Gorī and afterwards his chief general. He captured Delhi in 1193 and on the death of his master in 1206 took the title of Sultān. From that time foreign troops were quartered in

<sup>1</sup> As I have explained in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, October, 1926, pp. 717-23, the word *kharī*, feminine of *kharā*, means standing, and *Kharī Bolī* means the standard, current or established language. The word was first used during 1093 by Sadal Miṣr in *Nāsiketotākhyaṅ* and by Lallū Lāl in *Prem Sāgar*. *Kharī* has nothing to do with *kharī*, pure.

the city. Urdu is always said to have arisen in Delhi, but we must remember that Persian-speaking soldiers entered the Panjab and began to live there, nearly 200 years before the first sultan sat on the throne of Delhi. What is supposed to have happened in Delhi must, in fact, have taken place in Lahore centuries earlier. These troops lived in the Panjab; they doubtless inter-married with the people and within a few years of their arrival must have spoken the language of the country, modified of course by their own Persian mother tongue.

We can picture what happened. The soldiers and people met in daily intercourse and needed a common language. It had to be either Persian or Old Panjabi, and the people being in an enormous majority, their language established itself at the expense of the other. For some time the soldiers continued to talk Persian among themselves and the local vernacular with the inhabitants of the country; but ultimately Persian died out, though it continued to be the language of the court, first in Lahore, and later in Delhi, for hundreds of years after it had ceased to be ordinarily spoken in the army. In the Persian which the invaders used there were many Arabic and a few Turkish words; a large number of these were introduced into India.

What happened in Lahore and Delhi resembled in many points what was happening in England after the Norman Conquest. The Normans, speaking a dialect of French, came into an Anglo-Saxon-speaking country and made French the court language. Though they greatly influenced the speech of the conquered country, yet within three centuries they had lost their own language, and England to-day speaks English, blended, it is true, with French. The changes produced in English by the coming of the Normans have probably been exaggerated, but in any case they were greater than those produced in Panjabi and Hindi by the Muslim army. Apart from the incorporation of many loan words the influence was remarkably small. These languages remained practically unchanged in their pronouns, verbs, numerals and grammatical system. The chief change was in vocabulary. In all this English corresponds very closely to Urdu.

Muhammad Gori seized the Panjab in 1187 and his troops under Qutb ud Din Aibak, after consolidating their position, swept on to Delhi, but they cannot have left a hostile Muslim army in the rear. We may be certain that the descendants and successors of the original invaders joined them, and that the two armies marched together to Delhi, which was taken, as we have seen, six years later. When, twelve years later still, the new emperor was installed in Delhi, a large proportion of his soldiers must have spoken by preference a language very like what we think of as early Urdu (the remainder speaking Persian). The basis of that language was Panjabi as it emerged from the Prakrit stage, and it cannot have differed from the Kharī of that time nearly as much as the two languages differ to-day. The important fact is that Urdu really began not in Delhi but in Lahore, and that its underlying language was not Kharī (much less Braj, as often stated), but old Panjabi. Later on this first form of Urdu was somewhat altered by Kharī as spoken round Delhi, but we do not know that Braj exercised any influence at all.

The formation of Urdu began as soon as the Gaznavi forces settled in Lahore, i.e. in 1027. At what time they gave up Persian and took to speaking Panjabi-Urdu alone, we cannot tell, probably it was a matter of a very few years. One hundred and sixty-six years later the joint Gori and Gaznavi troops entered Delhi. In a short time Urdu was probably their usual language of conversation. We must therefore distinguish two stages: (1) beginning in 1027, Lahore-Urdu, consisting of old Panjabi overlaid by Persian; (2) beginning in 1193, Lahore-Urdu, overlaid by old Kharī, not very different then from old Panjabi, and further influenced by Persian, the whole becoming Delhi-Urdu.

When Muhammad Tuglaq invaded the Deccan and founded Daulatābād (1326), and twenty-one years later when 'Alā ud Dīn Bahmanī rebelled against him and became the first ruler of the Bahmanī dynasty, the Muhammadan troops who accompanied them spoke Urdu as their mother tongue, and the language which grew up among the Marathi-, Telugu- and Kanarese-speaking inhabitants who

became Muslims, was not Persian but Urdu. It is worthy of note that whereas in the north the invaders gave up their own tongue and adopted Urdu, their successors and descendants managed to impose that language, now their own, on a large part of the Deccan, where to-day it is spoken by nearly three million people.

**Early History of Urdu.** We have no accurate knowledge of spoken Urdu in the early years of its existence. Amīr *Khusrau* (c. 1255–1325) tells us in his Persian works that he wrote a great deal in 'Hindavi,' but only a little has come down to us; and what we now possess, perhaps 1,000 lines, has doubtless been considerably altered in the passage of time, so that we cannot regard it as correctly showing the speech of his day. We must however emphasize the fact that he did compose literary works in Hindi or Urdu, perhaps both, and that nearly 200 years ago the poet Mīr Taqī accepted as genuine some of the verses which we have to-day. We know this because Mīr refers to them in his anthology.

The word 'Hindi' is used in both a wide and a narrow sense. In the wide sense it includes the languages spoken in Bihār, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Central India, Rājputāna and the S.E. Panjab as far as Ambāla. One might include Kumāon and Gaḍhvāl. In the narrow sense it means Hindi proper, the chief dialects of which are Braj and Khaṛī. The first writers of Hindi wrote principally in Bihārī, Avadhī, Braj and Rājputānī; languages which were used for both composition and conversation. Muslim authors occasionally employed one of these, but more commonly Persian. Khaṛī, though widespread as a conversational medium, was not much used for literature. Indeed with the exception of Amīr *Khusrau's* few hundred lines just mentioned, which are mostly in Braj, and the works of the poet Sital (c. 1723), we have no work in it till we come to the verge of the nineteenth century.

The Urdu branch of Khaṛī has a different history. *Mīrājul 'Ashiqān'*, a tract by Banda Navāz, which has recently been printed, and is probably genuine, belongs to the end of the fourteenth century. Seeing that the author left the Deccan when he was fifteen and lived thereafter

in Delhi, not returning to the Deccan till he was an old man, we may take his prose as showing the Delhi idiom of that time. In the fifteenth century there is Shāh Mirāj Jī of the Deccan, who has left four extant works, and from that time the stream of literature goes on ever widening and deepening.

We must therefore revise our thoughts of both Khaṛī and Urdu. Khaṛī is contemporary with Braj and Avadhī; its beginning may be put at A.D. 900 or 1000. The commencement of Urdu may be dated any time after 1027, when the Muhammadan army of occupation began to live in Lahore. Khaṛī as a spoken language has a continuous history of nearly a thousand years; as a literary language, if we omit Amīr *Khusrau* and one or two other authors, it dates from the end of the eighteenth century. It is difficult to distinguish precisely between Khaṛī and Urdu. For practical purposes the distinction lies in the fact that Khaṛī uses very few, and Urdu very many, Persian and Arabic words. Some people, both Europeans and Indians, have made the use of Hindi or Persian metres the touchstone, but that distinction can be applied only to poetry; it is inapplicable to prose. In poetry, too, some authors, while not varying their language, have employed now Hindi metres, and now Persian. Even at the present day there are poets who sometimes write Urdu poetry in Hindi metres.

There has been a strange reversal of the decrees of fate. The despised Khaṛī language, confined to conversation, and considered unfit for poetry, was not used for serious literary purposes, except by Sital and perhaps Amīr *Khusrau*, till near 1800; so much so that even to-day some persons, not realising that it has had a vigorous existence among the common people since the time when it took the place of Prakrit, think that it was invented by Inshā Allāh, Sadal Mīr and Lallū Lāl. In the Hindi sphere it has now turned out its rivals, and will soon be the only survivor so far as literary work is concerned, while in its Urdu form it has been for centuries the medium of a prosperous and growing literature.

It is important to remember that in the middle of the

fourteenth century there was no real difference between Delhi Urdu and Dakhnī Urdu, but with the establishment of the separate Bahmanī dynasty the two dialects began to diverge.

Urdu literature in its early stages was much more conversational and simple than it was in later years. Probably for that reason it resembles to a surprising degree the spoken language of to-day. This resemblance must not be used as an argument against the genuineness of an early poem or prose work. It shows merely that the author wrote the language as he spoke it. In later years men writing artificially and following foreign models produced works which, divorced from everyday idiom, differ widely from the Urdu which we know now. To take two instances. The Dakhnī poems of Muhammad Qulī Qutb Shāh before 1600, and the beautiful Dakhnī poem *Qutb Mushtarī*, written by Vajhī in 1609, are easier to read than Shāh Naṣīr's writings in the nineteenth century.

**The Name 'Urdu.'** An important question is how the word 'Urdu' came to be applied to a language. We have seen that the soldiers in Delhi at a very early date gave up the use of Persian among themselves and began to speak a modified form of the vernacular. In Delhi this form of speech, to distinguish it from the usual Khaṛī Bolī (and probably also from Persian), was called *Zabān i Urdū*, the language of the Army, or *Zabān i Urdū e Mu'allā*, the language of the Exalted or Royal Army. As the soldiers and the people intermixed and intermarried, the language spread over the city into the suburbs and even into the surrounding district. It was natural to keep up the separate name to distinguish it not only from the unmixed vernacular of the people, but also from the Persian of the court. This double distinction is not unimportant. It is possible, too, that in time the name served to mark still another distinction, viz. between the speech of Delhi and that of Lucknow. It is supposed that gradually the word 'zabān' was dropped, and 'Urdū' came to be used alone.

In this explanation there is a difficulty. Though the royal camp was established in Delhi during the time of Qutb ud Dīn Aibak in 1206, the earliest known example of

the employment of the word 'Urdū,' standing by itself and meaning the Urdu language, is in the poems of Muṣḥafī, 1750-1824, which are unfortunately undated, and in any case have only in part been printed. Gilchrist uses it in his *Grammar* (1796). The earliest examples of the phrase, *Zabān i Urdū*, the language of the Camp or the Urdu language, are in *Tazkira e Gulzār i Ibrāhīm* by 'Alī Ibrāhīm Khān (1783) and in Muṣḥafī's *Tazkira e Shu'arā e Hindī* (1794). In this title we must note the word 'Hindī' (meaning 'Urdū'). The expression *Zabān i Urdū e mu'allā* (*e Shāhjahānābād Dihlī*), the language of the Royal Camp, or the Exalted Urdu language (of Shāhjahānābād, Delhi) occurs in the anthology *Nikāt ush Shu'arā* by Mīr Taqī (1752). In Qiyām ud Dīn Qāim's anthology *Makhzan i Nikāt* (1754) we find *muhāvira e Urdū e mu'allā*, the idiom of the Royal Camp. 'Arsh, the son of Mīr Taqī, speaks of himself as *Urdu e mu'allā kā zabāndān*, one well acquainted with the Urdū e Mu'allā language. His date is unknown, but he seems to have been born in Mīr's old age.

Now the earliest of these is five and a half centuries after the foreign army had settled in Delhi; and we naturally ask why during all this long period the language never received the name 'Urdu,' and why people suddenly thought of that name after the lapse of so long a time, when it had ceased to have any particular meaning. This period of 550 years could perhaps be reduced; it has been claimed, but not proved, that the royal camp in Delhi was not known as the Urdu till the time of Bābur, who came direct from Turkistan with a Turki force in 1526. It is a doubtful point. We may admit that before his time the foreign recruits had nearly all been Persian speakers or descendants of Persian speakers. But on the other hand the word 'Urdū' for army had been in Persian since 1150, for it is found more than once in the *Jahānkushā* of Javainī with that meaning.

The first example of it in India is said to be in the *Tuzuk i Bāburī*, compiled by the Emperor Bābur himself in 1529. But even if we accept these later dates for the first occurrence in India of the word 'Urdū' with the meaning of army, we still have to account for the fact that for

226 years, from 1526 to 1752 no one seems to have thought of calling the language by that name, and that it was only after 1752 that this was done. It is almost incredible that none of the historians of the Mughal period ever used the name; yet such seems to have been the case. The language as spoken was generally called Hindi; when employed for literary, that is poetical, purposes it was known as *Rekhta* (see p. 3) or *Hindī*. Amīr *Khusrau* and *Shekh Bājan* (d. 1506) speak of *Zabān i Dihlavī*, the speech of Delhi; while *Vajhī* in *Sab Ras* (1634) calls it *Zabān i Hindostān*, the language of Hindustān. But no one in the early days spoke of 'Urdu.' Even in the end of the eighteenth century it was an uncommon word. People continued to talk of Hindi and *Rekhta*. As late as 1790 'Abd ul Qādir in the preface to his Urdu translation of the Qur'ān said he was translating not into *Rekhta* but into *Hindī*.

One interesting detail is still *sub judice*. It has been asserted that the Persian dictionary, *Mu'ayyid ul Fuṣalā* (1519) uses the phrase, 'in the language of the people of the Urdu.' But it is claimed on the other hand that the words are not found in good MSS. of the Dictionary; and the MS. in the British Museum does not appear to contain them. Even if it did, 'urdu' would not here be the name of a language. It is a fact worth noting that the word 'Urdū' is not given in this Dictionary at all with any meaning, either 'army' or any other. Possibly the explanation of the problem is that *Zabān i Urdū*, the speech of the Camp, or some equivalent phrase, was in conversational use from the earliest times, and that gradually, centuries later, it was admitted to books, while the use of the word 'Urdu' alone, without *zabān*, was still later. But the subject requires further investigation.

**The Place of Urdu among Languages.** The great Indo-European family of languages is divided into Italic, Teutonic, Keltic, Greek, Albanian, Slavonic, Armenian and Aryan sub-families. The Aryan sub-family has two main branches, Iranian and Indo-Aryan or Sanskritic. (The Kāfir languages may belong to the latter, but probably should be classed by themselves as a third branch.) During the course of the second millennium B.C. the Aryans came

from Central Asia into India. The Mauryan Dynasty was established before 320 B.C., and Ashoka, 250 B.C., ruled over a settled empire extending from Calcutta to beyond Kābul. At that time Sanskrit was spoken over the whole of north India; there were different dialects, but all were closely connected with Vedic Sanskrit. It is remarkable that there is practically nothing in the phonology of the modern Aryan languages of India which cannot be directly derived from an early form of Sanskrit, essentially the same as that of the Vedas.

There are to-day, if we exclude the Kāfir group, approximately 23 to 26 languages descended from Sanskrit. In the case of some, we can trace the intermediate stages fairly well; in the case of others, we possess nothing between Sanskrit and the modern language. The following is a fairly complete list of the Indo-Aryan languages:

Sindhi	Bihārī
Lahndī	Uriyā
Panjābī	Bengali (with Assamese)
Hindī	Marāthī
Gujrātī (with Bhīlī)	Singhalese
Rājputānī (with Khāndeshī)	Dard languages:
Pahārī languages:	Śinā
Kumāonī	Kashmirī
Gaḍhwālī (Central Pahārī)	Kohistānī
Western Pahārī	Five allied languages:
Nepālī	Chitrālī, Tirāhī, Pashāī,
Avadhī or Pūrābī (Eastern Hindi)	Kalāshā and Gavarbaṭī

Of these, Hindi, which immediately concerns us, has two important dialects, Braj and Khari Boli; Khari Boli again has three forms, (1) Urdu, which contains many Persian and Arabic words; (2) Literary Hindi, which has many Sanskrit words; and (3) Hindustani, a commonsense *via media* between the other two, hardly to be distinguished from simple Urdu. Finally, spoken Urdu has two varieties: (i) Dakni or Dakhni, spoken in the Deccan, and (ii) Northern Urdu spoken in north India.