

1. The Relationship between Hindi and Urdu

Ever since the establishment of classical philology as a scientific discipline was made possible by the European discovery towards the end of the eighteenth century that Sanskrit was ultimately related to Greek and Latin, it has become natural to see relationships between languages in terms of family trees. Thus Hindi and Urdu can be described as being ultimately descended from Sanskrit, near relatives of such contemporary New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages as Panjabi or Bengali, quite closely related to the next languages of the vast Indo-European family, such as Persian, and still more distantly connected to languages such as English and Portuguese belonging to remoter branches. Such relationships can be objectively demonstrated by reference to shared grammatical structures or to etymologically shared vocabulary, e.g. Hindi-Urdu *māñ*, Sanskrit *mātr*, Persian *mādar*, English *mother*. And at this level, the genealogical image works quite well.

But languages are not simply composed of the bones of grammar and vocabulary, for they live as the creations of human societies and as the instruments of their cultures. The patterns of historical contact and of influences through the borrowing of loan-words, even of syntactic structures, are much less easily fitted into a family-tree framework. So Sanskrit is not simply the etymological ancestor of both Hindi and Urdu, but — through its continuing prestige as the great language of classical Hindu civilization — the chief determinant of the separate identity of Hindi. Similarly, while Persian is quite closely related to that common NIA core of Hindi-Urdu, the spoken lingua franca often called 'Hindustani', it is the historical role of Persian as the great language of Indo-Muslim culture which ensures its continuing role as the major shaper of Urdu, as opposed to Hindi. And while purist adherents of both languages are for once united in their opposition to English as the former colonialist language of the Raj, both are influenced by its huge importance in the post-colonial world.

Committed partisans of either Hindi or Urdu have, of course, no difficulty in extending the genealogical imagery to accommodate such culturally-determined differences. And while Western students are spared the physical dangers that can all too easily be produced by the fierce linguistic chauvinisms of South Asia, they may find it difficult not to be influenced unconsciously by the insidious simplifications which would present Urdu as a bastardized version of Hindi, or alternatively Hindi as some illegitimate offspring of Urdu.

The first part of this introduction attempts to dispel such prejudices by providing a general account of the historical and cultural factors which have led to the bifurcating evolution of the two rival languages. It is above all important to regard them as rivals of equal legitimacy. The simple charms of the shared Hindustani genetic stock may appeal to some: but the identical twins have chosen to dress themselves as differently as possible, and it is hardly helpful to begin with prejudgements as to the relative attractiveness of simple homespun, Persian silk and Indian brocade.

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11. *The Indo-Aryan context*

The history of the easternmost branch of the Indo-European language-family, known as Indo-Aryan (IA), dates back at least three thousand years to the earliest hymns of the Rigveda, the most ancient of the sacred texts of Hinduism. When the natural processes of linguistic change threatened to corrupt the sacred Vedic texts and thereby sap their ritual power, the world's first linguists emerged from the ranks of the Brahmins to codify and thereby artificially preserve their language. This process reached its culmination in the grammar of Panini (c. 4thc. B.C.), which fixed Old Indo-Aryan in the stage of 'Classical Sanskrit'.

The elevated status which Classical Sanskrit continued to enjoy in India over the last two and a half millenia has subsequently derived more from its function as the vehicle of the overlapping entities of high Hindu culture and religion than from its spoken use (although there has always been a minority of learned pandits throughout India who can and do converse in the classical tongue). Thus while the language called *saṅskṛta* or 'refined' continued to serve as the language of literature, so-called *prākṛta* or 'natural' speech developed as the medium of conversation. But the subsequent evolution of the IA languages has always been powerfully governed by the huge prestige of Sanskrit to their Hindu speakers, not to speak of its long use as a learned medium for the elite classes of all parts of the subcontinent. The very factors which maintained Sanskrit as the predominant language of Hindu culture encouraged the use of the grammatically simpler Middle IA languages (MIA) by the various non-Brahminical religions: thus Buddhism adopted Pali as its sacred language, and the later Prakrits were used for the scriptures of the Jain faith. The linguistic changes entailed by the passage of time eventually made these languages almost as distinct from everyday speech as Sanskrit.

By about A.D. 1000 the various languages of the NIA group — Panjabi, Hindi, Bengali, etc. — had effectively emerged out of their MIA parents, although the characteristic Indian preference for using highflown and archaic language for literary records entails a paucity of direct evidence for them at this early stage of their existence, and their reconstruction must depend largely upon deduction from the more richly preserved writings of later centuries. In the task of such reconstruction, it is always essential to bear in mind the continuing influence of earlier stages of IA. Alongside the naturally evolved vocabulary of so-called '*tadbhava*' words, there has always been a continued role for their etymological ancestors from Sanskrit or Prakrit, collectively known as '*tatsama*'. Such a common word as Hindi-Urdu *log*, for instance, looks as if it must be a *tadbhava* representing the last possible stage of evolution from Sanskrit *loka*, since it is obviously not one of those '*desī*' words like *ṭabbar* 'family' for which there is no Sanskrit etymon. In fact, it represents the MIA stage of Sanskrit *loka* > Prakrit *loga* > (Old) Hindi *loa*, and is really a sort of *tatsama*. So, in looking at the etymology of Hindi-Urdu words, it is always as well to consult the best etymological dictionary (Turner 1966) rather than out-dated guides such as Platts 1884 and its numerous living descendants in both Hindi and Urdu monolingual dictionaries.

This palimpsest pattern applies to vocabulary rather than to grammar, where the natural laws of change over time have proved more effective. Such formidable items of Sanskrit paradigms as the dual number, and the elaborate system of verbal conjugation had been largely simplified before NIA came onto the scene: and an even more deep-seated change is that from a 'synthetic' to an 'analytic' syntax, i.e. from one in which syntactic relationships are expressed through a fully inflexional system to one in which case is shown by the use of independent words such as postpositions, or tense and mood by the use of auxiliary verbs.

12. *The Impact of Muslim Rule*

While a fairly long interval elapsed between the conquest of the Panjab by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030) and the Muslim capture of Delhi in 1192, the vast subsequent expansion of Muslim rule both eastwards to Bengal and southwards into the Deccan was rapidly effected. From the fourteenth century Muslim rulers controlled most of India, apart from such isolated areas as Rajasthan and the extreme South. Although the Delhi Sultanate later dissolved into a number of regional kingdoms, central authority was soon re-established by the Great Mughals (1526–1707): and the long period of Muslim rule was ended only in the eighteenth century by the triple impact of fresh invasions from Afghanistan, internal revolt by the Hindu Marathas, and the ultimately successful expansion of British power. This centuries-long Muslim political dominance naturally had profound effects on the cultural evolution of South Asia, as is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the use of language.

The rapid initial expansion of Islam in the seventh century brought Arabic as the sacred language of the Quran to all the vast territories of the Caliphate, but as a spoken language only to the Middle East and North Africa. In the eastern lands of Iran and Central Asia, Persian continued to be spoken and soon evolved as a literary language also. This classical Persian, the most prominent representative of the Iranian languages which are quite closely related to IA, retained its Indo-European structure and basic vocabulary, but incorporated a huge number of loan-words from Arabic — a Semitic language quite unrelated to Indo-European — and was written in the Arabic script. Although many of the invading warlords and their followers had some form of Turkish as their mother-tongue, it was this Arabicized Persian (in which Turkish elements amount to only a few loan-words) that they brought to India as their principal cultural language.

While some knowledge of Arabic was always expected of all educated Muslims, and those who wished to join the clerical establishment of the maulvis had to study it thoroughly, it was Persian which came to form the main medium and the central component of Indo-Muslim education. Not only was the most lavish patronage of kings and emperors reserved for Persian poetry, but administration was also conducted in Persian. The elementary mosque-schools (*maktab*) run by the maulvis consequently appealed not only to Muslims but also to the many Hindus who sought a place in the bureaucracy: some Hindu castes, notably the Kayasths, indeed developed a sound knowledge of Persian as the cornerstone of their professional skills as scribes, clerks and administrators. As a natural

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consequence the rival elementary schools (*pāṭhśālā*) run by the pandits came to have primarily a religious significance only, with Sanskrit being relegated to the narrower sphere of Hindu concerns.

As always in South Asia, however, few people used the same language for both writing and speaking. Although Persian is historically quite close to the IA languages, it is hardly mutually intelligible with them, and some form of lingua franca mixing Persian with Old Panjabi must have emerged soon after the permanent Muslim conquest of the Panjab in the eleventh century. Although Persian continued to be reinforced for many centuries by fresh immigrations of native speakers, their numbers even among the Muslim minority were soon much smaller than those of Indian converts. With the capture of Delhi, it was the local Khaṛī Bolī (KhB) or 'Upright speech' of the city and the adjacent area which came to form the local element, together with considerable numbers of Persian loan-words, in the lingua franca of the Muslim empires which was eventually to give rise to modern Hindi and Urdu.

13. *Medieval Hindi*

With their culturally conditioned indifference to most things Indian, the Muslims in their Persian writings casually referred to this spoken language in the same way as most other IA languages they came across in such vague terms as *hindī* 'Indian language' or *hinduī* 'Hindu language'. The modern perception of the medieval cultivation of Hindi (still known by its Persian name) is quite as generalizing and quite as misleading.

As the result of politico-linguistic developments in the modern period, the 'Hindi area' is now considered to extend across North India from Rajasthan to Bihar. Since the KhB dialect of the Delhi area which forms the basis of modern Hindi was hardly cultivated as a written language during the medieval period, historical justification has been effected by using the name 'Medieval Hindi' as a somewhat misleading umbrella term to cover the wide diversity of regional languages — now regarded as mere dialects of Hindi — which were so cultivated.

At the western extreme, medieval Rajasthani is richly preserved in a literature which concentrates upon courtly, martial and romantic subjects, produced largely by the hereditary bards attached to the Rajput courts. At the other end of the area, in the Avadh ('Oudh') region around Lucknow, the patronage of local Muslim rulers encouraged the development of a major tradition of Sufi verse in the Avadhi dialect of Eastern Hindi. The geographical location of the Rama myth in Avadh made Avadhi peculiarly appropriate also for the version of the Ramayan epic by the sixteenth century poet Tulsidas, which is still regarded as forming the crowning glory of the whole of Hindi literature.

The prime style of literary Hindi from the late fifteenth century onwards is, however, based on the Western Hindi dialect of Braj Bhāṣā. This derived its inspiration from the association of the Braj area, to the south-east of Delhi, with the childhood of Krishna. A proliferation in the sixteenth century of sectarian Krishnaite poets, of whom the most famous is the semi-legendary Surdas, laid the foundation for a more generalized use of Braj for a wide range of literary and semi-literary genres over much

of North India. This development was encouraged not only by the sacred association with Krishna, but also by the location of the Mughal capital of Agra in the Braj area: courtly patronage thus came to be added to religious devotion. Until the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it was in fact Braj and not the neighbouring KhB which was meant by the designation 'Hindi' in the perception of most Hindus, and the erroneous theory that Urdu is somehow the product of a mixture of Persian with Braj — a theory still to be encountered in Muslim accounts of Urdu — continues to reflect the dialect's past domination of the Hindi scene.

14. Classical Urdu

The Muslims of North India were as indifferent as the Hindus to the cultivation of KhB in the medieval period. Although there are notable Muslim contributions to e.g. Avadhi, Braj or Panjabi poetry, the vast bulk of medieval Indo-Muslim literature is written in Persian.

By another of those paradoxical developments in which the history of Hindi-Urdu so abounds, the first substantial tradition of writing in Urdu was founded not in the North but in the Deccan, where the lingua franca of Delhi had been introduced into the quite alien linguistic territory of Telugu and the other Dravidian languages by the Muslim invasions of the thirteenth century. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Deccan was divided among several powerful Muslim kingdoms, and the rulers of Bijapur and Golkunda (modern Hyderabad) in particular were notable poets and patrons not only of Persian but also of the archaic local variety of Urdu known as Dakanī. Motivated in part doubtless by a wish to assert their separate identity from the Mughal empire which was to absorb them by 1687, these courts produced considerable quantities of Dakanī verse, although their archaic language effectively separates them from the mainstream of classical Urdu.

This literary tradition was established as the double consequence of the conquest of the Deccan kingdoms by Aurangzeb (d. 1707) and the collapse of stable central authority which ensued so rapidly after his death. The migration of poets from the Deccan introduced the jaded Persian poets of the capital to the charms of vernacular poetry more or less at the point when the chaos wreaked by fresh invaders from Afghanistan called into question the attractiveness of Persian as the sole cultural medium of Indian Islam. Although detailed developments are necessarily obscured by the political turmoil of the mid-eighteenth century, it is quite clear that Urdu, suitably refined to meet the cultivated norms of the Delhi literati, soon replaced Persian as the preferred poetic vehicle of the Muslim elite. Their Persianized standard was to survive the enforced migration of many of their number to such safer havens as that carved out for themselves in Avadh by the Navvab-Vazirs who ruled from Lucknow; it was also to determine directly the subsequent elevation of Urdu, and indirectly to govern the contrary development of modern Hindi as its more successful rival.

Although such classic masters of early Urdu poetry as Mir (d. 1810) continued to favour Persian for their prose works, the gradual shift from Persian to Urdu was soon to gather an unstoppable momentum. It took

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rather longer for Urdu to gather its modern name. Until well into the nineteenth century, the old Persian labels of *hindī*, etc., were supplemented by a vogue for the Persian designation *restā* 'Mixed language'. Eventually, however, it was apparently the splendidly mixed title of the cantonment area of Mughal Delhi, known as *Urdū-e mu'allā* 'The Exalted Camp' — combining the Turkish loan *urdū* (meaning 'camp' and cognate with English 'horde'), the Persian izafat-construction *-e*, and the Arabic adjective *mu'allā* — which by abbreviation gave the language the name by which it has come to be known.

2. The British Raj

In the narrow terms which used to be set by colonial historians, the British supremacy over South Asia was established as the successful result of a long process of infighting, largely at sea, between the expansionist countries of western Europe. From the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese had been the most successful of these, and their historic role as the first militant missionaries of Christianity lives on in such entrenched Hindi-Urdu loans as *padre* > *pādrī* 'priest' and *egreja* > *girjā* 'church'.

As a result of the military victories won by Clive at Plassey in 1757 and by Munro at Buxar in 1764, it was, however, the British who were to dominate the political evolution of South Asia until Independence in 1947. Although the British rulers were at first unwilling and later unable to establish their local cultural presence in terms of large-scale conversions matching those achieved for Islam by their Muslim predecessors, their impact upon the linguistic evolution of Hindi-Urdu was to prove even greater. In this process, the immediate input from the superior military technology and the confidence which it engendered in the early colonialists was soon to be overshadowed in a complex fashion by the *mission civilatrice* of Victorian England and the subsequent emergence of English as the premier world language, first from Britain and later from America. Although English is identified as the language of colonialism in India and Pakistan, the powerfully imposed heritage has become quite as difficult to escape for both Hindi and Urdu protagonists as the separate inheritances of Sanskrit and Persian with which each are so much more at home. In their differential preferences, the shadows of imperial 'divide and rule' of course continue to flicker: and it is therefore worth tracing in some detail the triple process of increasingly polarized reactions between the dominant imperial power, Muslim protagonists of Urdu and Hindu protagonists of Hindi.

21. *The Impact of British Rule*

The Muslims were only the last in a succession of invaders of South Asia through the passes allowing access on its north-western frontier. The long-mounted process of European naval assaults on the coasts of the subcontinent brought substantial territorial reward only when the British were able, as a result of internal dissension, to capture the soft underbelly of Bengal, where they established their capital until 1912 at Calcutta. Historically, this was quite the wrong position from which to conquer the