

Chapter Two: Remaking History, Refashioning Culture

This brief historical account of the origin myths and realities of the terms 'Hindi / Urdu' was necessary because scholars often suggest, or even state, that the language today known as 'Hindi' is the rightful claimant to the space in Indian literary history occupied, at least up to the end of the seventeenth century, by the language today called 'Urdu'. In regard to Braj Bhāshā, Avadhī, and similar modern Indian languages, claims that modern Hindi subsumes those languages predate the partition of India. In regard to Urdu's space, such claims postdate the partition.¹ However, no discussion can now afford to ignore the fact that there *are* two claimants to a single linguistic and literary tradition, and the whole issue is more political than academic.

Hindi after 1857 gradually emerged, in the words of Jules Bloch, as 'the lingua franca of the Hindus'. Bloch also recognized that Lallū jī Lāl, 'under the inspiration of Dr. Gilchrist', changed everything by writing the famous *Prem sāgar* (Ocean of Love) 'whose prose portions are on the whole Urdu, from which Persian words have been throughout replaced by Indo-Aryan words'.² Tara Chand says that this was recognized by Hindi scholars as well, and quotes from a 1921 article of the famous Hindi man of letters Chandra Dhar Sharmā Gulerī in support of this.³

The positing of Hindi against Urdu had far-reaching effects on the literary culture of Urdu. Very few of these have been documented, far less discussed and explained in the proper perspective.

A byplay was going on at the time modern Hindi was being groomed to occupy centre stage on the Indian linguistic and literary scene. It was the denigration of Urdu on 'moral' and

¹The first major effort in this direction was apparently made by Babu Ram Saksena in his *Dakanī hindī* (1952). I am grateful to Professor Jaḥfar Razā, of the University of Allahabad, for this information.

²Quoted in the original French with his own English translation by Tara Chand, in *The Problem of Hindustani*, p. 88.

³Tara Chand, *The Problem of Hindustani*, p. 87.

‘religious’ grounds. Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885), for instance, who is widely regarded as ‘the father of modern standard Hindi’, was at that time not only switching over from Urdu to Hindi, but also writing savage, if vulgar, satires mocking ‘the death of Urdu Begam’--among whose mourners were Arabic, Persian, Pushto, and Panjabi, for they shared a common, ‘foreign’, script. Addressing the Education Commission of 1882, Bharatendu testified (in English),

By the introduction of the Nagari character they [the Muslims] would lose entirely the opportunity of plundering the world by reading one word for another and misconstruing the real sense of the contents....The use of Persian letters in office is not only an injustice to Hindus, but it is a cause of annoyance and inconvenience to the majority of the loyal subjects of Her Imperial Majesty.⁴

There were other anti-Urdu voices at that time, especially in Benares (now Varanasi), but Harishchandra’s diatribes stand out, coming as they did from a creative writer who began his career as an Urdu writer, and who still occupies a place in the history of modern Urdu literature. As late as in 1871, Bharatendu Harishchandra wrote that his language, and that of the women of his community, was Urdu. In fact, belonging as he did to the *pachhāhīn* (western) branch of the Agravāl clan, he perhaps didn’t even know the folk language of the Banaras area of his time, and certainly looked down upon the *pūrabiyā* (eastern) branch of the clan.⁵ Tara Chand asserts, ‘Throughout these centuries, Hindi (Persianized Hindustani) and not Modern Hindi (Sanskritised Hindustani) was the *lingua franca* of India, and the speech of polite society, whether Hindu or Muslim’.⁶

No other Hindu writer seems to have switched from Urdu to Hindi around that time, but the name ‘Hindi’ began to be used less and less for Urdu after the 1880’s. The British also more or less gave up on ‘Hindustani’ once the name ‘Urdu’ became almost universally popular.⁷

New Urdu writers continued to rise from among the Hindus, but the Muslims, perhaps unconsciously responding to the

⁴Sengupta, ‘Krishna the Cruel Beloved’, p. 137. For fuller details about this and about the satire against Urdu, see Sengupta, ‘Krishna the Cruel Beloved’, pp. 133-152.

⁵Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp. 118-19.

⁶Tara Chand, *The Problem of Hindustani*, p. 86. Tara Chand also cites the same Bharatendu Harishchandra quote given by Dalmia.

⁷The title of Platts’s dictionary (1884) is suggestive: *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*. Only a few years before (1879), Fallon had named his dictionary *A New Hindustani English Dictionary*. Writing in 1874, Platts had compromised: *A Grammar of Hindustānī or Urdū*.

pressure of official British opinion, tended towards excluding Hindu writers from the Urdu canon (and the Persian canon, but that is another story). In his enormously popular history of Urdu poetry called *Āb-e ḥayāt* (first published 1880), Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād (1831-1910) found only one Hindu poet worth more than passing mention. It was Dayā Shankar Nasīm (1811-1844), and Āzād discussed him anachronistically, along with Mīr Ḥasan (1727-1786), making it difficult for a reader to find Nasīm's account in a hurry.⁸

Āzād may not have known of Ajay Chand Bhaṭnāgar (fl. 1550's), but there is no reason why he should have ignored numerous Hindu poets of the eighteenth century, including such major figures as Sarb Sukh Dīvānā (1727/8-1788), Jasvant Singh Parvānah (1756/7-1813), Ṭīkā Rām Tasallī (fl. 1790's), Budh Singh Qalandar (fl. 1770's). Kānjī Mal Ṣabā (fl. 1770's), Bindrāban Ḳhushgo (d. 1756/7), Rājā Rām Narāḥin Mauzūn (d. 1762), Rājā Kalyān Singh †Āshiq (1752-1821), Rājā Rāj Kishan Dās (1781-1823), and a host of others.

Nearer his own time, Āzād makes only marginal mention of Ghanshyām Lāl †Āṣī, a leading poet of Delhi, and a pupil of Shāh Naṣīr (1760?-1838). Żauq (1788-1854), another and more famous pupil of Naṣīr's, was Āzād's *ustād*, and Āzād praised him to the skies in *Āb-e ḥayāt*. It is said that †Āṣī was a participant, on Naṣīr's behalf, in an episode of rivalry between Shāh Naṣīr and Żauq, and †Āṣī's ghazal on that occasion was superior to Żauq's. Āzād is reported to have obtained from †Āṣī's son the details of the former's life and career for inclusion in *Āb-e ḥayāt*, but he didn't use the material at all.⁹ Āzād did squeeze in a casual, marginal reference to †Āṣī, misnaming the poet, misattributing a *shi'r* of his to Vajīh ud-Dīn Munīr (Shāh Naṣīr's son), and observing in the margin, with the innocent-sounding aplomb characteristic of him, 'I heard from some senior persons that [the *shi'r* in question] was recited by Lālā Ghanshām Dās †Āṣī. He too was a pupil of Shāh Naṣīr's'.¹⁰

In 1893, Alṭṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī (1837-1914) published his *Muqaddamah-e shi'r o shā'irī* (Preface on Poems and Poetry). It was an extensive theoretical statement on the nature of poetry, and an indictment of Urdu poetry in terms of British official ideas

⁸Substantial portions of *Āb-e ḥayāt* have been translated by Frances Pritchett for a forthcoming publication, with an introduction by me that elaborates some of the points made here. (The translation is to be published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi.) See also my 'Constructing a Literary History'. For Āzād on Dayā Shankar Nasīm, see *Āb-e ḥayāt*, pp. 308-09.

⁹†Āṣī, *Kalām-e †Āṣī*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰Āzād, *Āb-e ḥayāt*, p. 566. Note that Āzād names †Āṣī wrongly as Ghanshām Dās instead of Ghanshyām Lāl.

about what was wrong with it. Next to *Āb-e ḥayāt*, the *Muqaddamah* remains the outstanding Urdu prose critical work of the nineteenth century. It commands nearly absolute authority even now. The *Muqaddamah* is dotted with references to, and quotes from, Urdu poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; with the exception of four references to Dayā Shankar Nasīm (two of these quite perfunctory, and all of them disapproving), there is no other Hindu among them. Ḥālī does quote a *shiʿr* from Bāl Mukund Ḥuẓūr, a pupil of Dard (1720-1785), but misattributes the *shiʿr* to Mīr.¹¹

Reviewing the first volume of Maulvī Sayyid Aḥmad’s Urdu-Urdu dictionary *Farhang-e āṣifiyah* (published 1901), Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī said that the compiler of an Urdu dictionary should be a person from Delhi, and should also be

a *sharīf musalmān* (a well-educated Muslim of good family), for even in Delhi, it’s only the speech of Muslims that is considered proper and conforming to the required standard. The social [English in original] state of the Hindus does not permit the *urdū-e muʿallā* to be their mother tongue.¹²

It is not surprising that Ḥālī had no sense of incongruence in dismissing the whole Hindu community as outside the pale of cultured Urdu, and even making a somewhat sinister though vague remark about the ‘social’ condition of the Hindus. He was only echoing the standard theory of his British masters. Ḥālī was a person of wide humanity, and was absolutely free from communal bias. In his views about the Hindu’s native incapability in regard to Urdu, he was much like the European scholars of his day who could, with all compassion, believe in the ‘inherent’ inferiority of the ‘black races’.

Shiblī Nuṣmānī wholeheartedly granted the expertise of Hindus in Urdu. He also granted that the Hindu community was full of liberal-minded people who were active in the promotion of Urdu. Writing in the *Muslim Gazette*, Lucknow, of October 9, 1912, Shiblī argued,

It is alleged that the Hindus are active in obliterating Urdu, which is the language of our community. Let’s see how. Is it because the Hindus bring out the very best magazines [original in English] and journals (*Adīb*, and *Zamānah*) of the Urdu language? Is it because they are thus encouraging and enhancing the value of Urdu writers and are making ready a large number of new Urdu writers of quality? Is it because in U.P., Hindu writers of ability are on a par with Muslims in producing quality Urdu works? Going through the

¹¹Ḥālī, *Muqaddamah-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, p. 190. Ḥālī quotes two *shiʿrs* on this page, describing both as the property of Mīr. The second one is actually Ḥuẓūr’s. For Nasīm, see pp. 216-17, 234-35, 237, 238.

¹²Ḥālī, *Kulliyāt-e naṣr-e ḥālī*, vol. 2, pp. 203-04.

pages of *Zamānah* I have often viewed its Hindu contributors with envy.¹³

Shiblī's judgement about the Hindus is true, word for word. But please note that he describes Urdu as *hamārī qaumī zabān*, which I translate as 'the language of our community'. Shiblī thus implies that Hindus (of U.P. at least) are doubtless fully proficient in Urdu, but the language belongs to the Muslims. That's why, while praising Premchand's Urdu, Shiblī once said without a trace of self-consciousness that though Premchand was a Kāyasth from Eastern U.P., he wrote better Urdu than the educated Muslim elite of Delhi and Lucknow.

A somewhat hilarious echo of Shiblī's innocent condescension is to be found in an anecdote narrated by Josh Malihābādī (1898-1982) about his friend Qāzī Ḳhurshīd Aḥmad in Hyderabad. They were guests at a party given by the Nizam's Prime Minister, Maharaja Sir Kishan Parshād Shād (1864-1940). Josh recited some of the Maharaja's poetry as a favour to the guests. The irrepressible Qazi exclaimed, 'The Maharaja is not from Delhi, nor is he from Lucknow, yet he is a good poet, and that too when he is a Hindu, a mere Hindu!'¹⁴

Dātā Dayāl Maharshī Shīvbrat Lāl Varman (1860-1939), a Hindu saint and a prolific Urdu writer, claimed that while 'No language in the world other than Hindi can fulfill the religious needs of the Hindus', he was furthering and propagating Hindi through his Urdu writings. In a paper that he published in the July 1910, issue of his magazine *Mārtand*, Lahore, the Maharshī wrote:

I too write everything in Urdu, but I have, at the same time, the well-being of Hindi close to my heart. Those who have a flair for writing in Urdu, should be thus striking new paths for Hindi. They should use [in their Urdu] Hindi words in abundance.¹⁵

It was only in the 1930's that the Muslims, thrown on the defensive by the realization that Urdu might have no place in a Hindu-dominated India, proclaimed the folly and falsity of the 'Urdu equals Muslim' equation, and began to assert the truth: Urdu was, and had always been, the language of both Hindus and Muslims. Even so, as late as in 1945, Firāq Gorakhpūrī (1896-1984), a Hindu and a major Urdu writer, advised Hindu writers to adopt the style and idiom of the Muslims, for good Urdu was truly the domain of the Muslims. In an essay entitled 'Answer to a Letter', Firāq wrote:

¹³Shiblī Nuḥmānī, *Maqālāt-e shiblī*, p. 189.

¹⁴Josh Malihābādī, *Yādoñ kī barāt*, p. 430.

¹⁵Quoted in Muḥammad Anṣārullāh, '*Urdū naṣr par hindū maḥhab kā āsar*', pp. 19-20. See also the author's *Dātā Dayāl Maharshī Shīvbrat Lāl Varman*.

In order for the Hindu to outshine even the Muslim in Urdu, it is not necessary at all to give up his religion and gain the honour of converting to Islam....What is needed is for him to grasp firmly in his hands the inner veins of that language in the same way that Urdu, or Western Hindi, was grasped by Mīr, Dard, Saudā, Ġhālib, Anīs, Ātash, and Dāgh. Rather, they had clasped the inner veins of Western Hindi closer to themselves than their own jugular vein....A Hindu who possesses a great mind and heart can, by reading the Muslim poets of Urdu, become a greater Urdu poet than [even] Mīr and Iqbāl.¹⁶

Another manifestation of the (un)conscious belief that the Hindu was not a kindred spirit as far as Urdu was concerned can be seen in the *ustād-shāgird* (master-pupil) connections among Urdu poets during the early twentieth century. The institution of *ustād* and *shāgird* gained so much success shortly after coming into existence in the eighteenth century, that the excellence and importance of a poet was judged also by his literary lineage, and by the number and excellence of his own *shāgirds*. Poets like Sarb Sukh Dīvānā became leading *ustāds*, commanding a number of *shāgirds* who were major poets in their own right. Dīvānā counted major Muslim poets like Jaʿfar †Alī Ḥasrat (1737/8-1791/2), and Ḥaidar †Alī Ḥairān (fl. 1770's), among his *shāgirds*.

One consequence of the assiduous promotion of the Hindi / Hindu and Muslim / Urdu idea in the nineteenth century seems to have been a paucity of Muslim *shāgirds* of Hindu *ustāds*. Hindu poets, too, gradually tended to gravitate toward Hindus for establishing their *ustād-shāgird* connection.

It must be said to the everlasting credit of the Hindu / Urdu mind that although by the end of the century a number of potential Urdu readers were switching over to Hindi in Northern India, and many institutions and movements had sprung up there to do aggressive salesmanship of the Nagari script and modern Hindi, the Hindu community continued to produce Urdu writers, and the end-of-century scene in the nineteenth century shows a number of dominating, or potentially dominating, Hindu literary figures in Urdu. Ratan Nāth Sarshār (1846-1903), Tribhuvan Nāth Hijr (1853-1938?), Durgā Sahai Surūr (1873-1910), Bishan Narāḥin Abr (1869-1916), Vināyak Parshād Ṭālib (1848-1922), Jvālā Parshād Barq (1863-1911), Brij Narāḥin Chakbast (1882-1926), Shankar Dayāl Farḥat (1843-1904), Sūraj Narāḥin Mīhr (1859-1931), Lālā Srī Rām (1875-1930) are not names that the history of nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century Urdu literature can afford to forget. Some of them, like Brij Mohan Dattātreyah Kaifī (1866-1954), made substantial contribution to modern Urdu disciplines as well.

In regard to literary theory, the Hindus imbibed the influence of Āzād and Ḥālī as much as the Muslims did. Both were driven by

¹⁶Firāq Gorakhpūrī, 'Answer to a Letter', pp. 40-41.

the same 'reformist' concerns; both spoke and wrote the same literary language, and shared the same literary-cultural assumptions.

The harm, however, had been done. True, there were historians like Frazer in the nineteenth century too, who said: When [Urdu

was] used for literary purposes by the Mussalmans, the vocabulary employed was mainly Persian or Arabic. When used as a *lingua franca*, for the people speaking the various dialects of Hindustan, the vocabulary is mainly composed of the common words of the market-place....High Hindi is purely a book language evolved under the influence of the English who induced native writers to compose works for general use in a form of Hindustani in which all the words of Arabic and Persian were omitted, Sanskrit words being employed in their place.¹⁷

Among modern Indian historians, there was Tara Chand, who recognised the politics behind the Urdu / Hindi question. In 1939, the Delhi station of the All India Radio broadcast a series of six talks entitled *Hindustānī kyā hai* (What is Hindustani?). The speakers were: Tara Chand, †Abd ul-Ḥaq, Rajendra Prasad, Zakir Husain, Brij Mohan Dattātreyah Kaifī, and Āṣif †Alī. The time and the subject were both fraught with emotion, and Urdu's case was most forcefully presented by Kaifī and †Abd ul-Ḥaq. Rajendra Prasad purveyed the official Congress / Hindu line. Tara Chand came out with the most succinct presentation, historically speaking. These talks were delivered by the six persons in the order named, from February 20-25, 1939, and with permission from All India Radio were published in book form by Maktabah Jāmi'ah, New Delhi, soon after they were delivered. Tara Chand said:

For the Hindus, Lallūjī Lāl, Bādal Mishra, Benī Narāḥin, and others were ordered [by the authorities at the College of Fort William] to prepare books comprising prose texts. Their task was even more difficult. Braj did exist then as the language of literature, but it had prose barely in name. So what could they do? They found a way out by adopting the language of Mīr Amman, [Sher †Alī] Afsos, and others, but they excised Arabic / Persian words from it, replacing them with those of Sanskrit and Hindi [Braj etc.]. Thus, within the space of less than ten years, two new languages...were decked out and presented [before the public] at the behest of the foreigner....Both were look-alikes in form and structure, but their faces were turned away from each other...and from that day to this, we are wandering directionless, on two paths.¹⁸

¹⁷Frazer, *A Literary History of India*, p. 265. Frazer should have said, 'used for literary purposes alike by Hindus and Mussalmans', rather than 'Mussalmans' alone. Apparently he didn't want to stray too far from the standard line on this matter.

¹⁸Maktabah Jāmi'ah, *Hindustānī*, pp. 11-12.

Tara Chand had clearly implied British political motivation in his All India Radio speech; five years later, writing his monograph *The Problem of Hindustani*, published by the Hindustani Academy, Allahabad in 1944, he blamed the misguided ‘zeal’ of some ‘college professors’ at Fort William. His conclusions were, however, the same:

Unfortunately, the zeal for finding distinctions led the Professors of the College to encourage attempts to create a new type of Urdu from which all Persian and Arabic words were removed and replaced by Sanskrit words. This was done ostensibly to provide the Hindus with a language of their own. But the step had far-reaching consequences and India is still suffering from this artificial bifurcation of tongues.¹⁹

The sane and dispassionate accounts of historians like Tara Chand weren’t enough to uproot the plant of doubt and suspicion, especially when it was fed and nurtured by waters from chauvinistic streams.

Writing just thirty years after Tara Chand, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, perhaps the greatest modern Indian linguist, quoted some of ‘the obscurantist slogans’ introduced by ‘the “Hindi” propagandists’ as follows. He quoted the Hindi first, then gave his translation:

(1) *Hind, Hindu, Hindi--yeh tin hamare liye ek hain*: ‘Hind (or India), Hindu, and the Hindi language--these three are one and the same for us.’ This partly agrees with the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh idea that the only proper or real Indian peoples are those who follow the Hindu religion. Comment is superfluous....

(5) *Urdu sirf ‘Musalmāni’ Hindi hai, alag Bhasha nahin. Urdu ki Arbi-Farsi lipi-ko hatao, Urdu apna sacca rup Hindi-ko prapt karegi*: ‘Urdu is just the Muslim form of Hindi, not a distinct language. Remove the Perso-Arabic script of Urdu, and Urdu will find its true form, which is Hindi.’

Chatterji’s comment on all this deserves to be quoted in some detail. (The italics are Chatterji’s own):

Linguistically, it is quite correct to say that Hindi and Urdu are two forms or styles of the same ‘Western Hindi Speech’--the *Khadi-Boli Hindustani* of Delhi. But historically, and linguistically, Urdu is not the modified, Muslimised form of what now-a-day[s] passes as Hindi, i.e., *Sanskritised Khadi Boli*. It is rather the other way about: Persianized Hindustani as it developed in the Mogul court circles in Delhi during the 18th century (before that, we find [it] in the *Dakni* speech of the Deccan...), ...was taken up by the Hindus...They adopted or revived the native Nagari and began to use a highly Sanskritic vocabulary...and thus they created the literary Hindi of to-day, round about 1800, mainly in Calcutta.

¹⁹Tara Chand, *The Problem of Hindustani*, pp. 57-58. See also Farmān Fathpūrī, *Hindī urdū tanāzu*†, p. 53.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji goes on to say that he now agrees with the view of Tara Chand that ‘Sanskritic Hindi’ was created on the ‘model of Persianized Urdu’, though he was, at one time, opposed to this view. Chatterji need not blame himself for being somewhat tardy in coming round to the views of Tara Chand on the Urdu / Hindi question. Many Urdu scholars, it seems, haven’t done so even now. I haven’t yet seen an Urdu linguist say in clear and unmistakable terms that modern Hindi is a *shailī*, or style, of Urdu. *Shailī* is a word much favoured by modern Hindi scholars to describe the relationship between Urdu and Hindi: Urdu is nothing but a *shailī* of Hindi.

(10) *Drawid-sena, Siv-sena jaisi ek ‘Hindi sena’ banao, taki Hindi-ke liye laden.* ‘Create a Hindi Army like the Dravida Army, and the Army of Siva, to fight for Hindi.’²⁰

Chatterji makes no comment on this; he was probably left speechless. Writing in 1968, Ashok Kelkar, who is now perhaps the doyen of modern Indian linguists and semioticians, coined the term ‘Hirdu’ to indicate the current linguistic reality of the speech of Urdu / Hindi, and to highlight the linguistic-cultural complexities which now stick like encrustations onto their actual historical reality. Kelkar wrote:

Contemporary standard Hindi-Urdu, however, consists of a number of integrated variations that need to be studied together--in an integrated framework.

...Hindi-Urdu (or Hirdu as I propose to call it from now on) is, much like its predecessor Sanskrit and contemporary rival English, the regionally ‘unmarked’ koine of South Asia.

...Historically the linguistic matrix of Hirdu...is the so-called Kharī Bolī dialect area.

What is special about Hirdu is that both ‘native’ and ‘adherent’ speakers have to be counted as ‘good informants’ for eliciting texts and secondary responses (to questions such as ‘Is this good Hindi / Urdu?’). Both types of speakers feel equally at home in Hirdu--enough not to worry about committing ‘mistakes’ in the use of it, so as to be free from any sense of insecurity.²¹

Having succinctly stated the current position of Hirdu as the koine of South Asia, with only *English* (and not modern ‘Hindi’) as its rival for that place, Ashok Kelkar delivers the clincher:

Both [Urdu and Hindi] are an outgrowth of Kharī Bolī, a branch of the ‘Madhyadeshi’ (‘Western Hindi’), itself a branch of the ‘inner Central’ group of the Indo-Aryan (Indic) sub-family of the Indo-European family.

...Hindi literature is barely eighty years old. Urdu is older by only a generation or so...[A] history of ‘Urdu’ literature will cover Hindavi

²⁰Chatterji, *India: A Polyglot Nation*, pp. 50-54.

²¹Kelkar, *Studies in Hindi-Urdu I*, pp. 1, 2, 3, 5.

or Rekhta (some prefer to call it Old Urdu) and Old Literary Dakhani.²²

In spite of the historically true and dispassionate narratives of Tara Chand, Kelkar, and Chatterji on the origins and nature of Urdu and modern Hindi, the dominant and majority opinion among the Hindus about Urdu remained substantially the same as articulated by Rājā Jai Kishan Dās and Shiv Prasād toward the end of the nineteenth century. Francis Robinson says, ‘Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the dominance of the Urdu speaking elite was gradually undermined by several factors, most of them arising from the effects of British rule’.²³ It should be clear that one of the policies of the Raj was to inculcate among the Hindus, especially those of the North, the belief that their identity needed to be expressed in terms of a separate language. ‘Raja Jai Kishan Das...one of Syed Ahmad Khan’s closest friends, began to urge the cause of Hindi and the Nagri script in every possible way: he pressed for the abolition of Urdu in government offices,...when the Hindi-Nagri standard was raised, many of the Urdu-speaking elite fell behind it.’²⁴

Francis Robinson’s conclusion that ‘an increasingly important development in the 1880’s and 1890’s [was] the tendency of the Hindi movement to become a communal crusade against the Urdu language’²⁵ is borne out by the report of the Education Commission set up by the British in 1882. In his evidence before the Commission, Shiv Prasād, a senior person in the Department of Education (then called ‘Public Instruction’) in U.P., who had switched from supporting Urdu to Hindi, said: ‘For Hindus, Hindi was a language purged of all the Arabic and Persian accretions which served to remind them of the Muslims’ supremacy while the Nagri script had a religious significance....For Muslims on the other hand Hindi was dirty and they thought most degrading to learn it’.²⁶ Thus in the ‘second half of the nineteenth century, Urdu

²²Kelkar, *Studies in Hindi-Urdu I*, pp. 11-15. (Capitalizations throughout the above quotations are the author’s.) Note that when Kelkar says that Urdu literature is barely a generation or so older than ‘Hindi’ literature, he’s making the point that the *name* ‘Urdu’ as that of a *literary language* came into common use after 1850. This is borne out by my foregoing discussion. I am grateful to Professor A. A. Surur for bringing Kelkar’s text to my attention, and to Ashok Kelkar himself for presenting me with a copy of his somewhat rare monograph, through my friend Professor Rasheed Kausar Farooquee, formerly of Bijapur University.

²³Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, p. 3.

²⁴Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, p. 74.

²⁵Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, p. 75.

²⁶These are Shiv Prasād’s own words, quoted by Robinson (p. 36). Shiv Prasād was also unhappy over the popularity of Urdu--which, he

and the Persian script in which it was written became a symbol of Muslim power and influence'.²⁷

Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Ḳhān was farsighted enough to realize that the effects of the demand for a separate 'Hindi' for the Hindus would be harmful to both Hindus and Muslims, though for different reasons. On April 29, 1870, he wrote to Muḥsin ul-Mulk from England:

I have received a piece of news which made me extremely sad and anxious, it is that egged on by the suggestions of Babu Shiv Parshad Sahib, there is a general fervour in the hearts of the Hindus in favour of effacing from the world, the Urdu language and the Persian script, which are the memorials of the Muslims [in this country]....This is a proposal and a device on which there will in no way be agreement and unity among the Hindus and the Muslims. Muslims will never agree on Hindi, ...and the consequence will be that Hindus and Muslims will become separate. There isn't much to fear in this, thus far....Rather, the Muslims will be the gainers, and Hindus will be in loss. And yet I am concerned about just two things here: first, according to my temperament and nature, I desire well for all Indians, whether Hindu or Muslim;...second, they [the Muslims] will never become capable of doing anything for their own good.²⁸

For the Urdu speakers, one of the cultural consequences of the Hindi-Nagari movement was the inculcation among them of feelings of guilt and inferiority about both Urdu script and orthography. It will be recalled that one of the points of Harishchandra's tirade against Urdu was that its script was foreign; worse, it permitted ambiguity in reading, and thus encouraged people to cheat. Supporters of Nagari also claimed for it an intrinsic superiority over the Urdu script. Garcin de Tassy tells us about a paper written in 1864 by Rajinder Lal Mitter²⁹ in support of Nagari. In it, Mitter also asserted that Urdu possessed a script inferior to Nagari.³⁰ I might mention here in passing that

said, was becoming a mother tongue for the Hindus.

²⁷Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, p. 36.

²⁸Sayyid Aḥmad Ḳhān, *Maktūbāt-e sar sayyid*, vol. 1, pp. 463-64.

²⁹Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp. 132-33, 418-19. Rajinder Lal Mitter, or Rajendra Lal Mitra, to give his proper name, was a culturally powerful and influential figure in early modern Bengal. Himself influenced by 'orientalists' and 'historians' like Max Mueller, Tod, and Grant Duff, he influenced Bharatendu Harishchandra and many others. During his long association, in many capacities, with the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1856-91), he performed a great mediating role between the English scholars and Indian (Hindu) texts and ethos. In the process, he helped construct the Indian / Hindu reality in a way that encouraged the then-rising tide of Hindu nationalism.

³⁰See Farmān Fathpūrī, *Urdu imlā aur rasm-ul khaṭ*, p. 72.

the seed for these ideas too was sown by Gilchrist. He once proposed the use of the Roman script for many oriental languages, including Sanskrit, Arabic, and ‘Hindustani’.³¹

Such voices gathered force as time went on, and ultimately convinced many in the Urdu cultural community too of their truth. The British had in any case introduced Urdu in Roman script for use in the Indian Army. The Roman cannot (without diacritics) configure many important Urdu sounds, but the Army’s demands were not very sophisticated anyway. Except for editions of the New Testament in ‘Roman Urdu’ used in many Christian mission schools, the Roman script for Urdu was never widely known outside the Indian Army.³² Yet this doesn’t mean that the matter of changing Urdu’s script to Roman was not considered seriously. Garcin de Tassy reports that critics of Urdu, ‘blinded by prejudice’, began to run down its script. He felt that the British might even decide ultimately to impose the Roman script on Urdu, and if they did so, it would be extremely unfortunate.³³

Nevertheless, calls for ‘improvements’ in the Urdu system of orthography, or even its script, are still made, and not from ‘anti-Urdu’ circles alone. The Urdu linguistic and literary community is perhaps the only one in the world which feels uncomfortable, and even guilty, about almost every aspect of its script and orthography. To this must be added a surreptitious feeling of guilt generated by the Urdu literary community’s almost universal belief that Urdu was a ‘military language’ after all.

The fault for this, I think, should lie with Urdu historians from 1880 on, who didn’t stop to examine the implications of the fact that if the name ‘Urdu’ first came into use during the last few years of the eighteenth century, it might perhaps have no military implications. Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Sherānī did explore the various names of the language, and asserted that ‘Urdu’ as a language name was of recent origin. But he didn’t appreciate the problem that this presented for the historian.³⁴

³¹The great success of the colonial discourse in India can be judged from the fact that a modern, liberal historian like Siddiqi actually admires Gilchrist for his proposal to Romanise the script of these languages: he looks upon it as a step toward the ‘unification’ of the country. Siddiqi says, ‘Gilchrist’s attempt to introduce the Roman script characters in order to unify the Indian script was, perhaps, his greatest contribution’. He published the *Oriental Fabulist* (1803) to prove that ‘Hindoostanee, Persian, Arabic, Brij Bhasha, Bongla and Sanskrit’ could be written in the Roman script ‘with ease and correctness’. See Siddiqi, *Origins of Modern Hindustani Literature*, pp. 39-40.

³²For a notion of what the ‘Roman Urdu’ was like, see Willatt, *A Text Book of Urdu in the Roman Script*.

³³Quoted in Farmān Fathpūrī, *Urdū imlā aur rasm ul-khat*, p. 73.

³⁴Sherānī, *Maqālāt-e sherānī*, vol. 1, pp. 10-44.

The only literary historian who did realise the anomaly here was Grahame Bailey. He even offered a tentative explanation for the late appearance of the name 'Urdu'. Unfortunately, he also made a number of fanciful observations about the origin of Urdu, and his writings on this matter seem not to have been taken seriously. Bailey argued that 'Urdu was born in 1027; its birthplace was Lahore, its parent Old Panjabi; Old Khaṛī was its step-parent; it had no direct relationship with Braj. The name Urdu first appears 750 years later'.³⁵ And he noted some queries:

We have to answer three questions:

- (1) Why was there a delay of centuries in giving the name Urdu?
- (2) If a new name had to be given in the eighteenth century, why was this name chosen for the language when it had many, many years previously been given up for the army?
- (3) If the army was not called *urdū* till Babur's time, 1526, the language which had then existed for nearly 500 years must already have had a name. Why was that name given up?

Grahame Bailey said that the problem was easier to state than solve. He himself presented a very feeble explanation, suggesting that 'some name or description such as *zabān i urdū* was in conversational use from the time when the army was first called *urdū*, and that very gradually, hundreds of years later, it crept into books, possibly earlier than we are aware of, while the use of Urdu alone was still later'.³⁶

It is obvious that this is untenable, even as speculation. It is as untenable as the date of the 'birth' of Urdu given by Bailey. Yet to Bailey must go the credit of realising that there was a problem with Urdu's nomenclature. If Urdu scholars didn't follow the matter up, so much the worse for them. Bailey in fact did suggest an answer, but with extreme diffidence: 'Jules Bloch made a striking suggestion, which he admits is only an intuitive feeling required to be substantiated by proof, that the name Urdu is due to Europeans'.³⁷ Bailey didn't investigate Bloch's idea further, but felt that since Gilchrist always called the language 'Hindustani', and in 1796 reported--as we have seen above--that the language was also called 'Oordoo',³⁸ it could not have been the British who introduced the name. This is quite true. But it was the British who

³⁵Bailey, *Studies in North Indian Languages*, p. 1. I am grateful to Frances Pritchett for bringing to my attention Grahame Bailey's writings on this subject.

³⁶Bailey, *Studies in North Indian Languages*, p. 6.

³⁷Bailey, *Studies in North Indian Languages*, p. 3.

³⁸As we have seen, Gilchrist made this claim in *A Grammar of the Hindoostanee Language* (p. 261).

popularised the name, for apparently political reasons. Even Bailey fell into the ‘military error’ in believing that *urdū* means ‘army’, and nothing more. In fact, there is no recorded instance of this word ever being used in the Urdu / Hindī / Reḳhtah / Dakanī / Gujrī language to denote ‘army’. Its most popular meaning, in fact, was ‘the city of Shāhjahānābād’. This is borne out even by the definitions of the word *urdū* from Fallon and Platts that I have discussed at length.

Similarly, the blame for not effectively refuting the theories about the antiquity of modern Hindi, and even its anteriority over Urdu, must lie with the historians of Urdu--all of whom failed to address this issue scientifically and logically, if they dealt with it at all. Premchand, not a historian by any means, had clearer ideas on this subject, though he too seems to have ultimately swum with the current, as we saw in the beginning of the previous chapter. He advocated the use of ‘Hindustani’--which he defined as a simplified Urdu / Hindi--but recognised that Hindi was not a separate language as such. In an address delivered at Bombay in 1934, he declared, ‘In my view, Hindi and Urdu are one and the same language. When they have common verbs and subjects, there can be no doubt of their being one’.³⁹ Speaking in Madras before the Dakshin Bhārat Hindī Prachār Sabhā, also in 1934, he said, ‘The name ‘Hindi’ was given by the Muslims, and until just fifty years ago, the language now being described as ‘Urdu’ was called ‘Hindi’ even by the Muslims’.⁴⁰ But these, and other remarks like these, were like stray thoughts, not decisive, and having no force of theory. So fictions about Urdu’s ‘Muslim military character’ persisted, and are generally current even now.

³⁹Premchand, *Sāhitya kā uddeshya*, p. 108.

⁴⁰Premchand, *Sāhitya kā uddeshya*, p. 124. I am grateful to Professor Jaīfar Razā of the University of Allahabad for drawing my attention to these texts of Premchand.