fact, was 'the city of Shāhjahānābād'. This is borne out even by
the definitions of the word urdā 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
Hindi Prachār Sabha, 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 Ja'far Razā of the University of Allahabad for drawing my
attention to these texts of Premchand.
Chapter Three:
Beginning, Then Going
Away From Home

Urdu literature perhaps began with Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān Lāhorī (1046-1121). Nothing survives of the 'Hindi' divān that he is reported to have put together. We know about it from Muḥammad 'Auﬁ’s Lubāb ul-albāb (Pure Essences of the Intellects). Composed in Sindh around 1220-27, the Lubāb has this to say about Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān:

Although he was originally from Hamadan, yet since the polymathy of his work came to bloom and blossom in the cities of the East,...and he has been always known as a poet from these territories, his account has been given place in this category....The quantity of his verse is greater than that of all the poets, and he has three divāns: one Arabic, the other Persian, and the third Hindī, and whatever from his poetry has been heard or come across [by me] is masterly and most pleasing.¹

Since the term 'Hindi' was used occasionally in the Indian middle ages to denote any Indian language, a question has been raised about the Indian language in which Salmān actually wrote, and whether it could have been Panjabi. Khusrau, writing a few decades after 'Auﬁ, makes it clear that various parts of India have independent languages of their own, and that these have been in existence since ancient times. So, if Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān had written in Panjabi, it is most likely that Muḥammad 'Auﬁ would have said so.

In his maṣnawi called Niḥ sipihr (Nine Heavens), written in 1317-18, Khusrau devoted a whole long section to India.

¹Muḥammad ‘Auﬁ, Lubāb ul-albāb, p. 423. See also the older Browne edition (Leyden / London 1903), part 2, pp. 246-252.
Placing the ‘Indian speech’ above Persian and Turkish because of its ‘pleasing vocabulary,’ Khursrau went on to say:

/In short, it’s quite without purpose  
To try and gain the heart’s pleasure and song  
From the Persian, Turkish, or Arabic.  
Since I am Indian, it’s better  
That one draw breath  
From one’s own station. In this land  
In every territory, there is  
A language specific, and not so  
By chance either. There are  
Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Kibar,  
Dhaur Samandari, Tilangi, Gujar,  
Ma’bari, Gauri, and the languages  
Of Bengal, Avadh, Delhi  
And its environs, all within  
Their own frontiers.  
All these are Indic [Hindvi], and  
Are in common use  
For all purposes since antiquity. \(^2\)

Scholars have found it difficult to identify the modern equivalents of these language names; Vâhid Mirzâ, from whose edition I have drawn the text, does not gloss them. In any case, all the texts of the poem that I know have errors and misreadings, making the interpreter’s task difficult. Grierson\(^3\) relies on Elliot, who glosses the names as follows: Sindhi = Sindhi; Lahori = Panjabi; Kashmiri = Dogri; Dhaur Samandari = Kannada of Mysore; Tilangi = Telugu; Gujar = Gujarati; Ma’bari = Tamil of the Coromandel Coast; Gauri = northern Bengali; Bangali Avadh = Eastern Hindi; Delhi and its environs = western Hindi. Now there are many problems with this: (1) there’s no reason to identify Kashmiri as Dogri; (2) Kibar has not been glossed; (3) if Gauri is northern Bengali, why does Grierson not mention it in his vast list of Indian languages in this very volume? (4) Why are Bengal and Avadh taken together? Bengali-Avadh is the name of no language, and

Bengali proper cannot be ‘Eastern Hindi’, whatever that may be.

Here is what I understand from these names: Sindhi = Sindhi; Lahori = Panjabi; Kashmiri = Kashmiri; Kibar = ??; Dhaur Samandari should, I think, be Dvâr Samundari. Dwâr Samudra was a kingdom in what is modern day Karnataka, with its capital in or near the city now known as Hāsan. (I am grateful to Professor N. R. Farooqi of the University of Allahabad for this information.) Hence Dhaur Samandari = Kannada. Tilangi = Telugu; Gujar = Gujarati; Ma’bari = Tamil, because Malabar is an Indianisation of the Arabic maa’bar, ‘crossing point.’ (The southernmost tip of present-day Tamil Nadu was then the crossing point for Arab traders into Sarandib (= Singhaladip, or modern-day Sri Lanka). Gauri = the language of the area called Gaur, now in the district of Malda in contemporary West Bengal. It would have been a language separate from Bengali, for Khursrau lists Bengali separately. I suspect, however, that it could be a form of Marathi. The language of Gaur, in medieval Bengali, couldn’t have been important enough to find a place in Khursrau’s short list.

‘Abid Peshâvarî quotes the authors of a small Urdu ‘Dictionary of Errors’ (Qâmûs ud-aqîlât) as saying that Marathi is counted ‘among Gaur languages’.\(^4\) Gopi Chand Nârâng glosses Kibar as Dogri, Dhaur Samandari as Tamil, Ma’bari as Kannada. (This could be an unconscious switch.) He identifies Gauri as Assamese, but doesn’t cite his source, nor does he explain why the Assamese language should have been named after Gaur, which always was, and still is, in Bengal.\(^5\)

Gyân Chand refers to a treatise on the grammar of ‘Eastern Hindi’ by Rudolf A. F. Hoernle. Published in 1880, this work was called A Comparative Grammar of the Gaudian Languages with Special Reference to the Eastern Hindi, Accompanied by a Language Map and a Table of Alphabets. According to Gyân Chand, Hoernle meant ‘Indo-Aryan’ by the term ‘Gaudian’.

\(^2\)Khursrau, Nāh sipihr, pp. 179-80.

\(^3\)Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, vol 1, part 1, page 1

\(^4\)Abid Peshâvarî, Gâhe gâhe bûz khvân, p. 13.

\(^5\)Nârâng, Amîr khursrau kâ hindavî kalâm, p. 29.
Grierson describes Hoernle's work as a 'masterpiece', but gives no explanation of the term 'Gaudian'. Possibly the authors of Qam'us ul-aqlāh were simply following Hoernle in describing Marathi as a 'Gaur' language. I consulted some noted Sanskritists of Allahabad about 'Gauri' and 'Gaurian', but drew a blank.

Grierson doesn't say anything about 'Gaur' languages, but does list 'Gavli', reported in the 1911 census as a form of Marathi, spoken in the district of Nasik. Since the Marathi 'i' is pronounced somewhere between the English 'i' and the Urdu/Hindi retroflex 'r', it would have been quite possible for Khusrau to call it 'Gaur' (there being no retroflexes in Persian).

In the third from last line Khusrau has 'Hindvi', which I translate here as 'Indic', for Khusrau is identifying the native place, not the appellative, of the languages in question. Suniti Kumar Chatterji has pointed to the fact that a new style or form of this Common Indo-Aryan, as it was spoken around Delhi, as 'Hindustani' or 'Urdu', ...(or the Indo-Aryan speeches) of North India, in their ensemble or totality, came to be known to non-Indians from the West, simply as the Hindi or the Indian Speech (Hindawi, Hindiai, or Hindvi). Even this Indian (Hindvi, Hindi) Speech at first did not have a specialised sense...This incorrect and ignorant extension of a loose name helped to establish the idea, particularly during the last half a century (and in a special way, during the quarter of a century and more after India's independence), that 'Hindi' was a Single Speech.

Thus when Khusrau here describes Bengali, Tamil, and other Indian languages as 'Hindvi', he simply means 'of India.' He does not mean that all these languages had the common name 'Hindvi'.

In any case, one can see that Khusrau distinguishes Lāhorī (=Panjabi) from other languages like Aducki, and from the

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6Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, vol. 1, part 1, p. 27.
7Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, vol. 1, part 1, p. 450.
8Chatterji, India: A Polyglot Nation, pp. 36-37. Italics and capitals are the author's.

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mustalah ('specific speech') of Delhi and its surrounds. Earlier, in the magnificent Dībāchah (Preface) to his dīvān called Ghurrau ul-kamāl (The New Moon of Perfection), finished about 1294, Khusrau said:

/I am a Turk from India,
My response is Hindvi
Egyptian candy I don't have
For doing converse in Arabic./

I have presented to friends a few quires of [my] Hindvi verse too. Here, I consider it sufficient to just mention this, and not give examples, for no delection is to be had from inserting Hindvi vocables in sophisticated Persian, except when needed [for explaining something.]

/Since I am the Parrot of India
If you ask for the truth
Ask in Hindvi
So that I reply in dulcet tones./

He then proceeded to offer 'An Account of the Compilation of Three Dīvāns' that emphasized his own supremacy: 'Before this, none of the sovereigns of poetry has had three dīvāns, except for me, who am the Cosroe of the lands of poetry. Although Mas'ūd Sād Salmān does have three dīvāns, he has them in Arabic, Persian, and Hindvi.9

How one wishes Khusrau had given some examples, for almost nothing of his Hindvi survives today. But his account does make two things clear: Mas'ūd Sād Salmān wrote in Hindvi, and so did Khusrau. But this also raises a question: what happened between the times of Mas'ūd Sād Salmān (1046-1121) and Khusrau (1253-1325)? It is a full two centuries, and if the two greatest poets of the eleventh-twelfth and thirteenth-fourteenth centuries wrote in Hindvi, why nobody else? The question also arises, why are the Hindvi works of Salmān and Khusrau not preserved? To these we may add yet another question: why is it nearly another century before we next hear of literary production in Hindvi / Hindvi?

9Khusrau, Dībāchah, pp. 63-64.
For the known names after Khusrau are Shaikh Bajan (1388-1506), who wrote in Gujarati, and Fakhr-e Din Niẓāmī (fl.1434), who wrote in the Deccan.

The reason for the non-survival of Khusrau’s Hindī seems to be that he didn’t write much in it, and didn’t consider it worth saving. As he himself said, he wrote a few quires of Hindī verse, for presentation to his friends.10 Shiblī, on the strength of Auhadī Kirmānī’s taṣkārah called ‘Arafāt, says that Khusrau’s output in ‘Braj Bhāshā’ is equal in quantity to his Persīs, which is estimated at four to five hundred thousand lines, prose and verse put together. In another place Shiblī has the same Auhadī reference, but there he says ‘Hindī’ instead of ‘Braj Bhāshā’. It is possible that Shiblī was misremembering, for he seems to have relied much on memory, and that Auhadī actually said ‘Hindī’. There is no indication anywhere so far that Khusrau wrote in any Indian language other than Hindī, or that he wrote much in it either.11 Auhadī would seem to be exaggerating. In Nūh siphr, written nearly twenty-five years later, Khusrau claimed some knowledge of Sanskrit, but said nothing about his being a poet in Hindī.12 So one would be justified in assuming that Khusrau’s Hindī didn’t survive because there wasn’t much of it, and he didn’t set much store by it anyway.

The reason why Khusrau did not think much of his Hindī efforts is, clearly, the fact that Hindī still hadn’t become a respectable literary language by his time, and he considered it suitable only for a light-hearted, for-the-nonsense kind of composition. The reason Mas’ud Sād’s Salmān’s Hindī did not survive would seem to be the same, Hindī’s lowly status at that time; and we do not know anything about the size of his divān either. For all one knows, it may have just qualified to be called a divān, and may not have amounted to much in size. It may even have been regarded as an embarrassing oddity by his Persianate admirers. The Ghaznavī sage and poet Sānā’ī (1087/91-1145/6), who made a collection of Salmān’s poems and presented it to the great man, doesn’t seem to say anything about his Hindī.13 This of course raises the question, why did Salmān write in Hindī if it wasn’t a literary language at that time, and why is it that Hindī was not a literary language then?

I believe that Mas’ud Sād’s Salmān wrote in Hindī to demonstrate his virtuosity—not an uncommon practice in medieval literary culture in the Middle Eastern and the Indo-Muslim milieux. Even as recently as late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we have the Urdu poet Insha’allah Khān Inshā (1756/57-1817) writing his journal, though for a few weeks and clearly for public consumption, in Chaghātay Turkish, a language that very few Indians knew at that time. Also, his divān has poems in which are interspersed shīrs composed by him in many languages: Arabic, Chaghātay Turkish, Panjabi, Kashmiri, and so on.14 Clearly, Inshā, in writing these texts of extremely limited practical value, is giving way to a poetic exuberance, and an impulse of fine excess. Mas’ud Sād’s Salmān wrote in Arabic for the same reason. As to the reason why Hindī did not become a literary language by the time Mas’ud Sād’s Salmān or even Khusrau wrote, the answer lies in Sufi practices, as we shall see later.

The first person whose Hindī survives in substantial quantity, and with whom Urdu literature can seriously be said to begin, is Shaikh Bahā ud-Din Bajan (1388-1506). His grandfather came from Delhi, and settled in Ahmedabad. Shaikh Bajan was born in Ahmedabad, worked in Gujarat, and described his language on different occasions as ‘Hindī’.

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10In view of this, the unauthenticated stories narrated by Muhammad Husain Azad in Ab-e hayat (pp. 88-94) about Khusrau’s composing Hindī verses extemporaneously, in response to casual requests, gain some credence.


12Khusrau, Nāh siphr, p. 181.

13Lewis, Reading, Writing, and Recitation, pp. 130-37.

14Na’īm ud-Din, Insha’ kā turkī rozndmeha; see also ‘Ābid Peshāvarī, Insha’allah khān insha, pp. 655-75, and Inshā, Kulliyāt.
of poetry are both sacred and secular. The poetry has a strong popular base and appeal; there is an air of spiritual devotion and Sufi purity about its transactions. Patriotism, or love of the native land, is also a notable theme.

The quality of Shāikh Bājān’s poetry is uneven; the tone is occasionally one of ecstasy, though the general mood is didactic. The following poem occupies a middle space. It celebrates the inaccessibility of God, but there is a hint of desperation too. Success is not certain, failure is a strong probability. Still, there is a certain pride, a sense of distinction, in having such a distant and forbidding beloved:

/None can walk Your path
And whoever does
Exhausts himself, walking, walking...

The Brahman reads the holy texts,
And loses wit and wisdom
Yogis give up deep meditation
The anchorites practice
Self-denial, and do
No good to anyone.

Philosophers
Forget philosophising
They bare their head, trying
To keep the feet covered.

Jainites, in Your service
Suffer pain and do
The most arduous penance.

Look there
A dervish, in a new guise
A shaven fakir; another yet,
Master of the Age, pious
In worship; and here’s another,
Become a wanderer
Shouting, ha, hu, ha, hu.

There’s a frenzied one,
Openly so; another wanders
The desert, mad, unknown.

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16Zahir ud-Din Madani (Sukhanvarat-e gujarat, pp. 49-50) gives the name as Khazānah-e rahmatullāh, and even as Khazānah-e raḥmat. He worked from a manuscript in the library of the Jamā Masjid, Burhanpur. Jamīl Jalibī, who worked from another manuscript in the library of the Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, Karachi, gives the name of the same text as Khazāin-e raḥmatullāh (Tārīkh-e adab-e urdu, vol. 1, pp. 106-07), which I think is more acceptable.


One, drunk with love,
Raves and yells,
And another falls
Unconscious.
A wanderer, with long and
Matted hair, and black
And dark as night;
Another madman gets the
Shivers, shaves his head
And says only Your name.

Secretly, yet another
Pronounces Words of power
And domination; and
Here’s someone else
Breathing out secret Names
Mad to capture the whole world.
Another there, fasts and keeps
Awake, all night, every night

And that one there, becomes
A beggar, asking for
You alone, in alms.

Thus all groups and all bands,
All weeping and wasting away—
Pieces of chewed sugarcane.

That’s what they see
That’s what they find!
So say, oh Bajan
What can you count for?19

The above is a translation of a complete poem, comprising fifteen stanzas (or thirty lines) of a shortish metre in the original. The metre is Indic, and reasonably regular. Bajan favours Indic metres, but on occasion uses Persian ones too. The poetry is pleasing in its simplicity, but an occasional stunning metaphor (seekers after God end up like chewed sugarcane—with no juice

or sweetness of life left in them, fit only for burning) enlivens the utterance and raises its level substantively. One important point is that while the poems are mostly spare in the use of words, they pack a lot of meaning. The language itself seems to possess this characteristic, recalling Edward Terry’s observation quoted above about ‘Indostan’: that it ‘speaks much in few words’.20 In fact, at this point the language has not yet acquired anything from the vast rich store of images and metaphorical words and phrases that made Persian poetry (both Indian and Iranian) very nearly unique in the world, in possessing a huge ready-to-use vocabulary that sets up resonances of signification the moment anything from that vocabulary is brought into use in a poem.

One last point to be noted is that in the text as given by Sherānī, the poem has a descriptive title, in Persian: ‘And this hymn has been composed in the Hindī language’.21 Madani gives no title here, but includes this, and a number of other poems of which the title is simply ‘Gujrī’.

Like nearly all poetry in the Indian Sufi tradition, Shaikh Bajan’s embodies the Islamic worldview as coloured through the prism of Indian eyes. Hindu imagery and conventions abound in the works of early Sufi poets, and sometimes even affect their names. Shaikh Maḥmūd Daryātī (1419-1534), another Sufi poet of Gujarat writing in Hindī / Hindī, occasionally calls himself ‘Maḥmūd Dās’. It is possible that Kabīr (d.1518), and Shaikh ‘Abd ul-Quddūs Gangohī (1455-1538), called themselves ‘Kabīr Dās’ and ‘Alakht Dās’ respectively for the same reason.22

An interesting and somewhat similar case is that of Rajā Rām, who is famous (along with Benī Parshād) in Gujarat as one of two Hindu poets who wrote in Gujrī in the ancient times; Madani says that it was also rumoured about Rajā Rām that he converted to Islam. Madani himself long believed the two poets to be merely legendary, until quite by chance he

19 Madani, Suthanvarān-e gujrāt, pp. 66-67; Sherānī, Maqālāt-e sherānī, vol. 1, p. 169. While neither text can be said to be perfect, Madani’s is better.

20 See Chapter One, note 2.


discovered a manuscript divan of Raja Ram. Though incomplete, it has sufficient material to establish the fact that Raja Ram did exist. Madanī believes that Raja Ram came from Surat, flourished in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, and may have converted to Islam. In regard to the last point, a judgement based on the poetry—and that’s all we have at present—could go either way: Raja Ram was a Hindu writing in a basically Muslim idiom, or he was a Muslim, but adopted a Hindu name either as a gesture of solidarity with the majority population, or because he saw truth as transcending matters of name and address.  

By the early fifteenth century, Hindvi had become so popular in Gujarat that its vocabulary began to occur in Persian as well. In 1433-34 we have Bahr ul-fazā’ī, a Persian dictionary compiled in Gujarat by Fāzī ud-Dīn Muhammad bin Quvvām bin Rustam Balkhī. In addition to the numerous Hindvi glosses of Persian words provided in it passim, it had a whole chapter ‘comprising Hindvi words used in poetry.’  

By the time of Qāzī Māḥmūd Daryātī (1415-1534), and Shaikh ‘Ali Muḥammad Jīv Gāmdhānī (d.1565), the names Hindvi / Dihlavī seem generally to have been given up in favour of Gujarī. In his Preface to the Shaikh’s Hindvi poems called Jāvāhir-e asrārullāh (Gems of the Mysteries of God), Sayyid Ibrāhim, pupil and grandson of the Shaikh, wrote: ‘Shaikh ‘Ali Muḥammad…having filled his heart with true gemstones and pearls, strung them in the string of poetry, recited his revelations and subtle points with his pearl-discovering and gem-scattering tongue, and collected them in words of Gujarī, and modes of verse.’  

The language name ‘Hindi’ does not appear to have been used in Jāvāhir-e asrārullāh. Yet it does not seem to have entirely disappeared from Gujarat, and in fact, seems to have existed side by side with Gujarī for a long time. A masnavī called Tārīkh-e gharbī, composed in Gujarat between 1751 and 1757, contains the following verses:

/Shoot no barbs at Hindi,
Everybody knows and explains
The Hindi meanings well.

And look, this Qurān, the Book of God, is
Always explained in Hindi;
Whenever it is intended to expound
Its meanings openly, to the people,
One says and explains them
In Hindi/.  

It must have been in the fifteenth century itself, if not earlier, that literary activity in Hindi / Hindvi became popular in what is now called the Deccan. The first name that we are aware of at present is that of Fakhr-e Dīn Nizāmī, whose masnavī has been tentatively named Kadām rā’o padam rā’o because the only extant manuscript of the poem doesn’t have a name. Internal evidence shows it to have been composed circa 1421-34. It is a poem of great length; the extant manuscript has 1032 shīrs (2064 lines). Since the manuscript is incomplete, the complete poem must have been even longer. Sayyidah Ja’far says that there are indications in the poem to the effect that there were other long poems in Dakani before this.  

The language of Kadām rā’o padam rā’o is dense and difficult to understand. It certainly sounds more alien than that of Bājan. The reason perhaps is the poet’s heavy preference for Telugu, Kannada, a bit of Marathi, and a good bit of tautam-Sanskrit vocabulary over Persian; though unlike Bājan, who didn’t use Persian metre much, Nizāmī composed his poem in a mainline Persian metre, used quite carefully. Nizāmī is not a better poet than Shaikh Bājan, but he tells his story reasonably well. This lends support to Ja’far’s view that there were other poems before Kadām rā’o padam rā’o; an effective narrative

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23Madanī, Sukhanvarān-e gujarātī, pp. 93-96.
method would not ordinarily have been possible without the poet having models of Dakani verse narrative before him:

/Kadam Rā'o said, Honoured Lady
Come, and listen carefully;
I'd heard it said that women
Do deceive a lot, and I today
Saw something of your tricks;
And ever since I saw those tricks
In real life, I have been
In perplexity. What I knew
By hearsay alone, I saw with
My own eyes. And since then
My eyes have had no peace.
Two serpents I saw, one
A female, high-born, the other
A lowly male, and they together
Were playing lover-like games
Of sex, and lust. As God
Did make me King, so how
Could I see such inequity
Of pairing? I sprang at them
With my rapier drawn
To finish it off then and there.
The female fast slipped away
With her life, leaving her tail behind/. 28

There is just one manuscript of the poem, now in the library of the Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdu, Karachi. The poem is very hard to read, even with the help of the facsimile of the original printed by Jālībī with his text. Some of my translation above is, inevitably, tentative. But the poem has an easy flow of rhythm, once one develops a knack for reading it aloud.

28Niţāmī, Kadam rā'o padam rā'o, pp. 91-93.