

Ratna Sahai, ed.  
Muslims in India

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*1, Khara Nidan* and *Jujajur Ghat*.

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Saleman Khan in children's literature.

### Urdu Literature

*Sbamsur Rahman Faruqi*

Linguistically speaking, Urdu is a comparatively young member of the great Indo-European family. It is prominent among the Indian languages which are descended from Sanskrit through numerous Prakritic off-shoots and which include, among others, Panjabi, Sindhi, Bengali and Marathi. Specifically, it grew out of a dialect called *khari boli* (the upright or unadorned speech.)

Urdu seems to have arisen in the tenth century in an area which now falls in different states, in the immediate vicinity of Delhi. By the eleventh century, the language seems to have acquired a literature. Masud Sad Salman of Lahore (1046-1121) is described by Amir Khusro (1253-1325) as having compiled a whole book of poems in 'Hindi'.

The name 'Hindi' shouldn't surprise us. 'Urdu' as the name of a language didn't come to be used before the eighteenth century, and the language did *not* spring in Muslim military camps. It is sometimes said that the name 'Urdu', which means 'military camp', testifies to the language's military (or 'foreign') origin. In fact 'Urdu' also means 'court' or 'fort', and John Gilchrist defined (1796) the word to mean 'polished language of the court'. Up to about the end of the seventeenth century, the language was known mostly as 'Hindi' or 'Hindvi', meaning 'the language of India'.

By about the fourteenth century, 'Hindi' was popular in Gujarat where it was later called 'Gujri', and in parts of modern day Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, where it was first called 'Gujri', and also 'Hindi', and finally 'Dakani'. Around the seventeenth century, the name 'Rekhta' (mixed) appears for the language in the north. In the eighteenth century, it came to be

increasingly described as *zabane urdu-e mualla* (the language of the exalted court.) Time and usage shortened it to *Urdu-e moalla*, and then to just *Urdu*.

Urdu has always been secularist liberal in its word-and-thought-content, and is by no means the language of Muslims alone. Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, Jews, all have contributed to it. Yet it is true that extant records of its first six centuries of existence show its employment for literary

expression almost exclusively by Muslims. There are at least two reasons for this. First, Muslim sufis used this language since its very infancy. Second, until about the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Hindus concentrated on Persian. Some of the great names in Indian Persian literature in the eighteenth century are Hindu.

That very little Urdu literature has survived from northern India before the seventeenth century is a frustrating puzzle

اردو	ولی	حیدر بخش حیدری	سجاد ظہیر	اختر حسین راہپوری
مسعود سلمان	محمد تقی میر	سر سید احمد خاں	فیض احمد فیض	عزیز احمد
امیر خسرو	اسد اللہ خاں غالب	ذکاء اللہ	مخدوم جمی الدین	اسے سرور
فضل الدین بلکانی	بہادر شاہ ظفر	شبلی نعمانی	مجروح سلطان پوری	کلیم الدین احمد
شیخ بہاؤ الدین بجان	ذوق	نذیر احمد	سردار جعفری	شمار اللہ دار میراجی
قاضی محمود دریائی	مومن	عبدالحلیم شرر	سادات حسن منٹو	نن م رشید
شاہ علی محمد جی گدھانی	الطاف حسین حالی	میرزا محمد ہادی رسوا	عصمت چغتائی	اختر الایمان
شیخ خوب محمد چشتی	محمد حسین آزاد	سر محمد اقبال	عبد العظیم	قرۃ العین حیدر
شیخ میران جی شمس العشاق	امداد امام اثر	میر انیس	احتشام حسین	محمد حسن عسکری
سید اشرف بیابانی	میر امتین	صرت موہانی	مجنون گورکھپوری	

in Urdu literary history. We hear of Masud Sad Salman's *divan* (collection) of 'Hindi' poems, we have report of a similar *divan* by Amir Khusrau and a handful of quotes from the sufis. That's all. On the other hand quite a good bit of Gujri and Dakani writing survives. Historians speculate that Urdu had reached Gujarat by the time of Alauddin Khalji (r.1296-1316). If this is true, the language must have established its presence quite rapidly. A dictionary of Arabic, composed by a Gujarati scholar Fazluddin Balkani in 1433, contains a chapter in which are entered 'Hindvi' words used in Persian poetry. Thus it is clear that by the fifteenth century Urdu had become powerful enough in Gujarat to be a source of borrowing for Persian, and prestigious enough to have its words listed in an Arabic dictionary.

One of the greatest sufis of Gujarat was Shaikh Bahauddin Bajan (1388-1506). He contributed greatly to *Jikri*, a complicated genre of devotional poetry, developed by Gujarati sufis. The Shaikh describes his language as 'Hindvi' or 'Dehlavi'. Some other major Hindvi/Gujri poets were Qazi Mahmud Daryai (1419-1534), Shah Ali Muhammed Jiu Gamdhani (d.1565) and Shaikh Khub Muhammad Chisti (d. 1614). The strain that runs through the poetry of all Gujri sufi poets is Islamic-mystic ecstasy with an overlay of Hindu imagery. The reason for the latter was the sufi's role as integrator, and his world-view, in which the universe was seamless and teleological, reflecting the Eternity and Unity of God.

Urdu, it has been suggested, reached the Deccan as a result of Muhammad Tughlaq's transfer of his capital to Deogiri in 1327. The finest flowering of Urdu poetry and prose in the Deccan was from about 1450 to 1700 when the language was embraced widely by king and commoner, saint and

soldier, scholar and merchant. Shah Miranji Shamsul Ushshaq (d.1496) can be said to be the source and originator of this efflorescence, followed by Syed Ashraf Biyabani (1459-1528). Both describe their language as 'Hindi.'

The creative strain of Dakani was just about drying up by the end of the seventeenth century. It fell to Vali (1665-1725), a Deccani/ Gujarati Muslim (both Aurangabad and Ahmedabad claim him for their own), to revitalise the literature by adopting the modes of *sabk-e hindi* (Indian style), the name given to the distinctly Indian manner of Persian poetry composed in India from about 1550. The 'Indian style' is marked by subtlety and complexity of metaphor, abstraction of thought, and a predilection for wordplay. Vali gradually moved away from the Dakani mode toward the Indian style and thus infused a whole new range of ideas and creative possibilities into the very nearly desiccated body of Urdu poetry. Vali became a powerful influence in Delhi from around 1719.

The greatest Urdu poet to imbibe Vali's influence (which however he consistently denied) was Muhammad Taqi Mir (1722-1810). During his long career Mir broadened and strengthened Urdu language and poetry, and left a body of work to rival any in the world in the quality of passion, verbal virtuosity, mellifluousness and width and depth of experience.

Modern Western ideas began to appear in the nineteenth century. Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869) is a classical poet with a modern sensibility. His voice – ironic, self-questioning, complex, and ambiguous – is heard through early modern and modern Urdu poetry. Mir was probably the greater poet, but Ghalib led Urdu poetry into the twentieth century and overshadows his major contemporaries Bahadur Shah Zafar (r.1837-1857), Zauq (1789-1854) and Momin (1800-1852) in modern acclaim.