

## 4. The Range of Hindi and Urdu

The preceding sections have attempted to provide a minimal background for the understanding of the modern evolution of Hindi and Urdu. Inevitably concentrating upon reference to externally determining factors, these have largely disregarded the internal dynamics which make Hindi and Urdu what they are today.

Part II of this introduction is devoted to a serial description of the linguistic components of these twinned but now separate languages. But, while a technical acquaintance with the formation of Arabic and Persian or Sanskrit words is crucial to a full understanding of all styles of Urdu or Hindi, these styles also demand a more general appreciation. It is to such a necessary preliminary overview that the paragraphs of this section are dedicated.

### 41. *Hindustani-Urdu-Hindi*

The respective circumstances over which Urdu and Hindi have evolved over the past couple of centuries provide the chief parameters in which written styles of language are first to be viewed. But, as in any language, it is that individual contribution forthcoming from an individual writer's genius or talent which allows one to delight in any particular register, and the way in which it has been suited to meet the demands of expression to be expected in a particular genre of writing.

A great many varieties of style within the triangle determined by the three extreme points of deliberately down-to-earth Hindustani, highly Persianized Urdu and highly Sanskritized Hindi are inevitably to be detected from a superficial reading of texts in both languages: and the specimens selected for this book fall at various points around this triangular pattern. Given the time-depth we have sought to explore, perceptions of historical development should also rightly colour stylistic appreciation. On the other hand, our selection has necessarily been restricted by practical considerations: and many typical styles are hardly represented. Although we have attempted to steer some sort of middle course between the extremes of Sanskritized Hindi and Persianized Urdu, and have deliberately rejected speciously produced examples of 'fine writing' in either language per se, we have — for instance — nevertheless not found room for exemplification of the style of sports reportage which, whether in Hindi or Urdu, continues to be so profoundly influenced by both technical English loans and by English syntax.

The following sections are accordingly composed as brief overall introductions to the pieces we have succeeded in including in this anthology. If a certain bias emerges towards the more flexible styles which continue to be practised to such effect in both Hindi and Urdu, this perhaps reflects our double impatience with the ultra-varieties so disastrously attractive to the 'purists' in either camp.

### 42. *The Range of Urdu*

In spite of the latter-day efforts of protagonists of Hindi to depict Urdu as a deviant version of the *ārya bhāṣā* of India, the simple fact remains that it is a language which people in large numbers — albeit not geographically

concentrated — actually speak as their mother tongue.

Urdu did nevertheless have to face the formidable heritage of its Persian predecessor, for so long cultivated as the formal medium for prose-writing of all kinds by the Muslim courts of medieval India. The more remote Indo-Persian became from its spoken origins in Iran and Central Asia, the more obsessive the attention that was paid by its Indian practitioners to the niceties of the elaborate rhymed style (*inṣā*) which was demanded from munshis supposedly competent in Persian. The British requirement for simplified texts which underlay the Fort William enterprise modified this heritage, without exorcizing all its formalistic redundancies or — of course — being able to avoid what have come to be seen as archaisms (1).

From a subsequent perspective, this early example of the Urdu of c. 1800 is also distinguished stylistically by a rather lax intertwining of its Persian and KhB elements. The *preciosi* of the declining courts of Lucknow and Delhi did their best to excise such imprecisions, principally in poetry but also in prose: but happily they were never quite to succeed in their attempted regulation of Urdu into a nicely-schooled niece of Persian. Ghalib, unquestionably one of the greatest of all Urdu poets, was quite casually eclectic in the inimitable prose-style he evolved for his letters, incorporating Persian and Arabic phrases, constructions and tags in the most natural fashion with an underlying syntax determined by the norms of Hindustani speech (3). Ghalib was, however, a great stylist: and without his linguistic genius, Urdu was equally capable of falling unaided into the pit of Sir Sayyid's rough style (4), or — with British encouragement — into the lifeless translations of their prescribed Hindustani textbooks (9).

While Urdu still looked as if it would enjoy a secure future in an undivided South Asia, a great range of styles was able to flourish. These ascended or descended — according to one's point of view — from the magically contrived 'simple' evocations of Delhi usage achieved by such master-stylists as Farhatullah Beg (13) to the orotundly Persianizing journalese preferred by Sharar in his capacity as self-appointed memorialist of the lost kingdom of Avadh (11). Between these extremes, a more natural literary idiom came to be evolved for such diverse purposes as literary criticism (6), linguistics (10), political autobiography (14) or pamphleteering (18). Although more Persianized both in vocabulary and constructions than spoken Urdu, this everyday literary Urdu style has a rather closer relationship to the norms of educated spoken Urdu than exists between literary and spoken Hindi.

Unfortunately for the continuance of this intrinsically natural Urdu style, as developed by native speakers from present-day Haryana to Calcutta in India, its evolution has come to lie in the linguistically alien territory of Pakistan. Cultural chauvinism *vis-à-vis* India, together with the inferiority-complex *vis-à-vis* the native-speakers of Urdu now settled in Pakistan, have come to encourage the development of a hyper-Persianized idiom quite as artificial as the modern hyper-Sanskritized Hindi of India. While given a certain force by the country's most prominent orators (22), the style of most Urdu writing in Pakistan all too accurately reflects the bombastically Persianized register of the official media (24).

### 43. *The Range of Hindi*

The unsympathetic attitude of the Hindi camp towards Urdu described in the previous section is reciprocated in the typical Urdu-speaker's view of Hindi — namely, in the memorable phrase of a character created by Anita Desai, as a 'vegetarian monster'. The style of Hindi which has prompted this view is the officially-promoted language with its heavy reliance on Sanskrit loans and neologisms, use of which is invariably equated with the concept of linguistic 'purity' (17). The degree of Sanskritization adopted by an author is the most important variable in Hindi prose style. It depends not only on chronology (though an increased use of *tatsamas* is certainly a feature of the modern language), but also on the background of the individual writer, the degree of abstraction of his subject-matter and its position on a scale stretching from deliberately elitist polemic to the more natural registers of creative or narrative prose.

The first attempts at writing Hindi prose such as those of the eccentric Insha (2) were necessarily experimental and self-conscious, and it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that a more natural style was to emerge. At that stage, before the Hindi-Urdu question had become an acrimonious communal issue, a high proportion of Sanskrit vocabulary did not necessarily have the corollary of a low number of Perso-Arabic loans, and a spontaneously eclectic register was achieved by such innovators as Harishchandra (5); and despite the constant attraction of Sanskrit loans, a mixed style of this kind has continued to find favour with gifted Hindi authors (21). Specialized subjects such as literary criticism, however, have of course always drawn heavily on the ready-made technical vocabulary of Sanskrit (12), and a similarly Sanskritized register invariably accompanies any subject matter with a specifically Hindu cultural context (20).

In the early decades of the present century it was the norm for Hindu boys of some social standing to be tutored in Urdu and Persian (19), a fact which obviously had its effect on the Hindi style adopted by writers with this background. Such an education was, however, far from universal, and the use of high-flown Urdu in public life and administration often caused an unbridgeable comprehension gap between the servants of the state and the lay public (7); even for the literate sections of society the use of Perso-Arabic words in the Nagari script was a somewhat baffling problem (8).

In the years leading up to Independence, the question of linguistic register assumed a new importance: no longer a merely academic issue, it became one of the clearest symbols of cultural identity in the turmoil of communal politics. While the more fervent Hindu nationalists saw Sanskritized Hindi as the appropriate choice of national language for independent India, those seeking a rapprochement of Hindu and Muslim interests joined Gandhi in a more conciliatory stance supporting Hindustani (16). Some important voices such as the Bengali poet Tagore were at best ambivalent to the attribution to Hindi of the new national role, since they regarded their own regional languages as having a better-established literary tradition; this revived the old question about the connexion between the language of literature and that of everyday speech — a debate whose echoes go back to Insha's generation — some advocates of Hindi such as the poet Nirala insisting that the connexion was an

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irrelevance (23). Ironically, much of the polemic with which the Urdu-Hindi-Hindustani debate was fought was heavily influenced by English in its syntax and its rhetoric (15), and this most insidious of influences continues to show its impress on most modern styles of both Hindi and Urdu.