

# Urdu in India since Independence

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*What ails Urdu in India today? It is government apathy as much as lack of private, non-government action. While the elite proponents of Urdu wait for somebody else to do something about the promotion of Urdu, there are many things which individuals or small groups can do. Those who love Urdu need to shake off the feeling of persecution and use the factors that work in favour of Urdu.*

THE link language of everyday communication in India continues to be, as it was before independence, one which is as much Hindi as it is Urdu. It is true that since independence the government has shown apathy and worse towards Urdu. But the proponents of Urdu focus almost exclusively on the injustices done to Urdu. They too often call upon somebody else — such as the government — to do something instead of doing it themselves. They have failed to take advantage of factors that favour Urdu. The defence of Urdu requires an increase in the number of people who have a command of it. The first step is education. But one need not depend on government-run Urdu medium schools. Those who have a command of Urdu can start teaching it in their own neighbourhoods. Confining Urdu to the Persian script also works against its spread. There is a large readership for Urdu works written in Devanagari script and also for Urdu works introduced through English.

In 1949-50 I spent the greater part of my study leave at Aligarh. \* In those days, in the area regarded as the heartland of Urdu, UP and to a lesser extent Bihar, the state governments were doing everything possible to destroy it. This was achieved by an absurd interpretation of the 'three language formula' devised by the government of India. This recommended that in every state three languages should be taught in the schools — (1) the language of the state (which would normally be the mother tongue of the majority of its inhabitants) (2) another modern Indian language (Hindi would often be chosen where the first language was not Hindi), and (3) one other language. A good deal of elasticity was envisaged in the implementation of this formula, and in UP Urdu, the language of most inhabitants of UP after Hindi, could, and should, have been chosen. The UP government decided instead to declare

Sanskrit a modern language, and the teaching of Urdu in the schools — it had been taught in all UP schools before independence — was discontinued. On the whole that situation has continued ever since, at any rate until fairly recent times when I understand some minor changes have taken place in the situation. In the first years of independence the main reliance of those people in the Urdu field who wanted to preserve Urdu as far as it could be preserved, to allow for its development and to counter the policies being pursued against it was to rely upon the sympathies for Urdu that existed at the level of the government of India. Nehru, who spoke Urdu well, was in favour of doing something to support it and was opposed to the policies of the UP government; but the centre was not in any position to dictate the course which UP government should follow, and the best it could do was to provide funds and other support for organisations manned by the supporters of Urdu.

Let me consider the measures taken by central government over the last two decades or so. The government of India, at any rate from Indira Gandhi's time onward, had its own reasons for doing something to support Urdu. There were political considerations motivating this, which did not necessarily have much to do with sympathy for Urdu. A committee was set up in 1972, headed by I K Gujral, to consider how the cause of Urdu could be advanced. The report of the committee, which amounted to more than 250 pages, was presented in 1975 and 187 recommendations were made. This report was 'put on ice' and the main reason for this was the vigorous opposition of Jagjivan Ram to anything being done for the cause of Urdu and Indira Gandhi's desire not to alienate him in the political situation which obtained at that time. However, in due course the Gujral report was laid before parliament. Then, successively, two committees were set up to look once more at the situation of Urdu — one headed by Ale Ahmad Suroor, a sub-committee to examine the recommendations of the Gujral Committee, (set up in 1979, reported in 1983) and one headed by Ali Sardar Jafari (set up in February 1990, reported, with unusual promptness, in September 1990).

The Jafari committee discovered that 95 per cent of the recommendations made in the Gujral report had not been adopted. The state government of Bihar, and shortly afterwards that of UP, recognised — on paper — Urdu as an official language of their respective states.

Som Anand, in an article written in 1992 says that quite substantial financial support was given to Urdu, but that the situation in the Urdu-speaking community was such that it had not been able to make proper use of the support which was given. He says the government of India makes considerable efforts to help the Urdu press, but the Urdu newspapers are in no position to derive any benefit from this. The United News of India (UNI), at the instance of the government of India, decided to start an Urdu teletypewriter service for the newspapers with a grant of several lakh rupees from the government. The UNI offered this service to 40 Urdu newspapers, but this offer has not yet been taken up. But this is not the only difficulty. To get such a service operating, you need good translators, and these are not available. The fact is that the new generation of Urdu speakers has grown up at a time when Urdu is not taught, so how could you expect to find young people who know Urdu well? And on top of that, in the so-called Hindi area of northern India, the standard of education in English has also declined very considerably. The result is that Urdu translators who are employed by the Urdu newspapers know neither good English nor good Urdu.

What could individual Urdu speakers or small voluntary organisations formed by them have acted to combat the dangers that Urdu was facing? One thing that they could have done was ensured that their own children learnt to read and write Urdu. If the schools were not providing for their education, the parents themselves could have provided it, and by and large they did not. Even in Urdu-speaking families people who were generally devoted to Urdu and whose children were also interested in Urdu, had not taught their children to read and write it. Urdu for them was simply the language of the home. Many of them enjoyed Urdu poetry; they would go to mushtrats and most of them could

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understand what was being said. I remember seeing a young relative of the late Habbur Rahman writing down in Devanagari script Urdu verses which appealed to her. On another occasion I met Ismat Chughtai. She told me that her daughter could not read and write Urdu. So one asks the question, why not? Why didn't the parents make sure that their children could read and write Urdu? It seems to me that whatever the difficulties, it was, and is, primarily the responsibility of people who love Urdu and Urdu literature to arrange for the teaching of Urdu and Urdu literature themselves. They could and they should do that; and if I am not mistaken, they are not doing it.

It should be obvious that the basic thing that needs to be achieved for the defence of Urdu is a considerable increase in the numbers of people who have a command of it, not simply Urdu colloquial speech, but the Urdu which enables one to read and appreciate Urdu literature. Anyone who is concerned with increasing the numbers of people who are competent in Urdu can do something practical about it without any external support at all. In many immigrant communities in countries like Britain people want their children to acquire a much better knowledge of what some people call their heritage language than is provided for in any official provision in the schools and the educational system. They act accordingly. That is, they themselves set up classes, hire rooms or meet in suitably sized rooms in their own houses and impart some instruction to their children. And there is absolutely no reason why Urdu speakers in India shouldn't do the same.

Obviously, there are some spheres in which nothing very substantial can be done by individuals or small-scale voluntary organisations. There are bodies established in the states and at the all-India level to promote the cause of Urdu.

It seems to me that in order to make a fair assessment of what these bodies have done — or failed to do — we need to know a great deal more about them. The questions I would like to ask are: what is the extent of government funding; what is the constitution/terms of reference; who are the members of its governing body; and how are they chosen; does it issue regular reports of its activities, if so, how often, if not, are there informal accounts of its work available.

I learnt through correspondence in 1996 with the chancellor of Jamia Milia that "[Anjuman i Taraqqi i Urdu] is not entirely dependent on government funding. It gets a government grant of Rs 1.30 lakh annually from the Delhi Administration.

Its income from rent of its own multistoried 'Urdu-Ghar' is more than sufficient for its needs. It has a general body of 40 members and elections are held every five years. I doubt if they have any regular system of reporting to government." He also wrote that the "[Taraqqi Urdu Bureau] is entirely dependent on government funding. Reporting to government does not appear to be regular. The Bureau is passing through a 'retiring' phase."

As I wrote in an article in the *Indian Review of Books* (September 15-November 15, 1995), one of the most disappointing features of the picture is the idleness and ineffectiveness displayed by those who have seen themselves as the trustees and leaders of the Urdu-speaking community. Substantial resources were from very early days made available by the central government to organisations established to support and promote the interests of Urdu. But the record of these organisations is a far from impressive one. In 1949-50 I spoke personally to some of those who sat on the governing body of the Anjuman i Taraqqi i Urdu and urged them to draw up a coherent plan of activity and proceed to implement it.

One thing I drew attention to was the fact that we did not have good, accurate texts of even the greatest Urdu classics. I gave them the example of the Oxford Classical Texts of the great Latin and Greek authors, saying that the sole aim of those who prepared these texts was to publish as accurate a text of each author as it was possible to establish. If the Anjuman i Taraqqi i Urdu did nothing but that, it would be an enormously valuable service to the cause of Urdu. Twenty years later its total achievement in this field was the publication of one such text, Imtiaz Ali Arshi's edition of Ghaleb's Urdu verse. There were other ambitious projects allegedly started but never proceeded with, or, if proceeded with, never completed; and work done in connection with these projects which could and should have been published without impairing the success of the projects as a whole, never appeared.

I well remember a conversation I had with Ale Ahmad Sunoor in 1965. I urged that a plan to publish all of Ghaleb's writings in good, reliable texts should be initiated at once so that these could appear in the centenary year, 1969. All that did appear was a disgracefully produced reissue of a volume of Ghaleb's letters first published in the 1930s. In the same conversation he told me that he had received a glossary of the vocabulary of Nazir Akbarabadi, which he had asked Maikash Akbarabadi to prepare. I said, "Publish it now. It can still be used as material for the full-scale

Urdu-Urdu dictionary you are planning". He rejected the idea. And 30 years later we have neither a full-scale dictionary nor the glossary. I was told in later years that Maikash's glossary had been lost.

Rashid Hasan Khan, in an interview with Atiq Farouqi says:

The Taraqqi Urdu Board [Bureau] long ago planned to produce a comprehensive Urdu dictionary in four or five volumes. Some extremely famous people...[who?] were chosen for this task and one volume was allotted to each. For years together regular payment was made to these people, and each was given an assistant. Years later it was learnt that work on the dictionary had not been completed. When the time came for them to render account of what they had done, these revered gentlemen returned their materials in the same state as they had received them...no work is now being done. There is an urgent need for an Urdu dictionary, but after 10 years of continuous effort the Taraqqi Urdu Board has to this day not been able to compile one...Granted, a concise dictionary has been printed. I read it...and found not a single page in which there were not one or two mistakes of one kind or another.

The University Grants Commission made a plan for a history of Urdu literature in four substantial volumes. An appropriate grant for this purpose was given to Aligarh Muslim University. At first the University prepared an excellent plan, and the details they presented convinced me that this history of Urdu literature would be a work of really high quality. Nine writers, all of them very well-known and highly regarded, were involved in the project. The first volume was to cover the period from the 12th to the 17th century AD. When the first volume appeared I read it — and you cannot imagine my astonishment...All its references were completely unreliable, nor could one rely on the accuracy of the passages quoted. I wrote a detailed review of it at the time... This was reproduced in a number of periodicals and was much talked about. As a result all copies of this first volume were taken off the market and piled up in Aligarh, and a statement was issued that it would be corrected and then re-issued. To this day no corrected edition of the first volume has appeared and neither have the remaining volumes (*Akbar i Nau*, December 2-8, 1988).

Atiq Ahmad Siddiqi tells us in his article 'Status of Urdu in India' (the [Taraqqi] Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu set up by the central government has brought out about 700 useless books; most of them are translations. Similarly, Sahitya Academy and National Book Trust, both government organisations, have brought out a large number of useless Urdu books (*The Nation*, Lahore, October 4, 1993). Later in the article he is similarly critical of the

Urdu academies that were established in many states and which have been "rendering so-called useful services".

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in his interview with Ather Farouqui says that teachers at the university level started a retrograde strategy to save their jobs. Urdu teachers convinced university authorities that since enrolment in Urdu was dwindling seriously, it was necessary that even those students who did not read Urdu at any level whatsoever, or inferior students, should be granted admission if they wished to study Urdu as a subject in BA or MA. This resulted in the intake of incompetent candidates as Urdu students. These incompetent people, having obtained their degrees, joined the Urdu departments as teachers: "Then followed the illiterate line of students taught by these illiterate teachers. It seems that now this phenomenon of generations of illiterates after illiterates will never come to an end" (*The Nation*, Lahore, July 8, 1994).

Not only did the champions of Urdu fail to do what they should have done on their own initiative, they failed to do what they had promised – and what they had been paid – to do. To crown it all they themselves took active steps which in Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's words "proved very harmful for Urdu". I think it regrettable that Rashid Hasan Khan does not name all the distinguished people whom he characterises in harsh (and fully justified) words. These people do not deserve the protection of anonymity – they need to be thoroughly exposed.

I am well aware that dissatisfaction with the role played by bodies like the Anjuman i Taraqqi Urdu and the Taraqqi Urdu Bureau commonly leads people to wash their hands of them. In that this leads to the formation of organisations that make it a policy to refuse to accept government funding and free themselves of all obligation to governments and their policies. This dissatisfaction is welcome. Such completely independent organisations are indeed necessary. The Maulana Azad Research and Educational Foundation was one such. I learnt from a letter that "the Maulana Azad Foundation was registered in 1989... From the very first day it has been our policy not to accept any kind of help from the government of India, so that government policies cannot influence us either directly or indirectly. To continue the work of an organisation run on these principles is extremely difficult, but we are putting up with all such difficulties... The Muslims of Sikandarabad are the sole source of our funding." Another letter said, "From the very outset it was resolved that the members of the Foundation would not accept employment by the govern-

ment of India, would not accept membership of any governmental or non-governmental committee and would not establish any relationship, direct or indirect, with the government of India. Members would not accept any financial assistance from the government of India, or any grant, or any prize. They would also as far as possible try to abstain from taking part in any seminar or mushaira connected in any way with the government of India. As far as possible they would refrain from publishing anything they write in Urdu periodicals partly funded by the government."

The foundation has also been running two Urdu medium junior high schools in Sikandarabad. The only other Urdu schools in UP are run by the Aligarh Muslim University. In these two schools both Urdu and English are available as the medium of instruction, and most parents choose the English medium for their children, although the level of proficiency in English of these children is such that this is an intolerable burden for them, even though the level of English used is extremely low. In short, Urdu medium is at its last gasp in both these schools and within a few years this so-called Urdu medium will cease to be used.

Ather Farouqui writes in an article in the *Economic and Political Weekly*: "A few places Urdu medium primary schools are run by local bodies where teachers were appointed... Most of the people appointed... the so-called Urdu teachers, generally do not even understand what is meant by the term Urdu medium... Therefore, in UP, Urdu education means teaching Urdu as a subject. It is unfortunate that few of the so-called Urdu teachers in UP can even read the books in Urdu script meant for primary classes. It has also been observed that the Urdu teachers in UP are engaged in their family occupations like agriculture and milk dairies and go to the school once or twice a month."

Dissatisfaction with government-sponsored organisations is justified, and the setting up of independent bodies to defend Urdu and assert and campaign for its rights is a welcome development. But it should by no means follow that no further interest should be taken in government-sponsored initiatives. If associations and bureaus and academies set up to advance the cause of Urdu are not doing so satisfactorily, this needs to be said in organised public criticism of them, and, even more important, plans of activities which they should be carrying out need to be worked out, and widespread campaigning initiated and sustained to press these bodies to adopt these plans. It follows that bodies like the Maulana Azad Foundation should similarly have a coherent programme of ac-

tivities which they should publicise, and for which they should enlist practical support on as large a scale as possible. The same applies to approaches to the government of India.

The protagonists of Urdu seem to me all too often to call upon somebody else to do something instead of doing it themselves, and that there is a historical background to this attitude, formed in the centuries when Muslims constituted the ruling elite of India. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, who is himself a member of the UP Urdu-speaking elite strikes a rare – and welcome – note when he says in his interview (in English) with Ather Farouqui published in the Lahore paper *The Nation* on July 8, 1994: "The Muslims of Uttar Pradesh... have a sense of superiority, which I consider quite stupid really... The UP *sharifzada* will never do for himself anything that he can command, persuade or cajole anyone else to do for him."

There is a proposal to do the teaching of Urdu should be taken on as one of the main tasks of the religious foundations, the madrassas and so on, which are primarily established for the imparting of Islamic learning. I do not think that there is any point in this at all. In the first place, why should the job be handed over to other people. The champions of Urdu are looking for someone else to do work which they ought to be doing themselves and which they are not doing. In the second place, there never has been the least evidence that these organisations are interested in the teaching of Urdu, or at any rate in teaching it to any very worthwhile level. These madrassas have functioned continuously both before independence and throughout the whole period since independence and not one of them has ever shown the least interest in teaching Urdu to the level which would introduce their students to Urdu literature. They are concerned with religious questions and only with religious questions. It is not in the least likely that they will undertake this task on anything like a large scale. As far as my experience goes there is no reason to assume that the attitude of the teachers in religious institutions has changed much since the time of Ashraf Ali Thanavi when, almost a hundred years ago now, he wrote *Bahishti Zewar*. He has a chapter in Part Ten in which he lists all the kinds of books which women should not read. But two things have to be said about that. Firstly that we want women to be able to read everything that men can read. Secondly, the disapproval of the kind of literature which Ashraf Ali Thanavi censures obviously extends to the literature which men read. In *Bahishti Zewar*, he lists among other books that should not

be read: "divan aur ghazalon ki kitaben" "divans and books of ghazals" – in other words, virtually the whole of Urdu poetry and certainly that part of Urdu poetry which is the most valuable; the *Indar Sabha*; the story of Badr i Munir, that is the story of the masnavi of Mir Hasan; *Dastan Amir Hamza*, *Gul i Bakawali* and other books. To expect people who are dedicated to religious teaching to teach people to read some of these best works of Urdu literature seems to me quite unrealistic.

I come now to what I think the protagonists of Urdu should do. I do not object to them saying that other people, like the government of India, state governments and so on, ought to be doing this, that or the other, and should be pressed to do so. I do not object to them saying that we should try and get teachers in religious institutions to take up Urdu. I do not object to these things, but they should pay far more attention to what they themselves should do, regardless of what other people are or are not doing. There are some important activities in which all protagonists of Urdu need to engage themselves and all others whose support they can obtain. One such is the production of Urdu materials in the Devanagari script. It would be extremely helpful to people who know Urdu but who cannot read the Urdu script and to the cause of Urdu generally if Urdu teaching materials and works of Urdu literature were published in the Devanagari script.

All organisations – government-sponsored and voluntary – ought to consider the implications for them of the fact that many Urdu speakers know Urdu but do not know the Urdu script. They are anxious to read Urdu, but they can only read it if Urdu literature is presented in the Devanagari script. In my opinion it should be entirely within the remit of the government-funded organisations to produce texts of important and popular Urdu authors in Devanagari script. They should not wait for other people to do this. If they are concerned with the advancement and promotion of Urdu they should provide for the needs of those Urdu lovers who know Urdu and want to know more about it and to be able to read more of its literature, but do not know the Urdu script.

Publications of Urdu works in the Devanagari script, of course, serve a wider audience than that which I have just described. They serve the audience of Hindi speakers who do not know Urdu but are interested in what Urdu literature has to offer. I think that Hindi speakers offer the next most favourable audience for Urdu literature after that of Urdu speakers themselves. True that there are people – some people – in the Hindi speaking community

who are the most vociferous opponents of Urdu, but it would be a great mistake to think that all Hindi speakers share their attitude. There are among Hindi speakers substantial numbers of people who do not want to make Urdu their first language, but are nevertheless interested in getting access to what Urdu literature has to offer. This is proved by the number of publications of Urdu works issued by Hindi publishers in the Devanagari script. Quite numerous selections from popular Urdu poets are being published by Hindi publishers. I know that in her later years, Ismat Chughtai could always find a publisher for her stories in Devanagari before any Urdu script version was published. And Muhammad Umar Memon of the University of Wisconsin, US, tells me that almost all of Manto's works are now available in Devanagari. My experience is that champions of Urdu are for the most part simply unaware that this is going on and even if they are aware they take an attitude towards it more or less of indifference – and they certainly should not.

Already in the early 1950s there was a multi-volume publication called *Sher-o-Sakhan*. This was a comprehensive selection of Urdu poetry presented in the Devanagari script with, at the bottom of the page, explanations in Hindi of the meanings of Urdu words which the editors thought their readers would not otherwise understand. A periodical published in Allahabad, *Urdu Sahitya*, presented contemporary writing in Urdu in the Devanagari script and with explanations of difficult words. An anthology of Urdu verse in English was published in 1995. This is a bilingual book with Urdu text on the left-hand page and the English translation on the right-hand page. At the suggestion of the publishers Urdu text is presented in the Devanagari script. Again this is clear evidence that there are more people who want to read Urdu poetry in Devanagari script than in the Urdu script. *Masterpieces of Urdu Ghazal from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* published in 1990 gives the Urdu text in the Urdu script on the left-hand page and on the right-hand page an English translation and then a transliteration or transcription of the Urdu text written in roman letters. There are two other collections – *Masterpieces of Urdu Rubaiyat* and *Masterpieces of Urdu Nazm*.

Rahi Masum Raza in a stimulating interview in *Akhtar i Nau* (February 9-15, 1990) said that unless the classics of Urdu literature were published in the Devanagari script they would cease to exist for future generations. He also said that Urdu speakers should discard their

traditional script and adopt Devanagari instead. My own view is that there should be no compulsion to adopt the Devanagari script, but equally there should be no opposition to those who choose to do so. Every support should be given for publication of Urdu works in Devanagari as well as in Urdu script editions.

Adoption of Devanagari was also one of the recommendations of the Gujral Committee report: "There is a strong case for publishing Urdu books in Devanagari script... The *diwans* of Urdu poets and the anthologies of Urdu poetry in Devanagari script have sold in thousands. In our opinion, the experiment should be extended to cover fiction and humour also." The Suroor sub-Committee repeated this recommendation adding that "the government should earmark some funds" for this purpose (Recommendation no 84). And the Jafari Committee reiterated all this. These recommendations were very welcome ones. What one would like to know is whether the government, or the organisations established to promote Urdu, have taken any notice of them. Ali Sardar Jafari, the chairman of the third of the three committees, had already taken an admirable initiative many years ago in producing Devanagari editions of Ghaliib and Mir. One important, and much to be desired, consequence of making as much Urdu literature as possible available in Devanagari is that it would do something to hinder the efforts of Hindi chauvinists to expel from contemporary Hindi what they falsely call 'un-Indian' elements. Urdu in Devanagari script will help to maintain in Hindi the use of much vocabulary which is still, despite all the efforts of the Hindi chauvinists, common to the two languages.

There is another constituency of Urdu literature, that of those who can only approach Urdu literature through the medium of English. My own two books written in collaboration with Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (1968) and *Chalith: Life and Letters* (1969), were meant for people in the English speaking world. When they were a year or two ago, they sold quite well, obviously here in India. The publishing firm Rupa is anxious to publish English translations of works of Urdu literature.

It is not only publishers' realisation of the existence of this wider audience for Urdu literature in English that has made them ready to publish books like these. Since the rise of the women's movement and since the emergence of a strong anti-racist movement in the west, respectable publishers are frightened of being seen as in any way conforming to the values of racism or anti-feminism and one of the interesting results of this has been that

Asian woman who has translated from Urdu, stands a very good chance of having your translations accepted for publication in the UK and the US especially if it is women's writing that she has translated. This is a digression, but I wanted to make the point because even if there are quite fortuitous reasons which have not got anything to do with the value of Urdu literature, but which nevertheless make it possible for Urdu literature to be presented to a wider audience, we should not hesitate to take advantage of such factors.

There is another, I think increasingly important, audience for Urdu literature presented in English in the second and third generation immigrants from Urdu speaking areas into the English speaking and the English knowing world and there are substantial numbers of such people both in North America and in Britain, and to a lesser extent in other European countries. In short, there is a much wider audience for books presenting Urdu literature in English than there was, say, 30 or 40 years ago. There was published in England, *The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry*, selected and translated by Mahmood Jamal (1986), and in India a Penguin book on Khalib (Pavan K Varma, *Khalib: The Man, The Times*, 1989) and numbers of translations of Faiz, including *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*, translated by Agha Shahid Ali.

Those organisations which are concerned with the promotion of Urdu need to be concerned with all these audiences and not simply with the audience of those who are already able to read the Urdu script. For example, the Anjuman i Taraqqi i Urdu or the Taraqqi Urdu Bureau, needs to give support, including if necessary financial support, to any of those bodies, voluntary bodies, publishers, others, in this country and in other countries who are doing things which help the advancement of Urdu.

In my readings I have noticed that the extracts from the English and Urdu press are full of all the injustices done to Urdu, and there is very little else. The account they give is perfectly accurate, and the greater part of this paper too has been devoted to them. But that is not the full picture. There are factors which are working in favour of Urdu and these too need to be described if an accurate, full picture is to be presented.

Waheed-ud-Din Khan says in an article: My complaint is not against the national press, but against the Muslim press. At present all Muslim newspapers are trading in protests, complaints and the community suffering. It is a fact that the present Muslim journalism is protest journalism, not constructive journalism in any way. This is

the main problem. I may be allowed to say that the Muslim intellectual class itself is devoid of any positive thinking. Then, how can they work to promote positive thinking among ordinary Muslims? What are the Muslim newspapers doing? They are indulging in convincing the Muslims that they are an oppressed and deprived minority for whom all avenues of living and progress are closed. The reality is that problems and opportunities are always there in the world. The correct approach, therefore, is to find out the opportunities lurking among the problems and urge the people to utilise them while overlooking the problems. The correct formula is to 'starve the problems, feed the opportunities' (*The Nation*, Lahore, July 9, 1993).

Then there are distortions — dishonesty, to be quite blunt — in the picture presented of the historical context within which the problems facing Urdu have to be seen. Perhaps because Ather Farouqui's thesis is the longest sustained treatment of these problems that I have read, I find him more guilty of these than most. His attacks on Hindu and Hindi chauvinists are fully warranted, but he greatly exaggerates the weight they carry on the Indian political and cultural scene. On the other hand he (and most other writers) are silent about the equally pernicious (and much more long-standing) Muslim chauvinism which is widely prevalent in the Urdu speaking community. Writers correctly assail the Uttar Pradesh government for declaring Hindi as the sole official language of the state. By exactly the same logic they should assail the government of Jammu and Kashmir for making Urdu its sole official language, when, as Syed Shahabuddin points out in his article in *Mahastream Annual 1988*: "Urdu is the official language of the state and the medium of instruction and yet declared as mother-tongue in 1971 or in 1981 as a household language by a very small proportion of the population who regard Kashmiri or Dogri or Hindi as their language". But I have never heard of any Muslim who takes the proper stand on this question.

Ather Farouqui argues, sometimes openly, and sometimes by implication, that Urdu speakers who have supported Congress or have consented to serve in government-financed organisations have 'sold out' to the enemies of Urdu. No doubt some of them have, but again this is much too simplified a picture. In particular his attacks on those Muslims who, long before independence was won, were with the Congress, are quite unwarranted. To describe Hayatullah Ansari as one "who raised the slogan of Urdu but who in fact had no interest in the welfare of Urdu and Muslims" (*The Nation*, Lahore, July 15,

1994), is completely unjust. He writes, "I consider the 20-lakh-signatures movement started by Dr Zakir Husain as an extremely unrealistic, escapist movement. Naturally, it did not yield any result". In what way "extremely unrealistic, escapist"? And why "naturally"? It is quite fair to say that the signatures campaign did not achieve the result it aimed at, but this does not mean that it was of no significance.

Waheed-ud-Din Khan's advice is to 'starve the problems, feed the opportunities', or, in other words, build upon the factors which help the cause of Urdu. Three of these have great significance. First, despite the efforts of the Hindi chauvinists the lingua franca, the 'link language' of everyday communication, continues to be, as it was before independence, one which is just as much Hindi as it is Urdu. This is evidenced by *Teach Yourself Hindi* (1989). On a typical page of the vocabulary provided at the end of the book, out of 73 entries 54 are words of this kind and there are only 18 words at the most which would perhaps not be understood by Urdu speakers. Secondly, the immensely popular Hindi films could equally accurately be called Urdu films. The Gujral Committee in para 140 of its summary of its conclusions rightly says that "the major contribution of films is that they have not allowed any barriers to grow between Urdu and Hindi". These two factors alone indicate that spoken Urdu is a language widely understood by millions of Indians, many of whom are not Muslims. Thirdly, interest in Urdu and its literature (especially its poetry) is widespread among very large numbers of people who do not know the Urdu script and have only a partial understanding of the literary language. I therefore quarrel with Ather Farouqui's view that Urdu is now essentially the language of the Muslims. And this is nothing new; Urdu always was essentially the language of the Muslims, notwithstanding that before independence it was also the language of much greater numbers of non-Muslims than it is now. I do not fundamentally disagree with Ather Farouqui on this point, but in the light of the positive factors I have spoken of, what is the point of constantly stressing that the Urdu speaking community and the Muslim community are virtually one and the same? Such a stress obscures the important point that the defence and promotion of Muslims and the defence and promotion of Urdu is not the concern of Muslims alone. These things are the concern of all those who uphold the declared ideals of independent India, and Urdu speakers need to reach out to all of them and work in harmony with them for these common ideals.