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## The Teaching of Urdu in British India

**ABSTRACT:** Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, was promoted through teaching as well as other means by the British in India. They first started teaching it formally to their officers to enable them to understand Indian society and govern it more effectively. They also started teaching it to the Indian Muslims (and other Indians too), who studied Persian earlier. Urdu was unpopular at first but, by the end of the nineteenth century, it started emerging as a symbol of Muslim identity. After that the Muslim League, and other Muslim corporate bodies and groups, supported the teaching of Urdu for political reasons even if they wished to acquire English for utilitarian ones.

**Introduction:** Urdu is the national language of Pakistan; the language which carries the ideological burden of Pakistani nationalism. It has been used as a symbol of national integration, next only to Islam, by the ruling élite which fears the breakup of Pakistan along ethno-linguistic lines—i.e., into the areas inhabited by the speakers of Sindhi, Pashto, Siraiki and Balochi.<sup>1</sup> Ever since 1948, when the East Bengalis claimed that their language, Bengali, should be one of the state languages of Pakistan,<sup>2</sup> the ruling élite has been portraying Urdu as the language of Islam and Muslim unity in South Asia.

Indeed, so much is Urdu associated with Muslim culture in India,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See my *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup>See Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 182–234; Athar Farooqi, “A Study of Urdu Language in Delhi State Since 1947,” M.Phil Thesis, Jawahar Lal

Pakistani nationalism in Pakistan, and Islam in both countries that it is often ignored that it was promoted by the British (who often called it Hindustani) in the nineteenth century.

That English was introduced by the British in the higher domains of power—the administration, military, education and so on—is very well known. But the way they spread Urdu through a process which Robert L. Cooper calls “acquisition planning”—a policy to increase the number of users of a language<sup>4</sup>—has received no attention in the socio-linguistic history of India.

**Objective:** This article, therefore, aims to fill this gap. It traces out how British language-teaching policies helped spread the use of Urdu in northern India and parts of present-day Pakistan. Since our focus is on institutional policies, especially language-teaching policies, the informal networks through which Urdu spread have been ignored. These are very important; so important that they must be dealt with separately. This article, however, will confine itself primarily to the history of the teaching of Urdu in British India.

**The Informal Means of Learning Urdu:** Before the arrival of the British, Muslims, and even educated Hindus, learned Persian, the official language of administration, rather than Urdu.<sup>5</sup> However, in northern India middle and upper class people (the *ashraf*; sing. *sharif*) spoke Urdu at home and, since it was written in the Persian *nasta'liq* script, the formal learning of Persian ensured the learning of Urdu. Moreover, according to Muzaffar Alam, from Aurangzeb's reign onwards, there was “a serious and organized effort to persuade the Mughal élite to learn the local language and script” in a bid to accommodate the regional challenge to the central élite identity.<sup>6</sup>

It cannot be ascertained exactly when the Muslim élite started speak-

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Nehru University, School of Languages, 1990, pp. 1–3; ‘Abdu ’l-Ghanī, “Mardūm Shumārī: Kyā Hū’ā? Kyā Hōnā Čāhiyē?” *Hamārī Zubān* (15 Feb. 1991), pp. 3–4; and Omar Khalidi, *Indian Muslims Since Independence* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995), pp. 132–4.

<sup>4</sup>See his, *Language Planning and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>See Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 32:2 (1998), pp. 325–7.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 345 and 349.

ing Urdu, or rather its precursor which was often called Hindavi, at home. However, there are words in all Persian works of a historical nature—such as the memoirs of the Mughal kings—which are recognizably Urdu. Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Shīrānī, who has made lists of such words, concludes that it must have been spoken in Akbar’s time (1556–1605).<sup>7</sup> It was also used as a facilitator—the medium of instruction for common people in matters of religion and for children. In *Tārīkh-e Gharībī*, which is a history of prophets in verse, the anonymous poet apologizes for writing in “Hindi” as follows:

*Hindī par na mārō ṭa’na*  
*Sabḥī bātāvēn Hindī ma’na*  
*Yeh jō hai Qur’an Khudā kā*  
*Hindī karēn bāyān sadā kā*  
 Do not look down upon Hindi  
 Everybody explains meanings in Hindi  
 This Qur’an which is from God  
 Everyone always explains in Hindi.<sup>8</sup>

This poem was written between 1712–56, along with a number of other works of a religious nature, produced by the Mehdavis, believers in Saiyid Mehdi of Jaunpur.

Indeed, according to Shīrānī, the common people probably learned Urdu through simple books explaining the rituals of Islam and stories about saints and prophets which were circulated from the eighteenth century onwards among semi-literate people. Such books included the “Shahādat Nāmas,” “Nūr Nāmas,” “Me’rāj Nāmas,” “Vafāt Nāmas,” and so on. Their themes were the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusain in the battle of Karbala, the ascension of the Prophet of Islam to the heavens, the stories of death and so on. Also included among these were stories attributed to saints and certain mythical characters.<sup>9</sup>

Books like *Khāliq Bārī* had words in both Persian and Urdu. This particular book is said to have been written by Amīr Khusrau. Shīrānī refutes the idea that its purpose was to teach Hindi to newcomers to India. He argues that it was written after Khusrau’s time and that it was

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *Maqālāt-e Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Shīrānī*, ed. Maẓhar Maḥmūd Shīrānī (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1966), vol. 2, p. 15; see also Alam, p. 343.

<sup>8</sup>As quoted in Shīrānī, *Maqālāt*, vol. 2, p. 207.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247.

meant to teach Persian to Indian boys.<sup>10</sup> However, for whatever reason it was written, children did get acquainted with the writing of Urdu by their reading of books like *Āmad Nāma* and *Khāliq Bārī*.

Then there was this practice of taking one's Urdu poetic compositions to a tutor (*ustād*). These tutors used to be accomplished poets and they did not charge any fixed fees for correcting a novice's verse. For instance, the great poet of Urdu Mirzā Asadu 'l-Lāh Khān Ghālib (1797–1869), had many pupils. For instance, in a letter to Bēkhabar, written in 1868, he says:

There are many—from Bareilly and Lucknow and Calcutta and Bombay and Surat—who regularly send their Persian and Urdu prose and verse to me to correct; I perform that service for them, and they accept the corrections I make.<sup>11</sup>

Even kings, noblemen and lesser gentry sent their verses for correction and improvement and often settled a regular sum of money upon their *ustād* as fees. For instance, Yūsuf 'Alī Khān, the Navāb of Rāmpūr, sent a monthly stipend of Rs. 100 to Ghālib. However, the service was essentially honorary and the *ustād* corrected verses of those who did not pay and those who did with equal diligence. For him (they were almost always men) it was a question of his worth being recognized. The *ustād* was necessary because poetry was socially significant. It was, in fact, the identity-marker of a gentleman (a *sharīf*); a hallmark of *sharīf* culture. Indeed, one of the most powerful social institutions for the spread of Urdu as the language of the educated élite was the declamation of poetry (*mushā'ira*). *Mushā'iras* were exceedingly popular and were held not just at the court of the Mughal emperor but also at people's houses.

The language of these *mushā'iras* shifted from Persian to Urdu so that Farḡatu 'l-Lāh Bēg's fictional account of a *mushā'ira* in Delhi tells us that when the poet Şehbā'ī recited a *ghazal* in Persian, it was praised as a matter of form—and possibly also because one didn't wish to appear coarse or uncultivated by one's failure to affect proper appreciation of Persian—but not everyone really appreciated it and some did not even

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Maqālāt-e Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Shīrānī*, ed. Maẓhar Maḥmūd Shīrānī (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1966), vol. 1, p. 315.

<sup>11</sup>Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, tr. and ed., *Ghālib 1797–1869: Life and Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 337.

understand it.<sup>12</sup> But this is supposed to have happened when Şehbā'ī, Ghālib and Mōmin, some of the great authorities on Persian in Delhi, flourished. Even at this time the snobbish value of Persian was intact though it was no longer as much in use as it was even in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As we have seen already, Ghālib, a great authority on both Persian and Urdu in his time, had many students including the last Mughal king Bahādur Shāh “Zafar.” Moreover, it is evident from Ghālib’s many letters to his students that his view of Urdu, or at least of poetic diction, was contingent upon a firmly hierarchical view in which Persian was at the top, Persianized Urdu came next, and conversational Urdu (of which he was a master stylist) was hardly appropriate for anything but informal conversation.

**The Teaching of Urdu to the British:** The formal teaching of Urdu, however, had begun long before the age of Ghālib. And, ironically enough, the British had started it. One of the reasons for establishing the Fort William College with professorships of Indian classical and vernacular languages was that the students destined to exercise high and important functions in India, should be able to speak the oriental languages with fluency and propriety.<sup>13</sup> Teaching in Urdu, or Hindustani as the British called it, was considered politically significant because it was considered the “literary language of the Musalmans and of Hindus educated on Musalman lines.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the British officers were formally taught Urdu, both in the Persian and the Devanagari scripts, at Fort William College in Calcutta. The college was not only a training academy for future rulers but also a symbol of the Raj itself. It was actually established on 10 July 1800 but the date of 4 July was put on the order because it was “the first anniversary of the glorious and decisive victory obtained by the British arms at Seringapatam the capital of the kingdom of Mysore.”<sup>15</sup>

Among the vernacular-language professorships established in the col-

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Farḥatū 'l-Lāh Bēg, *Dillī kā ek Yādgār Mushā'ira* (rpt. Karachi: Urdū Akāḍimī, 1960), p. 115.

<sup>13</sup>Fort William, *Papers Concerning the College of Fort William*, Regulation IX, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Printed at the Honourable Company’s Press, 1801), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>*Treasury Committee on the Organisation of Oriental Studies in London*, (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1909), Appendix XIII, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup>Fort William, n.p.

lege were Hindustani, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil and Canarese. The classical languages of India—Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit—were held in high esteem. Indeed so innovative was Fort William that besides the usual Latin and Greek, the classics of English literature, which were not yet formally taught in England, had been introduced here. For the historian of Urdu and Hindi, Fort William is important because prose in these languages, at least modern prose, was first written here and the man who got it written was John B. Gilchrist.

There are many accounts of Gilchrist, the physician turned professor of Hindustani, who presided over that momentous event—the birth of modern Urdu and Hindi prose.<sup>16</sup> As such I need not describe him and his venture. The two literary figures who created Urdu and Hindi prose, Mīr Amman of Delhi (d. 1806?) and Lallūjī Lāl Kavī (1763–1824), have also been described in as much detail as biographical material permits.<sup>17</sup>

Mīr Amman's *Bāgh-o-Bahār* was written sometime between 29 April 1801, when its author was appointed a "subordinate Moonshee," and 31 August 1802, when the book was given an award by the college.<sup>18</sup> *Bāgh-o-Bahār* is not the first book of Urdu prose nor is it a translation of the Persian work *Qiṣṣa-e Čahār Darvēsh*. It is a rendition of *Nau Tarz-e Muraṣṣa'*, a tale completed probably in 1775 by a certain Mīr Muḥammad 'Aḡā Khān Tehsīn, in highly Persianized, poetic and stylized Urdu. However, it was the first book to become widely known to several generations of British officers and Indian students. Both military and civilian officers used to be examined in Urdu on its basis, ever since such examinations were established. An order of 31 May 1844 stipulates:

Candidates shall be required to read and translate correctly the *Bāgh-o-Bahār* and the *Baital Pachisi*, the former in the Persian and the latter in

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<sup>16</sup>See Sadiq-ur-Rahman Kidwai, *Gilchrist and the "Language of Hindoostan"* (New Delhi, 1972) and M. 'Aḡīq Siddīqī, *Gilkrā'ist aur us kā 'Ahd*, rev. ed. (New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqī Urdū, 1979).

<sup>17</sup>On Amman, see Salim Akhtar, *Bāgh-o-Bahār by Mir Amman* (rpt. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), pp. 423–7; on Lallūjī Lāl Kavī, Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 18–9, and Veranlankar Sherdadevi, "Development of Hindi Prose Literature," Diss. University of London 1955.

<sup>18</sup>Most of the information in this paragraph comes from Akhtar, pp. 405, 433–6.

the Devanagari character; and further, to make an intelligible and accurate written translation into Hindustani, of an English passage in an easy narrative style.<sup>19</sup>

But the British officers were not the only ones to learn “Hindustani.” English women and children also learnt it. The women were generally taught by tutors and learned just enough to command servants. The children, learning from their ayahs, sometimes became adept. Sometimes, however, arrangements were made to teach Urdu in schools. The Calcutta Free Society, for instance, allowed Rs. 60 per month to teach “the native languages to the children.”<sup>20</sup> Another such school was the Regimental school at Cawnpore where English boys, sons of soldiers, studied “Hindoostanee and Persian” with Muslims and Hindus in 1827.<sup>21</sup> It was probably at this school that ‘Azīmu ’L-lāh, who played a major role in the service of the Nana Sahib, known for having ordered the massacre of General Wheeler’s garrison at Cawnpore in 1857, studied. Azīmu ’L-lāh entertained his employer Brigadier John Scott and his guests by performing “the parlor trick of reciting Shakespeare in Urdu.”<sup>22</sup>

**The Teaching of Urdu to Indians:** Turning to the teaching of Urdu to the Indians, some schools in the Bombay presidency, according to Fisher, taught the Marathi language and “Hindoostanee (in the Persian character)” in 1826. The Bible in Urdu was also taught here. In the Madras presidency the Muslims were supposed to be taught “Hindustani” in addition to the usual Persian and Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

While this toying with the teaching of Urdu was not in earnest nor thorough, a more serious experiment of this nature began sometime in the late 1840s in the heartland of Urdu-Hindi—the North Western Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh), so that the reports of 1844

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Fisher, “Memoir compiled from the Records of the India Government of the East India House ... 1826,” *Indian Education in Parliamentary Papers* (Part I), ed. A.N. Basu (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1952), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Andrew Ward, *Our Bones are Scattered: The Cawnpore Massacres and the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: John Murray, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Basu, pp. 101–2, and 112–3.

mention Urdu and Hindi textbooks being used in the schools here.<sup>24</sup> Urdu was also taught in primary schools and several reports of the 1850s tell us that people were not attracted to schools where Persian was not taught, or where only Urdu was taught, or that it was impossible to learn good Urdu without being taught Persian first and so on.<sup>25</sup>

Urdu was so little valorized that a school teaching only Urdu was unpopular. A number of reports on the schools of U.P. sum up only one thing: that “Persian is popular, and Urdu is proportionally looked down upon. Were Persian taught, numbers would attend.”<sup>26</sup> About the Punjab, Arnold reported that “Urdu is as offensive to a learned Arabic scholar as vernacular English in connexion with learned subjects would have been to a scholar of the age of Erasmus.”<sup>27</sup> In 1849 Dr. J.R. Ballantyne, Principal of the English department of Benares College, noted “that his students grudged the time spent in learning Urdu because they could expect praise at home for learning classical languages, but not for Urdu.”<sup>28</sup>

James Thomason, Lieutenant Governor of the N.W.P., however, carried on the experiment by establishing rural primary schools in Urdu and Hindi rather than the prestigious Persian.<sup>29</sup> In 1851–52, however, while there were 966 Persian schools with 6,164 pupils, in N.W.P. there were only 4 Urdu ones with 57 pupils. There were, however, 60 Persian-Urdu schools with 241 pupils, but these were something like a midway house, a kind of purgatory, en route to the abysmal depths of the Hades of low-status Urdu.<sup>30</sup> The teachers too had been educated only in Persian as reports pointed out, and the British often felt that opening Urdu-only

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<sup>24</sup>J. Thornton, “Letter from J. Thornton, Secretary to the Government, North Western Provinces, to J.J. Moore, 2 September 1844,” *Selections from Educational Records: Part II: 1840–1859*, ed. J.A. Richey (Calcutta: Suptd. Govt. Printing, 1922), pp. 239–40.

<sup>25</sup>H.S. Reid, *Report on the Indigenous Education and Vernacular Schools in the Agara, Aligarh, Bareilly, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Manipuri, Shahjahanpur for the Year 1851–52* (Agra: Printed at the Secundra Orphan Press, 1853), pp. 125–6. Reports for the years 1850–51 and 1852–53 were published from the same press in 1852 and 1854 respectively.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup>Richey, p. 302.

<sup>28</sup>King, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 70.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Reid's report for the year 1852–53.



schools was an uphill task.

Reid's report of 1852 makes it abundantly clear that the experiment of excluding Persian from schools simply failed. People just weren't attracted to such schools. The government, thereupon, put in some morsels of Persian depending upon the demand of the people and the idiosyncrasies and opinions of government officials.

**Higher Education in Urdu:** Apart from the schools, the British also wanted to add Urdu to the curriculum of the Calcutta Madrassa, a stronghold of old-fashioned Arabic and Persian studies. A report of 1854 on the Madrassa states:

The Oordoo language, which the Mussalmans of Bengal consider their vernacular, and which is indeed the only idiom which is spoken by the educated classes all over India, deserves particular attention, and it is the more necessary that it be taught in the Madrassa, because we cannot expect for many years to come that the natives will have sense enough to make it the basis of their private instruction. In Delhie and Agra, though the Oordoo is spoken with great purity, it is taught in the Government colleges, how much more is it necessary that it be studied in Calcutta where it is much degenerated.<sup>31</sup>

Some British officers did, in fact, chafe at the necessity of having to give importance to Persian which they would fain deny. But, as a member of the consultative committee pointed out, the Muslims had "a strong objection to receive instruction in Oordoo, which they regard as an unformed and un-philosophical language."<sup>32</sup>

However, the British did introduce Urdu at the Madrassa. The texts comprised old favorites like *Bāgh-o-Bahār*, *Tarjuma Karīma* (an Urdu translation of Sa'adi's work) and Gilchrist's *Grammar of the Hindoostanee Language* (1786).

Like the Calcutta Madrassa, the Delhi and Agra Colleges too were institutions of higher education for Muslims. The British founded one such institution at the Ghaziuddin Madrassa in 1792. Later on it became famous as the Delhi College. The college was meant, among other things,

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<sup>31</sup>*Selections from the Records of the Bengal Presidency No. XIV. Papers Relating to the Establishment of the Presidency College of Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1854), Appendix IV, p. xviii.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, Appendix V, p. xxx.

to teach “the languages of public business, and of common life, the Persian and Hindoo.”<sup>33</sup> What exactly was “Hindoo” is unclear. However, Urdu featured prominently later. According to C.F. Andrews, “[T]he Oriental Department ... became very popular indeed. The classes taught through the medium of Urdu, were not deserted for the new English studies.”<sup>34</sup>

Just because modern subjects including scientific ones, were taught through the medium of Urdu, the Delhi College is praised in lyrical terms by ‘Abdu ’l-Ḥaq, called the father of Urdu (Bābā’-e Urdū), who believed that it set an example which should be followed now.<sup>35</sup> The Oriental section had Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī, Naẓīr Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād among others. Ḥālī was an eminent poet of Urdu, Naẓīr Aḥmad a master of Urdu prose and Āzād a well-known critic. ‘Abdu ’l-Ḥaq also mentions Rām Čandar, who taught science through Urdu, and Dharam Narāyan, who translated a book on economics from English into Urdu, among the brightest products of the Delhi College.<sup>36</sup>

These teachers, translators and intellectuals were modernists. In the name of “nature,” “morality” and “virtue” Ḥālī and Āzād, among others, changed the erotic nature of the Urdu *ghazal*<sup>37</sup> In short, the Delhi College was also a seat of the most momentous change of ideas, a veritable Kuhnian “paradigm” change, in Urdu literature and the culture of educated Indian Muslims.

It was also instrumental in initiating the use of Urdu for non-literary purposes. Not only were science and mathematics taught in Urdu but many people, notably Munshī Żakāu ’l-Lāh, translated works from English into a new, lucid, and readable style of Urdu.

In 1857, when the University of Calcutta was established, Urdu was taught and examined for the matriculation and later for the B.A. examination. The Madras and Bombay universities also followed this example.

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<sup>33</sup>“Letter from the Court of Directors to the Governor of Bengal, 5 September 1827,” in Basu.

<sup>34</sup>*Zakaullah of Delhi* (rpt. Lahore: Universal books, 1976), p. 43.

<sup>35</sup>See his *Marḥūm Dillī Kālīj* (rpt. Karachi: Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū, 1962), p. 181.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 167–78.

<sup>37</sup>For a fuller discussion, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (rpt. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Despite all these efforts, Urdu remained unpopular, even till the 1870s. In 1864 Sir Saiyid Aḥmad Khān (1817–99), the noted Indian Muslim educationist, said that many of his fellow Muslims “strongly disliked reading Urdu.”<sup>38</sup> This was borne out by a report of the opinion of 25 essayists who tried to answer the question why the Muslims did not send their sons to government schools. Some of them said that Urdu lessons, given in these schools, were not needed, though the schools should teach Arabic and Persian properly.<sup>39</sup> Other people, connected with education, also claimed that educated Indians did not want Urdu to be taught to their sons.<sup>40</sup> Sir Syed himself changed his mind about Urdu several times. Initially, it would appear, he felt that shifting education to Urdu would “effectively block” off access to original sources of knowledge as well as to the languages of political power. Accordingly, he set up a Persian school at Moradabad in 1860 where his sons, who learned English at home, also studied. However, although Persian was the focus of attention, translation from it into Urdu and vice versa was part of the course at the school.<sup>41</sup> Later, as we shall see, Sir Syed became more enthusiastic about Urdu before becoming a champion of English.

By the 1870s the government decided to supply Urdu according to the demand for it. One of the relevant orders was as follows:

Sanction has been given to the appointment of Ordoo Assistant Masters and the teaching of Ordoo to all lads who wish it or whose parents wish it, in selected localities; and the success of this experiment will tell to what extent a desire for this class of instruction really exists.<sup>42</sup>

This prejudice against Urdu, which we find in the works of Ghālib as well, derived from the fact that it had never been the language of power.

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<sup>38</sup>Cf. King, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Hafeez Malik, ed., *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Education Philosophy: A Documentary Record* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1989), p. 144.

<sup>40</sup>King, p. 91.

<sup>41</sup>Lelyveld, p. 72; for the curriculum of the school, see Malik, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup>“Orders of the Government from C.A. Elliott, Secretary to the Government N.W.P to Director of Public Instruction, N.W.P, Allahabad, 14 November 1873,” in *Home Department Proceedings 1872-73*, ACC No. 8992/V/24/822, in NDC Sources located at the National Documentation Centre, Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, p. 7.

Earlier, that language was Persian. But by the middle of the nineteenth century English had effectively taken over. Thus the snob-value of Urdu, vis-à-vis Persian and English, was always low. But Urdu was fast becoming the identity symbol of Indian Muslims and soon led them to demand instruction in it if only to spite the Hindus, if only for symbolic reasons. All this was, however, some distance away in the middle of the nineteenth century.

**The Spreading of Urdu:** Besides the usual way of introducing Urdu in schools, the British created forces and conditions which helped spread it in India. For instance, they trained “Native Doctors” who were taught elementary modern medicine in “Hindustani.” A surgeon, called Brelin, compiled a lexicon of medical terms in Roman, Persian and Devanagari letters. Since no student was to be admitted “who cannot read and write the Hindoostanee language in the Nagree or the Persian character” in the courses, the Indian medical assistant helped spread the use of Urdu and Hindi.<sup>43</sup> The first Urdu newspaper started publishing from Calcutta in 1822, and by 1848, out of the 14 newspapers in the North Western Provinces, only 3 were in Persian, the rest in Urdu.<sup>44</sup> In 1871, 81 books were published in Urdu, but only 29 in Persian, and just 11 in Arabic.

In 1872 both Sir Syed and his son, Syed Mahmud, preferred an Urdu-medium education for Indian Muslims. This was later abandoned for advanced Persian and elementary English with Arabic as an option. In 1874 the Mirza Rahmatullah Beg Committee report even allowed the students to choose Urdu as a medium of instruction in some subjects. Sir Syed himself suggested to the committees responsible for religious instruction in the college that Urdu and Persian, as well as Arabic, books be given as readings to students. The Urdu experiment continued in the Oriental department of the MAO College (the predecessor of the Muslim University, Aligarh) where Urdu was the language of history, geography, science and mathematics. Although English was a second language here too, the department lost students to the English department. Finally, in 1885 it was abolished and only the English department, in which the

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Basu, pp. 85–7.

<sup>44</sup>*Selections from the Records of Government, North-Western Province* (Allahabad: Government Press, N.W.P., 1868), vol. iv, pp. 1–116.

medium of instruction was English for most subjects, remained.<sup>45</sup> Urdu, however, was the informal language of Aligarh. It was, in most cases, either the mother-tongue or at least a familiar second language of the students. And given the social significance of poetry, cultured conversation required the learning of some couplets of the Urdu *ghazal* at any rate. Then there was also the perceived threat from Hindi, at least in *sharif* Muslim consciousness. All these factors made Urdu a badge of identity, a mark of sophistication and refinement. Indeed, such was the emotional commitment to it that Urdu-speaking Muslims reacted with the snobbery and zeal of cultural fascists even to genuine differences of pronunciation and grammar of non-Urdu speakers in Pakistan for many years.

Some British officers also wanted to create an Urdu literature. The most well-known effort in this direction is that of Colonel Holroyd, officiating Director of Public Instruction of the Punjab. The Anjuman-e Panjāb, a zealous advocate of Oriental studies, became a platform in this major experiment of confronting medieval Urdu literature and sensibilities with Victorian modernity. The experiment has been described by Frances Pritchett who also argues that in this process the foundations of modern Urdu literature were laid: a transformation of world views and, hence, of poetic taste, came about as the old world of the pre-1857 days lay dying.<sup>46</sup>

But impatience with the old world was not confined to bringing about changes in Urdu literature or abandoning Persian. It was also a matter of embracing English. Testifying before the Education Commission of 1882 Sir Syed stated:

As long as our community does not, by means of English education, become familiar with the exactness of thought and unlearn the looseness of expression, our language cannot be the means of high mental and moral training.<sup>47</sup>

Urdu, Sir Syed went on to say, was full of poetic exaggeration,

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<sup>45</sup>The greater part of the information in this paragraph comes from Lelyveld, pp. 125–6, 128, 144, 205–6.

<sup>46</sup>Pritchett, pp. 31–45.

<sup>47</sup>See Syed Ahmad Khan, “Statement before the Education Commission on 5 August 1882,” in *Appendix to Education Commission Report: By the North West Provinces and Oudh Provincial Committee and Memorials Addressed to the Education Commission* (Calcutta: Suptd. of Government Printing, 1884).

metaphor and elegance. It was not a fit medium for “scientific” thought. In short, Sir Syed wanted nothing less than quick modernization and by the 1880s he doubted if Urdu could bring it about. However, by 1889 Urdu was an identity symbol of the Muslims of India, and Aligarh, being itself such a symbol, began teaching it as language and literature.<sup>48</sup>

The great figures of Aligarh, Thomas Arnold and Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥalī, both contributed to its popularity. Arnold established a competition for the best poem in Urdu and a society called the Ikhvān aṣ-Ṣafā where students’ essays were discussed. Shiblī Nu‘mānī, a many-dimensional intellectual, cooperated with Arnold to publish an Urdu journal first called the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and then the *Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College Magazine*. These were not mere students’ activities; these were the activities of the students of Aligarh “who became the pace-setters in behavior and dress for the rest of Muslim India”<sup>49</sup> and part of this behavior was the use of elegant Urdu. Thus their role in making Urdu the lingua franca of the Muslim élite cannot be exaggerated.

**Urdu as an Islamic Language:** In his autobiography, Jahangir recounts:

I ordered Mīr [Saiyid Muḥammad of Gujarāt] to translate the Holy Qur’an into clear and simple style bereft of all ornamentation and embellishment. And instead of writing the commentary and history of revelation the words of the Holy Book should be translated in Persian words.<sup>50</sup>

In the Persian original Jahangir uses the word “*rēkhta*” (“low or fallen down,” used for Persian mixed Hindavi and finally for Urdu) which is generally translated as “simple and easy language” in Urdu and English. Jahangir also uses the word “Persian,” which has led most people to conclude that he wanted the Qur’an to be translated into Persian. On the other hand, Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Shīrānī feels that he rather wanted it translated into Urdu.<sup>51</sup> Shīrānī, however, fails to explain the explicit use of the word “Persian” in the original. Be that as it may, the passage does prove that the idea of translating the Qur’an existed before the time of Shāh

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Lelyveld, pp. 245–6; also Appendix at the end of this work.

<sup>49</sup>Mukhtar Zaman, *Students’ Role in the Pakistan Movement* (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup>Nūru ‘d-Dīn Jahāngīr, *Tuzk-e Jahāngīrī*, tr. I’jāzu ‘l-Ḥaq Quddūsī (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1970), vol. 2, p. 43.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. *Maqālāt*, vol. 2, p. 44.

Valīu 'l-Lāh (1702–63), who is generally credited as the first translator of the Qur'an into Persian. He is also held to be the first prominent *'ālim* in India to have shown interest in Urdu. He encouraged his son Shāh 'Abdu 'l-'Azīz to attend the assemblies of the Urdu poet Khvāja Mīr Dard (d. 1785) in order to listen to his idiomatic Urdu.<sup>52</sup> Shāh Valīu 'l-Lāh came to much grief as a consequence of his translation. Not only was it not well received, the orthodox *'ulamā* even “accused him of invention, strong opposition was aroused and once some people even went to the extent of hiring ruffians to beat him up.”<sup>53</sup> Possibly because the British anticipated an unfavorable reaction to such a venture, the Governor General prohibited the publication of an Urdu translation of the Qur'an which Gilchrist had ordered in his letter of 19 March 1807. This translation had been made by Maulvī Amānat 'Alī, Mīr Bahādur 'Alī Ḥusainī, Maulvī Faḏlu 'l-Lāh and Kāzīm 'Alī Javān before 1804. All the copies of the translation were forfeited by the government and none is available today.<sup>54</sup>

The first Urdu translation then is that of the sons of Shāh Valīu 'l-Lāh, Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Qādir (1753–1827) and Shāh Rafī'u 'd-Dīn (1749–1817). The former followed the text rather too literally while the latter paid more regard to the Urdu idiom. The *'ulamā* were not pleased by this “innovation,” especially because in their view no translation could be faithful to the original. Slowly, however, they came to accept Urdu as an “Islamic” language. By the twentieth century Urdu was defended, against Hindi and other languages, as the quintessential language of Indian Islam. This change was speeded up in the nineteenth century when the Indian *'ulamā* took it up as the language of writing, lecturing and religious debate.

At the Dāru 'l-'Ulūm, Deoband, Urdu was used for translation into and from Arabic. The medium of instruction too was Urdu and, like Aligarh, most of the students were either mother-tongue speakers of Urdu or knew it as a second language. Thus, again like Aligarh, “Deoband was instrumental in establishing Urdu as a language of communication

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<sup>52</sup>See Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Abdul Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Sydney: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1982), p. 77.

<sup>53</sup>M. Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims* (1967; rpt. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985), p. 277.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Şiddiqī, pp. 155–7.

among the Muslims of India.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, according to a dream narrated by Metcalf, God himself spoke Urdu, having learnt it from the ‘*ulamā*’ as well as other Indian Muslims.<sup>56</sup>

Among others Maulānā Muḥammad Aḥsan, who taught Persian at Government College, Bareilly, wrote reformist tracts in Urdu. The religious scholars at the Nadvatu ’l-’Ulamā also wrote and spoke in Urdu.<sup>57</sup> The only exceptions were the Ahl-e Ḥadiṣ ‘*ulamā*’, who continued to use Arabic and Persian. Eventually, they too took to writing Urdu, albeit of a highly Persianized and Arabized variety. The situation could be best summed up in the following words of Metcalf:

More and more Muslims shared a common language in Urdu: the language of the new schools, of the books and pamphlets and translations of religious classics, and of ever more popular public debate.<sup>58</sup>

The *madrasas*, which gradually adopted Urdu as a medium of instruction even when the texts themselves were in Arabic or Persian, became “an instrument of the ‘Urduization’ of Muslims in the non-Urdu-speaking areas of India.”<sup>59</sup> Thus Urdu became associated with Islam and the Muslim community all over India.

**The Teaching of Urdu and the Hindi-Urdu Controversy:** The Hindi-Urdu controversy has been dealt with from the point of view of group mobilization, ethnicity, identity construction and Hindu-Muslim politics by several scholars, among them Paul Brass, Kerrin Dittmer, Jyotirindara Das Gupta, and Tariq Rahman.<sup>60</sup> One of the most thorough-going

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<sup>55</sup>Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (1982; rpt. Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1989), pp. 102–3.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Rizvi, pp. 242–3, 247.

<sup>58</sup>p. 359.

<sup>59</sup>Gopal Krishna, “Piety and Politics in Indian Islam,” in *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, ed. T.N. Madan (1976; New Delhi: Manohar in Association with Book Review Literary Trust, 1995), p. 377.

<sup>60</sup>Brass, pp. 118–81; Dittmer, *Die Indischen Muslims und die Hindi-Urdu-Kontroverse in den United Provinces* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972); Gupta, *Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and National Language* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 98–126; Rahman, pp. 59–78.



studies of how the Hindi movement—the movement to replace Urdu in the Persian script with Hindi in the Devanagari one—developed in nineteenth-century India is by Christopher King. He argues that the Hindi movement strove to transform the existing equation of Urdu=Muslim+Hindu to Urdu=Muslim and Hindi=Hindu.<sup>61</sup> Before the Sanskritization of Khari Boli, the base of both Urdu and Hindi, there was a Muslim-led movement to Persianize it in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Amrit Rai, who has described it in detail, points out that it is this which led to the emergence of Urdu as an identity symbol of the élitist (*sharīf*) Muslims of Northern India.<sup>62</sup> These movements need not be described here, but they should be kept in mind in order to understand the changes in the teaching of Urdu in the twentieth century.

In 1877 the Government of the North Western Provinces and Oudh prescribed the Middle Class Vernacular and the Middle Class Anglo Vernacular Examinations as necessary for lower grades of government service.<sup>63</sup> From 1879 onwards all appointments carrying a salary of Rs. 10 per month—just enough to survive on the fringes of respectability—could only go to people able to read and write Urdu. From this date onwards candidates who took Urdu in these examinations increased.

Year	Percentage of Hindi-taking candidates	Percentage of Urdu-taking candidates
1874–75	75.2	24.8
1879–80	53.7	46.3
1886–87	25.8	74.2
1895–96	21.8	78.2 <sup>64</sup>

In the central Provinces and Bihar, however, the provincial government favored Hindi. In U.P., Punjab, and N.W.F.P, however, the language of the domains of power (employment) was Urdu, and in 1883 a

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<sup>61</sup>King, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup>Rai discusses it in his *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi/Hindavi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>63</sup>Madan Malaviya, *Court Character and Primary Education in the N.W. Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1897).

<sup>64</sup>Source: King, p. 116.

contributor of *Bharat Bandhu*, an English-Hindi weekly of Aligarh, pointed out that there was a contradiction in opening schools teaching Hindi in villages while holding out jobs for those who knew Urdu.<sup>65</sup>

The beginning of the Hindi movement in the late 1860s had little effect on the popularity of Urdu in northern India and it was only in 1900, when Sir Antony Macdonnel, the Lieutenant Governor of the North Western Provinces, gave the Devanagari script the same status as the Urdu-Persian *nasta'liq*, that the Muslims started making serious and consistent efforts to defend Urdu. However, the evidence before the Education Commission of 1882 shows beyond doubt that even before that watershed Muslims did consider Urdu as an identity symbol.

The Urdu-Hindi controversy affected schooling in various ways. First, since most of the jobs in the lower domains were contingent upon knowing Urdu, the Hindus were in the classical dilemma faced by all supporters of ghettoizing languages. If, out of group loyalty, they sent their children to Hindi-only schools, the childrens' future prospects would be negatively affected. If they sent them to Urdu ones, they appeared insincere and hypocritical to other Hindus and perhaps even to themselves.

By the 1930s the demand for schooling in Urdu (or Hindi) was part of Hindu-Muslim politics in India, even in Gujarat and far off Burma, where the local Muslim population did not speak a word of Urdu. The Burmese Muslims, indeed, argued that "their religious books are written in Urdu,"<sup>66</sup> suppressing, for political reasons, the fact that the primary religious texts were in Arabic.

The Muslims also complained that the Congress ministries had introduced Hindi rather than "Hindustani" in schools. The Pirpur Report gave details of such practices and the Congress denied them in several publications. The Muslims made several other demands in favor of strengthening the teaching of Urdu, such as: maintenance of Urdu night schools; creation of a faculty of Oriental learning at Nagpur University, along with a chair of Urdu in addition to those of Persian and Arabic, the Muslim classical languages; recognition of Urdu as a medium of instruc-

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<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. III-6.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. *Education in India in 1927-28* (Calcutta: Govt. of India Central Publication Branch, 1930), p. 42.

tion for Muslim students in government high and middle schools, etc.<sup>67</sup>

The agitation even spread to the princely states. In 1933, for instance, there was an agitation against the Sankritized Hindi being used in the state of Jaipur at Alwar. The Muslims of the state requested the Maharajah to introduce Urdu in state schools “as an optional subject.” The Maharajah also allowed private Urdu schools to be opened at ten days’ notice.<sup>68</sup>

The Urdu-Hindi controversy did not even end after the partition of India. It continues in northern India even today but we are not concerned with it here.<sup>69</sup>

**Experiments in the Use of Urdu in Place of English:** Inspired largely by Dr. Leitner, both Sir Syed and the Anjuman-e Panjāb wanted to use Urdu to communicate modern knowledge to Indian students not only at the school but even at the university level. Sir Syed tried, failed, and came to prefer English for that purpose as has been described elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> The Anjuman-e Panjāb also failed, but it did succeed in setting up a University College, and then a University, in Lahore, which would disseminate European learning through the vernaculars and encourage Oriental classical literature while teaching and examining most subjects in English. The Osmania University in Hyderabad also tried to do the same. Let us look at these two experiments in some detail.

**The Punjab Experiment:** The University College, created in 1869,

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<sup>67</sup>For the complaints, demands, and Congress denials, see *The Central Provinces and Berar Government at Work: The Assembly Number* Vol. II:2 (1st Feb.–30 April 1939; Nagpur: Govt. Printing, Central Provinces and Berar) and Syed Mehdi Pirpur, *Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the Council of the All-India Muslim League to Inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces* (Published by Liaquat Ali Khan, n.d.; the letter of the President, Raja of Pirpur, to Jinnah is dated November 1938).

<sup>68</sup>Cf. “Grievances of the Muhammadan Subjects of the Alwar State and the Orders of H.H. the Maharaja thereon,” File No. 1 (3)-P(Secret)/1933. Foreign and Political Dept. ACC No. 2925/IOR./12325, NDC [National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, containing copies of some documents in India Office Library, London].

<sup>69</sup>For details of the controversy, see Brass, pp. 182–234 and Khalidi, pp. 131–52

<sup>70</sup>Rahman, pp. 43–4.

became the University of the Punjab in 1882. But neither the college nor the university could become vernacular-medium universities. As time went by, the degrees of Bachelor and Master in Oriental Learning (B.O.L. and M.O.L.) fell into disuse and the regular B.A. and M.A. became popular.

To some extent, however, the Oriental department of the college and the university did contribute to promoting Urdu. In 1874, for instance, there were classes in proficiency in Urdu; a number of books were written and translated into Urdu; in the 1880s the proceedings of the senate were supposed “to be conducted as far as possible in the vernacular”; and in 1914 the Syndicate agreed that a lectureship in Urdu would be created, which, however, didn’t come about until 1928, when Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Shīrānī—the author of the thesis that Urdu was born in the Punjab—was appointed. He was followed in the post by the scholar Saiyid ‘Abdu ’l-Lāh (1940). Saiyid ‘Abdu ’l-Lāh contributed much towards replacing English by Urdu in Pakistan. In 1945 the Urdu lectureship was upgraded to a readership and a Board of Study was created to supervise it. However, it was only in 1948, one year after the creation of Pakistan, that the university started teaching Urdu literature at the masters level.<sup>71</sup> In short, the experiment of using Urdu to teach all subjects in universities controlled by the state did not succeed. It did, however, succeed in Hyderabad which was outside the direct control of the British.

**The Hyderabad Experiment:** The state of Hyderabad, in Deccan, was ruled by a Muslim since 1724. In the time of Mīr ‘Uṣmān ‘Alī Khān (1886–1967), the seventh Nizam, it became the laboratory for a very unique and ambitious experiment—that of using Urdu in the higher domains of power: the administration, courts, education, finance, and so on. The inhabitants of the state, who were mostly Hindus, spoke different languages. According to the Census of 1921, the language-wise distribution of the population was: Telugu: 60,15,174 speakers; Marathi: 33,94,858; Kanarese: 15,36,928; and Urdu: 12,90,866.

One major step in making Urdu the vehicle of thought and culture in Hyderabad was the creation of the Osmania University in 1917. It was the brainchild of Sir Akbar Hydari, the prime minister of the Nizam, who is

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<sup>71</sup>Most of the details in this paragraph are taken from Ghulām Ḥusain Żulfiqār, *Ṣad-sāla Tārīkh-e Jāmi‘a Panjāb* (Lahore: The University of the Punjab, 1982), pp. 40–50, 79, 139, 217, 240.

also known for promoting Urdu in other domains of power.

To the Muslims of Hyderabad, Urdu must have appeared as an anti-colonial symbol, or at least a way of asserting pride in Oriental culture, because the famous pan-Islamist Jamālu 'd-Dīn Afghānī was in favor of using it as a medium of instruction in the university.<sup>72</sup> The university granted intermediate certificates from 1919, and Urdu was introduced at the B.A. and M.A. levels soon afterwards (see Appendix). All subjects, except English, were taught in Urdu, and English texts were translated into Urdu to achieve that end. The university's bureau of translation became the most important vehicle for the creation of new terms to express modern concepts. By 1937, 40,724 technical terms had been fashioned and 176 books translated from other languages into Urdu.<sup>73</sup> Despite occasional protests by students—such as the protest of the 60 students of the medical faculty in 1926, who were all thrown out—even medicine was taught in Urdu.

The Osmania University, being the first institution to impart the European kind of learning in India, became a symbol of pride for Indian Muslims. As the Urdu-Hindi controversy had raised Muslim consciousness about the symbolic significance of Urdu, Osmania stood for success. It meant, above all, that Muslims could manage their own affairs in the intellectual realm in their own language. Exactly because of these reasons, the British perceived the university to be a threat to their interests. A report even warns that “many of the translating staff and students are developing objectionable views.” In the elections to the Syndicate, the same report laments, “the party that is advocating German education for those Hyderabad students who go to Europe got a footing.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. B.K. Bawa, *The Last Nizam: The Life and Times of Mir Osman Ali Khan* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 79.

<sup>73</sup>“Osmania University,” *Great Britain and the East* (28 October 1937), pp. 3512.

<sup>74</sup>Most of the information on Osmania University is drawn from Report on the International Situation of the Hyderabad State for the fortnight ending 15th October, 1926 from the Resident of Hyderabad to the Political Secretary, H.E. The Crown Representative (30 April 1832), R/1/1/1462 ACC No. 9149 at NDC; 30 April 1932, ACC No. 7526 IOR in NDC; Report from the Resident of Hyderabad to the Political Secretary, H.E. The Crown Representative, 30 April 1932, ACC No 7520 IOR at NDC; Letter of the Resident of Hyderabad to the Secretary of H.E The Crown Representative, 14 February 1942, No. 5618-A(C), 14 Feb 1942; Letter from the Resident of Hyderabad to the Secretary of H.E. The

The main point at issue was whether the vernacular languages of India could be vehicles for higher learning. Testifying before the Blatter Commission in Bombay on 4 October 1924, Sir Ross Masood, Minister of Education in the Hyderabad State, vehemently asserted that they could. He said he would create a university for each linguistic group in India if funds permitted. However, he also maintained that in Hyderabad even those whose mother-tongue was not Urdu knew it very well because of exposure to it. “Even if you go to a village in the jungles,” he remarked, “which is [*sic*] 150 miles from the nearest railway station, and which has a population of, say, about 300 people, you will find Marathi boys speaking Urdu....”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, Masood supported two policies—apparently that of the vernacularization of higher education, and actually that of its Urduization. The former he defended on economic grounds (if there were more funds it was ideal), the latter on political ones. A closer reading of his interview, and of Hyderabad’s policy on the whole, suggests that Hyderabad Muslims, themselves Urdu-speaking, wanted their language to dominate in all areas. Masood claimed that “Urdu is spoken from Peshawar to Patna”<sup>76</sup>—a sentiment echoed by Muslim leaders during the Pakistan Movement in which Urdu served as an identity symbol for the Muslims.

That is why Hyderabad did not stop at Osmania. It went on to implement a policy of Urduization over the whole state. Part of this policy was making the use of Urdu compulsory in all secondary schools. Up to 1941 there were 363 out of 444 high schools which used the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. Among them there were also 61 schools for Europeans which were exempted from teaching Indian

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Crown Representative, No. 1928-C, 2 October 1944, ACC No. 7223 L/P&S/13/1239 at NDC; “H.E.H. the Nizam’s Government’s ‘Urdu Medium of Instruction’ Policy,” D.O. No. 97-C, 18 Jan. 1944, ACC No. 7233 L/P&S/1239 at NDC; “H.E.H. The Nizam Government’s ‘Urdu Medium Instruction’ Policy,” Letter from the Resident of Hyderabad to the Secretary of H.E. The Crown Representative, D.O. No. 2595-C, 14 December 1943, ACC No. 7223 P&S/13/1239 at NDC; and “Revised Scheme for the Reorganization of Education in H.E.H the Nizam’s Dominions,” Letter from the Resident, Hyderabad, to Secretary of H.E. The Crown Representative, Appendixes N & O IOR L/P&S/13/1239 ACC No. 7223, NDC.

<sup>75</sup>See his *National Education a Bold Experiment at Osmania University* (rpt. Islamabad: National Language Authority, 1987), p. 20; see also pp. 21 and 29.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

languages. These English-medium schools, in common with the rest of British India, also catered to 33.5 per cent Indians—mostly from rich and powerful families. There was also a college, the Nizamiyyah College, that allowed students to take the Madras University examinations in English.

In 1941, however, the Nizam's government ordered a common examination for all pupils from 1944 onwards. It was also stipulated that the Madras University system would be replaced by that of the Osmania (i.e., in Urdu) in five years, that all secondary schools would be Urdu-medium ones and that Urdu would be the only language of higher education, culture and employment in the state. However, it did allow the use of "recognised mother tongues" at the primary level.<sup>77</sup>

The resistance to this policy came from the English-medium schools, especially those at Secunderabad, and from the Hindus. The former requested that they should be allowed to continue as before, but the highest British officials decided to take no action against the Nizam's policy.

The Hindus, on the other hand, resisted much more vehemently. The Maharashtra Prashad, the Hindu Praja Mandal and Hindus in general protested through letters to the British officials, requests to the Nizam's government and public airing of their views. The Hindu Praja Mandal wrote on 9 November 1941, to the Viceroy that:

The Osmania University, that guides the educational policy of the State, instead of extending equal help to the different provincial languages of this State, viz., Telugu, Marathi and Canarese—caters only for the desires and aspirations of Urdu, which is not the language of the 89 per cent of the state population—the Hindus.<sup>78</sup>

The policy was termed a "death blow [*sic*] to Hindu culture" in the protest and Urdu was called an instrument of coercion. The Nizam's government explained that the mother-tongues could be studied both at the primary and at M.A. levels but that the medium of instruction would be uniform as educated people needed *one* language for communication

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<sup>77</sup>Cf. Nawab Ali Yawar Jang, Private Secretary to H.E.H. the Nizam to the Resident, Hyderabad State. In a letter to Secretary to H.E. The Crown Representative, D.O. No. 47-C, 18 Jan 1944. ACC No. 7233. L/P&S/1239 at NDC.

<sup>78</sup>See "Appendix C" in the "Letter of the Resident" of 14 Feb. 1942. No. 2166, 9 November 1941, from the General Secretary, Hyderabad State Hindu Praja Mandal Sunder Bhawan, Gowliguda, Hyderabad to His Excellency the Viceroy, New Delhi, NDC.

and employment.<sup>79</sup> The Maharashtra Prashad countered that the mother-tongues were marginalized and the lip service paid to them in theory was merely propaganda.<sup>80</sup>

Some British officers suspected that Hydari's championing of Urdu might have an anti-British bias. However, Sir Arthur Lothian, the Resident at the Nizam's court concluded:

[T]he predominating motive of Sir Akbar Hydari, the original protagonist of the policy, was to enforce a Muslim culture throughout the state and so strengthen the Muslim hold on Hyderabad in the event of Federation or independence for India in any other form.<sup>81</sup>

The British, however, did not interfere and the Nizam's policy continued till the Hyderabad State was absorbed by India in 1948. Whatever the injustice of Hyderabad's language policy—and like all political policies it was meant to increase and consolidate the power of the Muslim ruling élite of Hyderabad—it did serve to leave behind a symbol of pride in Urdu for the future. This symbol was Osmania.

The pride in Osmania was political in nature. Osmania was a symbol of autonomy, even of defiance of the dictates of the Raj which insisted that higher knowledge could only be given in English. Indeed, A.C. Lothian did say as much when he wrote in one of his reports to Sir Kenneth Fitze, Secretary to the Crown Representative:

A genuine Muslim patriotism also no doubt had its part, as their Government is very conscious of the fact that the Hyderabad State is the last surviving fragment of the great Mughal Empire.<sup>82</sup>

It was partly because of these political motivations that in pre-Partition days a number of universities located in the area which became Pakistan passed resolutions in favor of using more Urdu, like Osmania, in

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<sup>79</sup>Cf. Jang.

<sup>80</sup>See "Letter of the Resident" of 2 Oct. 1944. ACC No. L/P&S/13/1239, NDC.

<sup>81</sup>"From the File on Hyderabad Affairs, Public & Judicial Department," seen on 9 July 1944 by the political committee quoting Sir Arthur Lothian's letter. D.O. No. 2595-C, ACC No. 7233, NDC.

<sup>82</sup>See the Resident's letter of 14 Dec. 1943. D.O. No. 2595-C, ACC No. 7233, NDC.



teaching at higher levels. In Pakistan too the Urdu lobby—which became associated with Islam and right wing policies—argued in favor of teaching in Urdu at all levels quoting Osmania by way of example. The question was not a practical one: which language is best for teaching at which level? Rather, the question went much deeper, to something more basic: what identity, what values, what world view should we support?<sup>83</sup>

Urdu was symbolic of Muslim identity and its teaching supported a world view in which the “other” was either Hindu or British. It was the language of the mobilization of Muslims for the demand for Pakistan and hence it constructed a “Muslim” identity focusing on the similarities between Muslims and their differences from Hindus. Such a point of view, based as it was on Islam as the major identity marker, had the potential of becoming overwhelmingly religious. It also had the potential of being anti-ethnic. Thus, in Pakistan, Urdu was to become the symbol of an Islamic Pakistani identity. A corollary of insistence upon this identity entailed the negation, or at least the downplaying of, Pakistan’s other ethnic and linguistic identities. This unwelcome aspect of Urdu, however, deserves more detailed treatment.

**Conclusion:** Urdu took the place of Persian in some formal domains in north India and the areas now in Pakistan mostly owing to British policies. However, while Persian was the language of the state in the highest domains, Urdu was not—that position was occupied by English. Linguistically speaking, the Muslim élite adopted English as a status symbol instead of Persian. However, the Muslims of north India in particular and those of other parts of British India in general, also started associating with Urdu as an identity symbol. Urdu also became associated with Islam while English was associated with Western liberal ideas and élitism. In 1947, on the eve of the independence and partition of India, Urdu inherited a complex history full of unresolvable and often contradictory associations. Because of these associations, it was opposed by ethnic nationalists and despised by the English-educated élite in Pakistan. In India it became a Muslim preserve and the site of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. In short, Urdu is one of the most politically significant languages in South Asia; hence, the more we understand the processes by which it spread, the more insights we will gain into the language-politics of this part of the world. □

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<sup>83</sup>I deal with these issues more fully in my *Language and Politics in Pakistan*; see, especially, pp. 56–7 and 234–40.

**Appendix**  
**Urdu in the Universities of British India**

University	Year Urdu was Introduced	Level
1. Osmania	1919	Urdu was the medium of instruction; B.A. examination held in 1923; M.A. in 1925
2. Allahabad	1922	B.A. in 1922; M.A. in 1926
3. Lucknow	1922	B.A. in 1922; M.A. in 1948
4. Agra	1928	B.A. & M.A.
5. Calcutta	1933	M.A.
6. Madras	1919	Urdu was an additional subject in M.A.
7. Aligarh	1934	M.A. Earlier than that Urdu was used to teach history, geography and mathematics in the Oriental department since 1881
8. Delhi	1948	B.A. & M.A.
9. Jamia Millia Islamia (Delhi)	1963	B.A. in 1963; M.A. in 1971–72; Urdu was the medium of instruction since 1920
10. Punjab (Lahore)	1869	Urdu was the medium of instruction in some subjects in the Oriental section; a proficiency examination was also given in it from the 1870s; it became an optional subject in B.A. in 1827 and its M.A. was established in 1948

Source: (for items 1–9) Muḥammad Ṣābirīn, *Yūnīvarsīṭī Darājāt kē Urdū Nīṣābāt*

*kā Taḥqīqī-Tanqīdi Muḥāli‘a* (Delhi: Privately published, 1999), pp. 14–52; (for item 10) Ghulām Ḥusain Żulifiqār, *Şad-sāla Tārikh-e Jāmi‘a Panjāb* (Lahore: The University of the Punjab, 1982), pp. 101, 163 and 240.