

Challenges to Urdu in the post 1857 period and the Role of Ulema in the promotion of Urdu

*Shahnaz Shah

**Prof. Dr. Kaleemullah Barech

ABSTRACT:

This article aims at analyzing the political and social aspects, causes and effects of promotion of Urdu in the post 1857 scenario when the decline of the Muslim rule from India and the dawn of British rule accelerated the pace of communal and lingual strife which ultimately politicized the cause of Urdu driving it to many controversies. These controversies along the politicization of the communal as well as the lingual hostilities and animosities soon triggered religious partition of the communities laying the foundations of the Pakistan movement in the later stages. This article will discuss the political, social and lingual issues pertaining to Urdu in the wake of the fiasco of the mutiny of 1857.

Key words: Urdu, 1857, lingual, Muslims, Hindus, Persian, Subcontinent.

Introduction:

Language is the identity of a nation. It bears the social, cultural and moral values of a particular nation and projects to them. A nation without a language is crippled and ceases to exist in the comity of nations as it fails to project the realization of its existence to the world.¹ The case of Urdu is not similar to any language of its sort. It bears a distinctive identity, and, what makes it even more significant is that it has been adapted by people whose original languages were not Urdu. It has been embraced by different communities within the subcontinent.

Urdu was the source that united the suppressed and victimized Muslims of the pre-partition India controlled by the British. It was the main source of their spirit and enthusiasm to emancipate them from British oppression and Hindu dominance. Urdu is the national identity of modern Pakistan and one of the widely respected and rich languages of the world. Urdu is one of the few languages of the world which have registered a spontaneous evolution and growth in spite of the fact that Urdu is not the original language of the Indians. Its origin is based on the Urdu nation there did not exist any nation of this sort ever throughout India since the primitive ages. The Urdu language, in fact, was more like a constructed language amalgamating and assimilating the tones, vocabulary and diction of different languages spoken in the subcontinent. The Muslim rule from the Arabs and Persians, later from the rulers from the Turkish origin gave significant impetus to the spontaneous growth of Urdu.²

Today, Urdu is integral to the national identity of millions of people living in Pakistan as well as all over the globe. In its easiness of the vocabulary and its grammar and the sweetness of its speaking has attracted millions of people to adapt it as their second language. But Urdu in single millennia has left an unprecedented scale of impact on the

*Ph.D Scholar, Pakistan Study Center, University of Balochistan, Quetta.

Email: shahnazshah171@gmail.com

**Professor, Department of History, University of Balochistan, Quetta.

politics, culture and society of south Asia. It is truly incredible for language to grow so rapidly which does not have a spontaneous origin³.

Aims and objectives:

This research is aimed at exploring the role of the Ulema in the promotion of Urdu language and their efforts for the protection of Urdu. Their literary contributions are discussed at length in this article keeping in view the period of the post 1857 period. This was a very fragile political period as the war of independence had ended with a fiasco and the Muslims were under severe and brutal oppression of the British who had taken the control of the realms of power after dismembering the Mughal Empire. The given research also focuses on the attempts of the Muslims linguists and intellectuals along the politicians who served Urdu by defending it against the nefarious designs of the Hindu conservatives and nationalists.

Urdu in the politics of subcontinent in the post 1857 period:

Quoting the famous historian and orientalist, Gardine de Tuassi who was a very famous French linguist, the Hindus always attached Urdu with Muslim rule in India, thus, giving Urdu a poetical shape. To make it further precise and explicit, the Urdu language and grammar as a whole had registered tremendous boost during the Muslim rule. Under the patronage of the literature loving Muslims, especially, under the Mughal rulers Urdu had reached the zenith of its prestige as a language of communication and, more importantly, as a language of representing the sentiments of the public⁴. Altaf Hussain Hali was one of the few educators like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan whose efforts for the promotion of Urdu literature are influential on the history of Urdu anthology. He largely contributed in developing the new poetic style "The Poetics" the ambition of which was to serve the Muslim interests of India as a community. He wrote the famous book on poetry "Muaqad-dima e Sher o Shairi" reflecting the transforming patterns taking place in the society.

Unlike his contemporary Hussain Azad who condemned the traditional poetry style, Hali did not outrightly reject the orthodox poetry, he believed to introduce modifications in poetry and prose to make them more realistic and natural. While explaining his views regarding the space in the Urdu literature for modification, he used the western literary influence with a deep touch of the Arabic as well as the Persian literature⁵. He presented a combination of the platonian idealism and banthamite utilitarianism. His literary theory heavily influenced his work. He believed that Urdu language and literature was in need of an odd theory to get rid of the unnecessary things and influences on the literature also on the language. Much material in the literature and many words and slang phrases in the Urdu language were artistically weak and morally beyond satisfactory. His literary theory aimed at refining both the language and the literature from certain immoral and less artistic material. The Aligarh institute wanted a wholesale modernization of Urdu which pushed Shibli Nomani toward ambivalence. Soon, he emerged as a moderate reformist and became a critic of the extreme modernization style of Aligarh. He disassociated his views from that of Aligarh and did not want to associate with Deoband as the latter was too extreme in its conversation for maintaining the traditional patterns. He joined the Nadvat ul Ulema in Lucknow.

He did a series of scholarly work containing critical work and vies on Urdu of moderate nature. Still, as compared to the other works of Hali whose criticism was more philosophical and relevant, Shibli Nomani's work was less influential. The center of his focus was the adaptation of Urdu fashioned by classical Islamic literature influenced by Persian. In order to retain the orthodox style in his writings, he divided Urdu in two areas; the non-Indic Urdu and the recent decent Urdu⁶. He explained that the recent decedent Urdu as a nee based literature that was formed spontaneously in response to the colonial rule, the former period was the Hindu-Muslim identity. Urdu further got a magnificent boost with the introduction of Urdu. Deputy Nazeer Ahmed is regarded as the father of orthodox Urdu novels. He was a contemporary of Shibli Nomani and Hali⁷. His didactic novels were termed with the fruits of moral and social behavior, carrying lessons for social conduct and productive work. His novels besides depicting the social and political plight of the society carried lessons and straightforward means to steer out of their problems. The novels gave a new color to Urdu philosophy and literary movement throughout India. The novel writing of the colonial period in India did not resemble the western influence as did the poetry. The western novels did portray romanticism and fictional characterization to attract greater audience, but the Urdu novels of that period had very little space for such romanticism.⁸

India was facing a grave colonial age of suppressive rule and exploitation whereas the divide and rule policy of the British government was working its charm as the Indians were engaged in communal strife. The romanticism in any format of the literature could captivate the audience who were moved by the liberating ideas filled with revolutionary spirit. The novels of Nazeer Ahmed were very famous among the people and instantly pure from pleasure and levity.

The odd theory was widely accepted and the subsequent literary works and move-ments were, actually, efforts by the writers to come to terms with the theore-tical explanation of Hali. His vision was even acclaimed by the critics. His majorcritique was on ghazal in poetry. His odd theory propogated the devaluation of these lyric or ghazal which revolved around the concept of romanticism (ishq or love).⁹

It projected the posture of the multi-cultural homogeneity which the Hindus had always resented tooth and nail. Apart from this, it had gained widespread acclaim as the language that could represent the masses and connect them to the rulers proving a language to establish contact between the rulers and their subjects.

The real issue of difference of languages appeared after 1857 when for the first time in history, languages began to be associated with the religions of the communities who spoke them. Urdu was largely associated with the Muslims and Hindi with the Hindus driving serious wedge in the social bonds. Referring to the French oreintalist once again, indeed, the first rift in the shape of Hindi-Urdu controversy unleashed such a wave of hatred among the Muslims and Hindus creating an unbridgeable chasm among these communities¹⁰. Among all the eras of Muslim rule over the entire subcontinent, the Mughal era is regarded as the best and the most glorious period when the empire prospered much udder their reign. Similarly, Urdu too was nurtured by the Mughal and they sowed the seeds of Urdu as a leading and noble language of modern India. With

reference to the illustrious and standard dictionary, “the Farhang I Aasfia” Urdu is a composition that was given birth by the combination of the words and the dialects. It was the intermingling of Bhasha, Arabic and the Persian which laid the founding stones of Urdu as a language¹¹. It is much to the credit of Urdu that when it took the central stage in the political tensions of India. It created the feeling of national identity and separatism for the first time among the Muslim masses. It conveyed their patriotic sentiments and drove them toward a coherent path which ultimately united them on the political platform as well. Another reason which instigated the Hindus to boycott Urdu and gave the Muslims a feeling of glory and unity was its script.

There is no denying the fact that the most of the words of Urdu are borrowed from different languages and Hindi is one of those languages, its script was distinct. Hindi was written in the Devanagari script while Urdu was written in the Persian script. The application of the contradicting scripts in written formed the base of the lingual divisions. Hindus would never accept the imposition of a language the script of which resembled Persian or Arabic; both of whom had ruled over India¹².

On the other hand, the Muslims began to hold Urdu on high esteem on account of its connection with the pristine glory of the Muslims of the past. It reminded them of the glorious rule of the Muslims over India for a millennium, which as a result of the thinking bolstered their patriotic feelings. As a matter of fact, Urdu had become the emblem of power and prestigious glory of the Muslims. The first political resentment of the Hindus against Urdu came in 1837 when the British declared Urdu as the official language of India.¹³

The Muslims mark this year a launching pad of Muslim political struggle and lingual or communal consciousness. Previously, Urdu was treated as an ordinary language even by the Muslims, but the year of 1837 witnessed a tremendous boost in its prestige in the society. Its remarkable prestige and tremendous boost in the wake of this announcement can be gauged from the fact that in 1863 in Uttar Pradesh out of 23 renowned and most widely published newspapers, 17 were in Urdu and merely 4 were in Hindi¹⁴. Hindu fanatic writers were often seen giving statements with regard to Urdu, some of those statements vehemently opposed Urdu. The other statements were aimed at ridiculing it. The satirical statements of Babu Shri Prasad, an ardent and staunch advocate of Hindi language “Now Urdu is assuming the status of court national language” bear testimony to their attitude toward Urdu. Some politicians of that time regarded Hindi-Urdu controversy as mere an offshoot of actual ongoing political tensions among the communities of India, it paved the way for larger interminable conflicts¹⁵. As a result, ripples of distrust and the subsequent current of political maelstrom had engulfed the whole religio-social scene on the subcontinent. The religious movement of establishing of the Ram Raj by the bigoted Hindus was also and fundamentally based on their inveterate enmity for the Muslims. It is imperative to mention the Ram Raj movement in this chapter. Aside its religious and social posture, the ram raj movement also intensified the communal discord among the Indians¹⁶. The Muslims of India never wanted Urdu to supersede the other languages of India, as a matter of fact; they only wanted to cling with it to maintain their socio-cultural identity. However, the flimsy arguments and the half-hearted claims could not be substantiated by

the decline of the popularity of Hindi newspapers and magazines.

The circulation of the Hindi magazines was woefully on decline. The myth of the Hindi popularity was exposed by the collapse of the newspaper of Bahu Prasad Shiva. His Shimla Akhbar so miserably failed that its circulation was confined to merely 52 copies per day. In a country of Hindi where millions of Hindus spoke Hindi, the circulation of a national newspaper with a mere 52 copies was truly quite embarrassing. In the year of 1874, the chief commissioner of Avadh wrote that Urdu had gained more popularity ever since it was made the official language.¹⁷

From Lucknow, 172 books were published in Urdu whereas the publication of the books in Hindi was 42. The points and facts give above at length demonstrate that the movements launched against Urdu were not intellectual or literary movements, they were initiated and sponsored by the Hindu fanatics enhancing the political rifts. As it has been evident that the movement against Urdu was neither a literary one nor it was intellectually motivated, rather it was triggered by political putsch. Like the other entire Hindu maneuver, the politically motivated Hindi movements were aimed at striking at the roots of the vestiges of the Muslims.

The Hindi-Urdu controversy from Banaras 1867:

The year of 1867 marked the first actual rift in the communal harmony of India in the shape of the Hindi-Urdu controversy from Banaras. Banaras had never been historically hostile to the Muslims, but the Hindus of Banaras were quite displeased with the interaction of Urdu in the official circles of the Indian British Empire. They always sought endeavors to nip it in the bud of which the Banaras 1867 controversy is a glaring example¹⁸. The campaign, furthermore, add salt to the injuries of the Muslims by demanding the imposition of Bhasha and Nagri scripts instead of Urdu. This specific event sparked much hue and cry among the Muslims causing retaliatory measures by the Muslims.

Any change in the script can, thus, prove catastrophic for the existence of the very community. The apt and deeply observed words of Toynbee are essential to quote here, “there was no need to burn the great libraries of the ancient empires whenever they were conquered. It brought disgrace and bad name to the conquerors. All it was enough to change the script of the language of a nation”. The words of Toynbee do carry weight¹⁹. A language and its script complement each other. Damage to a one is equally disastrous to the latter. He means that a nation can be defeated without waging war against them. They can be defeated and their existence can be annihilated through the changing of the script. The intensity of anguish and anger among the Muslims can be gauged from the fact they had realized that their existence was connected to the language which had emerged as the symbol of their voice while the existence of the language was connected to its script.²⁰

Efforts of the Muslims; especially Ulema to protect Urdu:

The post 1857 scenario gave tremendous impetus to the literary tendencies. Many personalities rose to the occasion like Altaf Hussain Hali, Mohammad Hussain Azad, Allama Mohammad Iqbal, Mulana Shibli Nomani and Mulana Hasrat Mohani and many more. Where the other leading literary figures had their role in protecting Urdu, there the role of the Ulema was also unparalleled. The role of the Ulema in bringing Urdu in close

association to Islam was the best achievement in this regard. Urdu rapidly became the identity of the Muslims of the subcontinent as it had been attached to Islam as the sole lingual representation of the Muslims of united India. "There was immense need for uniting the masses on a single platform and to impart awareness to them so the cause of Urdu could be strengthened. For the very reason, Nawab Mohsin ul Mulk conducted several public meetings in different cities on different occasions. The purposes of these public meetings by the Urdu defense association in various cities were to protest the decision of the govt."²¹ In other words, the Urdu defense association was formed as an immediate reaction to the orders of Anthony MacDonnell to scrap Urdu from the curriculum. For protesting against the government and for lodging their agitation to view their grievances, the given organization convened another meeting on 15 August 1900 in Lucknow. The meeting enraged the authorities who began to keep a vigilant watch upon the activities of the organization. Agitating against the direct orders of the lieutenant governor was something that the authorities could never allow to magnify²². The meeting at Lucknow was presided by Mohsin ul Mulk who passed a resolution which was hailed and endorsed by all the participants unanimously. The resolution contained the protest with the material that the decree the government issued on 18 April 1900. The defense association associated the cause of Urdu with Islam and declared it an unjust action against the interest of Islam²³. Though, Urdu was genuinely associated with Islam or any other religion, the special fact is that the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in India had generously adapted Urdu to maintain their homogeneity, hence associating it with the cause of Islam greatly helped Mohsin ul Mulk to increase his mass support. The resolution also contained the fact that the introduction of Nagri was only beneficial to the people of western and northern Avadh as Nagri was not largely spoken by other states and it was confined to only northern Avadh and western Avadh²⁴. The attachment of father of Urdu, Molvi Abdul Haq for the glory and uplifting of Urdu in the colonial period will always be remembered. He was a scholar and linguist. Ameer Khsuro was called the father of Urdu literature because he was the first person to use poetry in Urdu literature while Molvi Abdul Haq is called the father of Urdu language. An eminent linguist and scholar, he was the first person to make the call and raise his voice for making Urdu the national language of Pakistan²⁵. He was a dominant critic of modern language and he inculcated in his students the zeal for the criticism of linguistic keeping in view the modern changes and trends and he also developed among his students the value and appreciation of Urdu as a language and as the symbol of their representation. "Abdul Haq took the organization to a new level of fame. More importantly, he was a leading figure in all the agitations against the Hindu movement (these movements aimed at promoting Hindi at the expense of Urdu). His vigor and campaigning gained accelerated momentum in the wake of his retirement from the university. In order to give his efforts for the protection of Urdu further strength, he joined the All India Muslim League after his retirement and used the Muslim League platform as a launching pad for his campaign. He vigorously campaigned and through his writings and speech, he protected Urdu and he also inspired the other intellectuals to join him for the defense of Urdu".²⁶

The Ulema and Urdu:

The Ulema were not behind anyone in their struggle for the protection as well as the promotion of Urdu. The best thing about their struggle in the promotion of Urdu was the infusion of the religious content in their literary works. Against the nefarious designs of the Hindus against Urdu, many notable Ulema like Molana Hasrat Mohani, Molana Mohammad Ali Johar and Molana Zafar Ali came forward and through their literary works teemed with the religious content; they invoked a new life to Urdu²⁷. The infusion of the religious content in the poetry, in the columns of magazines and in the short stories or novels, was aimed at embarking upon consciousness among the Muslim youth to be prepared against the Hindus and their connivance with the British who had invoked the divide and rule policy very cunningly²⁸. To further add to it, it was due to the efforts of the Ulema that through their religious insight and youthful inspiration, they used Urdu as the launching pad for the freedom movement of Pakistan. It was due to their struggle and dedication through the literary works that the youth rallied around them and got inspired to attach their feelings with Urdu. "It was the struggle of the Ulema that Urdu got the status of the Muslim identity throughout the subcontinent. By the time Molana Hasrat Mohani demanded full partition in 1921 along with the Khilafat movement going on in the subcontinent; Urdu language had pretty much become inextricably associated to the freedom movement of Pakistan. Thus, the attainment of Pakistan meant the protection of Urdu once and for all"²⁹.

Literary contributions of Ulema for Urdu Language:

The literary contributions of the Ulema for the promotion of Urdu stand on a special position in the history of India. Among the leading literary figures of Ulema, Molana Ashraf Thanwi is a truly notable name. He wrote 345 books and the range of his letters and anecdotes surpasses 1000 literary works many of which are in Urdu. His disciples like Molana Shabir Ahmed Usmani on the later stages played an undeniable role in the freedom movement of Pakistan.

Many Ulema also translated the Arabic and Persian books into Urdu which is deemed as a great contribution for Urdu because it widened the scope of Urdu among the youth as well as the Muslims across the subcontinent. The greatest contribution in terms of translation was made by the sons of Shah Waliullah Dehlvi as they translated the Holy Quran from Arabic into Urdu. They were the first persons to translate Quran in the Urdu language. Shah Rafiuddin Dehlvi and Shah Abdul Qadir Dehlvi are acclaimed throughout the subcontinent for this achievement. Following are the major translation works compiled by the Ulema during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tafsir Al-Hawi-Taqreer-e-Anwar al-Tanzil by Moulana Fkhrul-Hasan, Tafsir ibn Kathir by Abu-l-Fida 'Imaad-d-Deen Ismaa'eel Ibn Abi Hafs 'Umar Ibn Katheer Ad-Dimashqi, Kamaalayn Sharh Tafsir al-Jalalayaan by Moulana Muhammad Naem Deobandi, Tafseer-e-Jawaahir-e-Azeezee (Translation of Fat'hul-Azeezee) by Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlawi & Tafsir Mazhari by Usmani Mujaddidi Ann-Naqshibandiyah are some of the leading translation works that greatly helped the promotion of the Urdu language. In addition to that, Molana Hasrat Mohani also wrote many books in Urdu. His 9 volumes of Deewane Mohani are the most notable along with the Intekhaab e Sukhan and Kulliyat e Hasrat. Among the other famous Ulema who laid their lives for the protection of Islam,

for the promotion of the cause of the Muslims and the promotion of Urdu was Molana Mohammad Ali Johar. He was a prolific writer with immense energy of Islamic thoughts in his Urdu writings. He wrote Kalam e Johar. He was also a notable poet of the Urdu language and most of the poetry of his had a religious touch³⁰. The role of Molana Abul Kalam Azad in the promotion of Urdu is also highly valuable. His writings too were replete with the religious spirit. His famous book written in Urdu with a religious color was Ghubar e Khatir. Although the book is a collection of letters but except one or two letters, all other letters are unique and most of the letters deal with complex issues such as existence of God, the origin of religions, the origin of music and its place in religion. He also wrote the Tazkirah e Tarjumatul Quran.³¹

Conclusion:

After the experience of the Bengali-Urdu tussle, the center should have adapted a more lenient policy toward the other regional languages, but they suffered badly. The dictatorial years from 1955-1970 (the period of One Unit), and the periods from 1977-1988 and 1999-2008 did not allow the regional languages to promote. The authoritative mindset associated the regional languages with nationalism. This false belief badly hampered the progress of the local languages proving injurious to their evolution. This policy caused the confrontation of the local as well as the provincial languages with the Urdu being unable to have their due representation blaming Urdu for the given negligence.

The basic element of a language is to represent the identity of a particular community or nation. It channels communication among the masses. Either it inspires good-will or it incites communicable discord or religious disdain is not the fault of the language at all. It is a flexible structure that goes with the flow of the policies and concerning behavior that prevail in the society. In the similar content, Urdu is not bad as it is depicted to the world. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru who admired the place and importance of a language for a nation said that a language with its rich past keeps its script integral to its own existence in which any change of vital nature can significantly change the course of the language disconnecting it from its rich heritage and history.

The importance of Urdu in the lives of the Muslims of subcontinent can be gauged from their attachment to Urdu as the symbol that could gather them to any platform that could represent them and their interests. The much politicized Urdu appears today, it was not like that in the subcontinent in the pre-partition period where the language was regarded as the symbol of their unity and strength. The language bore their identity and political representation. Much to the nation's chagrin, in the post independence era, the national policy could be established on the coherent path, as a result, the lingual differences created a political divide in Pakistan.

Today, Urdu is the voice of the 210 million people living in Pakistan. It has evolved and survived in spite of persistent Hindu efforts to sabotage it with the connivance of the British. It is true that in the post partition period, Urdu has been subjected to numerous lingual controversies; its true spirit and identity have not been lost. However, the government has to play its part along the important role of the intelligentsia and the people from the civil society have to realize that Urdu is the language that has socially kept them integrated in an otherwise culturally diverse society, therefore, it is their duty to

protect it and promote it while giving due importance to other regional as well as the minor languages at the same time.

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