

Punjab, Punjabi and Urdu, the Question of Displaced Identity: A Historical Appraisal

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General perception about the colonial state to have impinged only upon the political and economic aspects of the colony is not the whole truth. The author scrutinizes the question of identity and the process of transformation it went through primarily because of the preference accorded to Urdu over the native Punjabi. He therefore interrogates Partha Chatterjee's postulate of 'inner domain' or 'the domain of the spiritual' consisting of family and language which remained insular under colonial dispensation. In the case of Punjab, in particular the 'inner domain' was hit the hardest. Urdu instead of Punjabi subsequently became the identity marker of Punjab Muslims, marginalizing in the process the native language of the province. The writer also locates the emergence of communal identity because of Urdu's introduction as the official/court language in the Punjab. Official patronage helped Urdu to flourish tremendously. Organizations like *Anjuman-i-Punjab* were set up to popularize Urdu among the urban classes. All this was done at the expense of Punjabi. In 1927, Hafiz Mehmud Sheerani in his famous book *Punjab Mein Urdu* propounded a theory designating Punjab as the earlier form of Urdu. This paper however argues otherwise.

Colonialism was an all-pervasive phenomenon, subjugating 87 percent of the globe by 1914 and the Sub-Continent of course was no exception. It signified colossal change in the realms of economy and polity as well as administration, which attracted sufficient attention of the historians markedly from nationalist persuasion. However, the ascendancy of Marxist brand of historiography in India provided a deviation to the much-treaded and exclusionary path that the discourse of history had been coursing along since the days of *Dada Bhai Neero Ji*, *Palme Dutt*, *Mazumdar* followed by *Tara Chand* and *Muhammad Habib* discounting altogether the impact of colonialism on culture, language and pre-colonial intellectual and cognitive formulations. Nicholas B. Dirks laments that most of the scholars and analysts have turned a blind eye to the cultural effects of colonialism, considering it merely the 'inevitable logic of modernization and world capitalism.' More crucial question, in the eyes of Dirks remains yet to be unraveled, pertains to the 'cultural control' exercised by the Colonial state.¹

I

With the emergence of the Subaltern School in the 1980s, through the post-structuralist and post-orientalist critiques of colonial technologies of control employed by its exponents, unveiled new levels of sophistication into an inquiry about the different modes of colonial hegemony. Consequently the focus was

particularly zeroed in on how ‘the ‘deep structures’ and ‘surface forms’ of discursive production were altered by the introduction of new conceptual languages through colonialism.’² The modern normative categories introduced by the colonizers redefined and displaced already existing cultural and cognitive hierarchies and threw up ‘new indigenised forms of regarding and representing the social and natural world.’ To elucidate the point further, one feels alluding to Nicholas Dirks again. He underlines the importance of the Colonial knowledge that ‘enabled the conquest and was produced by it.’³ Moreover, cultural forms in ‘traditional’ societies were reconstructed and transformed by and through that knowledge. The people like William Jones, James Mill, Richard Temple, Denzel Ibbetson and host of other British administrators/scholars etc appropriated the indigenous knowledge. They, after recasting the acquired knowledge of the colony in the light of their own epistemic understanding and cultural context, imparted it back to the indigenous people.

Hence, Colonial masters not only assumed power over the physical self of the colonized but also made them to internalize the cognitive structures rooted specifically in the Western knowledge system as the universal truth. Therefore, Partha Chatterjee’s postulate which he seems to have applied on the whole Sub-Continent including Punjab whereby anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society, in which the ‘inner’ domain is bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity. The domain of ‘outside’ signifies materialism where West has assumed precedence over the East.⁴ As outside domain gains strength and the Western skills are profusely imitated, the need ‘to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture’ become greater. While locating one of the several implications of the anti-colonial nationalism, Partha Chatterjee designates the ‘domain of the spiritual’ as the ‘sovereign territory’ hence it does not allow colonial power to intervene in that very domain. Therefore in the spiritual/inner domain ‘the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power.’⁵ Social reform, language and family were the three components of the inner domain. Initially Indian reformers looked expectantly towards the colonial ruler to bring about some reformatory change in the existing social setup but soon after when the period of nationalism, according to Chatterjee, got under way, colonial intervention of any sort was not allowed, rather it was resisted. The ‘colonial intruder’ was kept at bay from both family and language also. Chatterjee further argues that ‘here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not western.’⁶ That argument may hold water in the case of Bengal or those areas where nationalism emerged with unequivocal support from Bengali *bhadralok* but the same can hardly work with the equal force in the areas like Punjab. Any such nationalism with its inner domain was precluded from mobilizing people against the Colonial regime.

K N Panikkar has critically examined Chatterjee’s contention that opens a new vista of perception of the subject. He holds, ‘there was no sphere of culture, inner or outer, which remained beyond colonial reach.’⁷ In the case of Punjab,

Panikkar's point seems to hold more plausibility where colonialism permeated so comprehensively that outer as well as inner domains of the Punjab's society stood completely transformed in the course of a few decades after its annexation in 1849. Panikkar, while commenting on Chatterjee's view, extends his argument and states, 'the resistance (against the colonial intrusion) occurred not because culture was a sovereign territory in which nationalism was already manifest, but because colonial intrusion threatened to revamp the existing cultural identities.'⁸ Panikkar's argument has in it an air of generalization as if the Colonial impact on the multiple cultures existing in India, can be explicated in the light of his assertion. Particularly in the Punjab, the resistance was articulated against the colonial intrusion through the reform movements which subsequently assumed the religious garb i.e. *Arya Samaj*, *Singh Sabha* and *Tehrik i Ahmadya*. Punjab, because of its plural religious character, stood totally atomized by the 1880s. Consequently the collective Punjabi identity had been torn apart due to many factors: evangelical activity and the official support lent to it, introduction of separate electorate in local bodies elections from 1883 onwards, restoration of *kine* slaughter and communal preference in the recruitment for government services, to highlight just a few. However, the introduction of Urdu as a vernacular and the second official language in the Punjab had the profoundest bearing in the construction of new and to a great extent mutually exclusive identities and cultures in the province.

In the narrative that follows, an attempt has been made to delineate the ways and means that the Colonial regime deployed in order to re-configure the contours of the Punjabi social formation and culture through the new forms of representation particularly through a language declared as a vernacular in the region by the British. Subsequently the same language, Urdu, became the cultural symbol of South Asian Muslims, including the Muslim populace of the Punjab. The process that entailed Urdu's introduction at the official level in the Punjab and the implications it wrought in the years to come with respect to identity formation is the central theme of the debate that unfolds hereafter. Later on, the officially cultivated 'native intelligentsia' in the words of Ranajit Guha, sanctified Urdu and elevated it as the only language in the Indian Sub Continent that is capable of articulating Muslim ethos and culture.

II

Throughout the Muslim rule, in the Punjab as well as in the rest of North India, all the official business was conducted in no other language but Persian. Even the Sikh rulers (1799-1849) after establishing their administrative control over the Punjab, persisted with Persian instead of introducing any radical change either in the administrative set up or the language of the *Darbar*. Not even when Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) himself knew even a single word of Persian. However, Persian had been abandoned, as the official language in British India in 1836 and English was its substitute.⁹ As the writ of British Raj extended, the impact and influence of the English extended correspondingly. Consequently, it struck firm roots as the medium for transacting official business in matter of a

few years; nevertheless it could not have a smooth sailing in the Punjab immediately after its annexation.

British administrators in the Punjab started facing problems soon after the new administrative set up was put in place there. These problems were more pronounced with respect to the judicial and criminal work particularly while recording witnesses in court proceedings. The 'local language' and 'the system of deciphering and translation' were at times found elusive because *Ahlmad* (Reader) could not be relied on whilst translating 'the deponents.'¹⁰ The gravity of the problem got compounded when the Secretariat of Board of Administration ran into a tangle regarding an appropriate choice for a court language as large number of phrases and native terms were virtually untranslatable therefore majority of the cases had a great deal of ambiguity in them. In these circumstances, English proved to be an inadequate instrument, which could let officers of Punjab Commission off the hook. They were clearly in need of some language in which the official business could be facilitated; also enabling the officers to be in touch with the public without any intermediary. Thus, the matter was referred to the Governor General with the recommendation that 'Urdu be allowed as the official language of the law courts of the Lahore and Jhelum Divisions and in the districts of Jhang and Pakpattan, whilst Persian should continue for the rest of the Punjab.'¹¹ The reference of the Punjab Government readily found favor with the Government of India and Urdu was accorded the status of the official language without any noticeable demur or delay for the conduct of court work in the two divisions. The Government of India, however, directed the Board of Administration 'that in criminal cases the confessions of prisoners should be taken down in his words of native dialect, a translation brief added if the dialect be one not generally known.'¹²

In the meantime, the opinions of the field officers were also sought through a circular in 1849, as to the adoption of a language for the conduct of administrative business. Great majority of the district and divisional officers could not detect any mentionable traces of Urdu in the respective areas under their charge. Court work was obstructed at times just because the *munshis* and rest of staff at the various districts had to endure substantial agony to negotiate with the newly introduced language in the courts. Correspondence between Deputy Commissioner *Hazara* Capt. Abbott and the Secretary of the Board of Administration, Mr. G. J. Christian, explicitly alludes to the difficulties posed to the officers while doing their court work. Commissioner Multan Division also reported in the negative with respect to the familiarity of Multani people with that language and showed concern. Jhang was the only exception where some people had a smattering of knowledge in Urdu. The same, more or less also held true in the case of Pakpattan. However, Urdu could manage to secure some niche in Lahore and its surroundings. Besides, Commissioner of Jhelum stated the emerging signs of Urdu's popularity in *Gujrat*. In most of the dispatches of the officers, they seem quite categorical in stating that the overwhelming number of people of the province could speak only Punjabi.¹³

By 1851 the Government of the Punjab were convinced that Urdu (in Persian script) had gained enough ground in the whole province that it could be adopted

without any further delay. As stated in the Administrative Report of that year, Punjabi that was being spoken by the local populace mostly living in the villages, had fast been losing currency and giving way to the ascendant, Urdu.¹⁴ In the same report it was also declared that Urdu had almost acquired the position of a *lingua franca*, therefore Punjabis, if imparted education in that language instead of English - which would be too difficult for them - it could produce encouraging results. Likewise, dispatches of the officers from different corners of the province started reaching the Board of Administration making heartening observations about Urdu's soaring graph of usage among the general public. In April 1851, Commissioner Multan pleaded for Urdu to be allowed as an official language in the District and three years later in the whole Division. Such instances must have provided members of the Board a substantial impetus to take the decisive measure in April 1851 whereby Urdu was announced as the language of courts in the entire Province.¹⁵ Peshawar and Hazara Divisions remained exceptions nevertheless. About Peshawar and Leiha Divisions with reference to Urdu as an official language, John Lawrence opined:

It should be considered that the Urdu is not the language of these Districts neither is Persian. But Urdu is well understood by the majority of our officers, whereas Persian is not. Of course many more of the people understand Urdu even in these Districts than Persian. Urdu is the 'Lingua Franca' of India and it is presumably but perceptibly becoming that of all the Districts in the Punjab even in the Derajat and Peshawar it is spreading in Hazara it is familiar to the people.

The introduction of Urdu into the Courts will tend to spread it still more rapidly.¹⁶

The above quoted statement of John Lawrence clearly reflects how sanguine, British officers had been about the future of Urdu in the Punjab and they were putting in virtually everything possible to make it acceptable to the people mostly because it ensured administrative convenience for them. The main reason for their doing so also figures in the above statement of John Lawrence. British officers were relatively more proficient in that language than Punjabi, the language of the common folk. Just to reinforce Urdu in the province an Urdu newspaper by the name of *Sarkari Akhbar* was brought out, containing 'a brief summary of the news of the month, abstracts of important trials and orders, changes, appointments and dismissals.'¹⁷ Subsequently Urdu owed quite a lot to journalism with many newspapers started coming out during the last quarter of the 19th century, *Chaudvin Sadi*, *Paisa Akhbar* and *Zamindar* to quote just a few.

The question of imparting instruction to the natives was, for the first time agitated 'in no less a document than the famous dispatch of Charles Wood' in 1854.¹⁸ This document has been called the 'Magna Carta of English Education in India' that called for a policy whereby 'English would be used in the elitist

domains of power but the vernaculars will be employed for the dissemination of knowledge among the people.¹⁹ It was in the same year (1854) that ‘the English officials working in Punjab had prepared a scheme for initiating an education system there along the lines evolved earlier in the north-western provinces.’²⁰ Proponent in chief in devising the plan for education in the Punjab was the first Director of Public Instruction of the province, William D. Arnold (1856-1859). He also lent full support to Urdu and as Krishna Kumar states, quoting Richey, ‘Urdu represented “the nearest approach that exists to a common vernacular”, and was therefore a fit medium of popular instruction.’²¹ Hence, the way was paved for ensuring the ascendancy of Urdu as a vernacular in the Punjab, making it into the only region in the Sub Continent where even the vernacular was not its own. A committee was constituted in 1865 to look into the possibility of considering favorably all such future candidates for employment, who had sufficient proficiency, if not in English, at least in the vernacular (Urdu). The Governor of the Punjab expressed his desire ‘that a thorough knowledge of Urdu orthography with correctness, as regards both idioms and spellings be regarded as *sine quo non*.’²² While not casting aspersions on Urdu or the status it came to enjoy through official patronage, it can justifiably be argued that by adopting a language that had hardly been in existence in the province on the eve of its annexation, resulted in the marginalization of a large number of people, particularly rural folk. It may not be surprising to know that the overwhelming majority of Punjabi people live in the rural areas even now. Naturally the proportion of the village dwellers would have been many times higher than what it is now. They were reduced to ahistorical status by simply denying them the language of their very own. Dr. Leitner, though a very ardent supporter of Urdu that he was, along with some other British officers suggested ‘Punjabi should be taught first to children before exposing them to the instruction of other languages.’²³ Equally important was the appropriation of their right of self-representation. Those who were not ready to accept the dictates of the Colonial regime to change the ‘inner’ domain of their culture, as Chatterjee says in *The Nation and its Fragments*, that they had been adhering to, for centuries were cosigned to homeostasis.

It would also be of great interest to note the discordant voice raised by the Deputy Commissioner of Shahpur Mr. J. Wilson. His assessment as to the low literacy rate was caused by the employment of Urdu with Persian script as the medium that was foreign to the people. Plethora of Punjabi dialects were in use simultaneously in the province therefore picking up one dialect and developing it into a language, understood by all Punjabi speakers would be difficult. Hence, ‘he proposed that the Roman character was the most suitable as it was a ‘character’ developed by speakers of Aryan languages and would suit the genius of the Punjabi tongue better than the Arabic character.’²⁴ To substantiate his point Wilson referred to the Census Report of 1891, saying that

only 4 per cent of the boys in the Punjab between the ages of five and fourteen inclusive were learning to write, the proportion among Hindus being 12 percent, and among Mussalmans, 3

percent; of the whole male population only 5.89 percent were able to read and write, the proportion among the commercial classes being 17.8 per cent, among the agricultural classes only 1.44 percent and among the artisan class only 0.88 percent.'

To the ordinary Punjabi village boy Urdu is almost as foreign as French would be to an English rustic. The Punjabi boy is not taught to read the language he speaks, but a language many of the words in which he does not understand until they are translated for him into his own Punjabi.²⁵

Wilson's suggestion was circulated to elicit the opinion of the relevant officers in various districts but the unanimous decision of retaining Urdu as the official language of the province was upheld.

With the exit of the older order and the power elite, there emerged a power vacuum that was promptly filled up by putting in place the new system of Government with the consequence of which the Punjab came under the British suzerainty, whose provenance was located in Calcutta, the Imperial capital of British India. The change in rulers brought in another change as well, that of the class of intermediaries belonging to other parts of India. Most important among those intermediaries were the Bengali *Babus*. In fact the new administrative structure needed 'a large number of clerks, teachers, pleaders, and doctors the human underpinnings of the Raj.'²⁶ Such people had to be imported from 'the older British-controlled territories of Bengal and North Western Provinces' because they were not available in the Punjab. *Kayasthas* from North Western Provinces and *Brahmans*, *Baidyas*, and *Kayasthas* from Bengal did not take much time in constituting a new social grouping between the rulers and the large majority of natives who had yet to have English-educated, modernized elite of their own. Veena Naregal's opinion on the status of people who had come from other provinces appears spot on when she states, 'despite their politically subordinate and numerically marginal position, they were able to acquire an influential position through their re-inscription of cultural and political norms.'²⁷ Hence, by constructing that two-layered administrative hierarchy, completed the subjugation of the Punjabi populace not only economically but also socially and culturally.

That social engineering brought many far reaching changes in the future course of Punjab's history. Western modernity assumed extra ordinary salience as an epistemic tool. Modernity provided a perspective in which the identity of the local people was re-inscribed and with the introduction of census and ethnographical surveys etc, divergent social groups became conscious of themselves being different as exclusive identities. Those identities were not only re-configured by emphasizing religion, language and kinship bonds as identity markers but also solidified. With the colonial rulers came Christian missionaries, some of them were foreigner but many hailed from Bengal. The Bengalis who did not convert to Christianity, brought with them the reformatory zeal enshrined in the tenets of *Brahmo Samaj*. Its branch was opened up, by the name of Lahore Brahmo Samaj in 1863. It soon cast palpable influence on the

Punjabi Hindus, eventually resulting in the re-inscription of their identity in religious terms. Therefore, later on, the more extremist *Arya Samaj* found it relatively easy to inculcate among the Punjabi Hindus the sense of being different from the rest of the Punjabis belonging to other religious persuasions.

The question of identity rooted in faith became much more complicated when the Urdu-Hindi-Gurmukhi controversy sharpened the division between the three communities, who had been living side by side for centuries. Urdu-Hindi controversy that erupted in Benaras in 1867 went a long way in persuading the Punjabi Muslims to adopt Urdu as a symbol of their identity. One may not find enough reasons for not concurring with Paul Brass when he traces the usage of Urdu as a medium of instruction not before the later half of the 19th century 'when the Muslim elites of north India and the British decided that Muslims were backward in education in relation to Hindus and should be encouraged to attend government schools that it was felt necessary to offer Urdu in the Persian-Arabic script as an inducement to Muslims to attend the schools.'²⁸ It was only after the language controversy that North Indian Muslims adopted Urdu as a symbol of their identity 'second only to Islam itself.' Urdu, as has been stated earlier, was already accorded the status of a vernacular in the Punjab; having a borrowed identity symbol the province had a new cultural core in the form of North Western Provinces, cultural, religious influences that sprang from there, galvanized quite decisively the future course of particularly the Urban Punjab.

However, before addressing the issue of identity and language as the identity marker affecting subsequent history of Punjab, it would surely be worthwhile to look into the state both languages in question were in before the said province was subjected to the Colonial rule. That indeed is an uphill task because the sources that can serve as guiding posts are not very many. Nevertheless, Hafiz Mehmood Sheerani's remarkable work *Punjab Mein Urdu* can help us in having some idea about the status of both the languages in comparison to Persian during the 17th and 18th centuries.²⁹ Although the title of the book suggests Urdu to be the main point of focus, nevertheless it has been discussed in juxtaposition to Punjabi. Therefore, numerous allusions are found in Sheerani's book regarding Punjabi and its practical usages in the centuries before the advent of the British that some comparison can be made, to say the least. Similarly Tariq Rahman too has devoted one chapter of his book, *Language, Power and Ideology*³⁰ on the development of the Punjabi language during the 17th and 18th centuries but he seems to have repeated the version that originally belongs to Mehmood Sheerani. Another scholar of extraordinary stature, Ain ul Haque Faridkoti in his important book, *Urdu Zaban Ki Qadeem Tarikh*,³¹ though drawing the same conclusion as Sheerani, but the overall construction of the essence of his argument is substantially different. Sheerani and Faridkoti both infer out of their extensive research pointing to the unalienable nexus between both the languages. With the reference to all these works it may be possible to ascertain the viability and the potential of both the languages to act as substitute to Persian in the colonial Punjab.

Colonial administration elbowed 'Punjabi' out of contention by simply denying it the status of a language. For the British officials, the various dialects of Punjabi were merely 'barbarian mixtures of Hindee and Persian of which Oordoo... [was] the pure type.' Many dialects of Punjabi were considered as a great impediment in the process of its standardization. The Government was of the view that Punjabi villagers would find it easier to converse in and to understand simple Urdu than 'indifferent Punjabee talked by foreigners' and to its estimation in all probability Urdu would become the language of the people.³² All of these observations put forward by the Colonial Administrators, if read closely in the historical context, seems to be based on flimsy grounds. Punjabi had an oral as well as written tradition that goes back to centuries when Punjabi prose had been employed in disseminating religious messages. *Mauazah Nausha* by Nausha Peer was the first one in the long chain of Punjabi prose, followed by the *Janam Sakhis* of the Sikh Gurus.³³ Then Punjabi had been in vogue as the facilitator along with Urdu to the main language, Persian that was to become the main vehicle for leaning and knowledge production. *Paki Roti*, *Missi Roti* and *Mithi Roti* formed part of the educational syllabus, in circulation in the Punjab before British rule.³⁴ These texts were meant to impart instruction in religion. Therefore recurrent claim of those, ascribing a religious character to Punjabi cannot be deemed authentic in the light of these genres, which had been integral part of education in the pre-modern Punjab. The first prose writing traced in Urdu language is *Sub Ras* by Mulla Wajeeh produced in 1635,³⁵ much more recent than the first Punjabi prose.

III

The traditional view as regards Urdu is epitomized in the theory whose first exponent is Maulana Muhammad Hussein Azad that considers Vali Dekkani as the first poet of Urdu and Dekkan as its breeding ground.³⁶ Gradually the frontiers of Urdu literature were pushed back towards Northern India. The cities of Lucknow and Delhi became the centres of its development, although other parts of UP also played their role from the 18th century onwards. Many scholars argue that *Brij Bhasha*, a language spoken at the time of the Muslims' arrival in North India was an earlier form of Urdu. Amalgamation of Arabic and Persian vocabulary gave it an entirely new complexion; as a consequence Urdu came into being.³⁷ After reaching the pinnacle point of its glory as the medium of transmitting the subtlest of the civilizational nuances in both forms, poetry and prose, it reached Punjab fully grown. That probably was the reason; no *Dabistan* with its distinctive features could spring into existence in the Punjab (Lahore) as it did in Lucknow and Delhi.

That view held credence without any shadow of doubt till Mehmood Sheerani brought in a new literary synthesis by systematizing the debate, initiated by the *Maghzan* Lahore in 1903 that continued till 1919. The *Civil and Military Gazette*, *Urdu i Muala* and *Tazkira i Ijaz i Sukhan* also contributed quite tangibly in that debate whereby Urdu's point of origin was relocated in the Punjab and its role in the development of Urdu had been radically re-visited. In

1909, Muslims from urban Punjab lent unequivocal support and adherence to Urdu by setting up such organizations like *Anjuman i Begamat Hami i Urdu Lahore* at the initiative of Bint i Mahboob Alam who was the first Secretary General of it. Similarly *Bazm i Urdu* (1909) was brought into being with the same objective. Khawaja Dil Muhammad, Haji Rahim Bakhsh and Sir Abdul Qadir were the pioneering figures of this organization.³⁸ Later on Iqbal also joined them. However, Rahman quotes Iqbal's only interview in Punjabi in December 1930 to the Punjabi magazine *Sarang* in which he clarified that 'he did not write in Punjabi because his intellectual training had not opened up that option for him.'³⁹ Iqbal's poetry and the measure of popularity it notched up during the early decades of the 20th century provided a big boost to Urdu as a vehicle of literary expression though it came at the expense of Punjabi. Tariq Rahman refers to the anti Punjabi fervour exuding Muslims of the Punjab as follows:

Such was the anti-Punjabi fervour of the leading Punjabi Muslims that when Dr P. L. Chatterjee, the Bengali Vice Chancellor of Punjab University, declared in his convocation address at the University in 1908, that Punjabi, the real vernacular language of Punjab, should replace Urdu, the Muslims condemned him vehemently. The Muslim League held a meeting at Amritsar to condemn him in December.⁴⁰

That proposal of Chatterjee caused many furs to fly among the Muslim sections of urban Punjab. The newspapers, particularly the *Paisa Akhbar* relentlessly condemned not only Chatterjee's ideas but Punjabi itself was considered unworthy of being used as the medium of instruction even at the primary level never mind its potential use in higher education.⁴¹ Multiple dialects and no standard form of Punjabi language were also projected as a grave shortcoming that bars that language to be taken seriously as a vernacular.⁴² Many stalwarts of Urdu thought the promotion of Punjabi as a conspiracy to undermine Urdu as well as Muslims.⁴³

All such developments provided the background to Mehmood Sheerani along with the impetus infused by Mr. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Principal, Islamia College Lahore that made him to undertake the project with the title of *Punjab Mein Urdu* which eventually got published in 1928. His argument wielded a tremendous influence over many critics and laureates in Pakistan like Jamil Jalbi, Dr. Wahid Qureshi and Fateh Muhammad Malik. Most of those who have been upholding Sheerani's view represent the ultra rightist political position. Fateh Muhammad Malik, in a couple of his newspaper articles (published in the daily *The Nawa i Waqt*) has branded Punjabi as a primitive form of Urdu, the latter being obviously to Mr. Malik, a more refined and evolved form of the former. Malik seems to have drawn the crux of his argument from Sheerani's view projected in that book, which assumed the status of a classic.

Sheerani argued that Urdu was not originally the language being spoken in Delhi at the time Muslims went there; Muslims introduced Urdu in the vicinity

of Delhi and its neighborhood. Therefore, one is led to believe that Urdu might have gone to Delhi from the Punjab because Muslims came to Punjab first and then went further into the Gangetic plain. Furthermore, he traces striking resemblance between Punjabi and Urdu, enunciating Punjabi as primordial form of Urdu. Sheerani's subsequent effort to establish the independent historical evolution of Urdu from Hindi was given some credence; an attempt to prove mutual exclusivity of both the languages. However, Sheerani's view of establishing an umbilical cord between the Punjab and the evolution of Urdu could not go uncontested. A person, no other than Jamil Jalibi laments about the fact that Saad Masud Suleman's (1046-1121) *Hindvi Diwan* of poetry could not be retrieved. Therefore, Sheerani's view seems to be constructed on a few allusions made by Afi in *Lubab ul Albab* and Amir Khusrao in the Preface of *Ghurat ul Kamal* that Saad Suleman was the first Hindvi poet, who hailed from Lahore and the same Hindvi subsequently evolved into Urdu. However, the case for Urdu (Hindvi of older times) can hardly be pleaded because Saad Suleman's *Hindvi Diwan* has not been found, thus obliterating any plausibility of the claim regarding Saad being the very first poet in Hindvi.⁴⁴ Irretrievability of Saad's *Diwan* therefore exposes Sheerani's view to a credible contestation.

Those were, arguably, the political exigencies of the Muslim intelligentsia that Urdu was linked up with a separatist ideology, limiting it as a cultural symbol for the Muslims only. Similarly, Hindus claimed Hindi as their cultural emblem with a different script. Consequently the languages in the Punjab drew further apart because of the difference in the scripts i.e. Persian for Urdu, Nagri for Hindi and Gurmukhi for Punjabi. After Christian missionaries targeted Punjab for their proselytizing activities and *Brahmo Samaj* and *Arya Samaj* followed on their heels, consequently a visible change in the construction of distinct identities seemed in evidence, with religion being the its prime denominator. Cleavage between the three communities namely Muslims, Hindus and the Sikhs widened considerably. Religious exclusivism, the seed of which had been sowed initially by the Christian missionaries and then the sprouting seed was nestled passionately by the *Arya Samajis* in particular, spilled over to the discourse of language as the primary mean of articulating religious identities. While summarizing the whole argument one can state that the overall official policy of the British Government in the Punjab conjured into existence many currents and crosscurrents including facilitating missionaries in their work, and these contributed significantly towards the sharpening of exclusivist identities, contemporaneously existing since a very long time. Suffice to say after all the analysis given above, language, as it happens more often than not, became the principal site of identity formation after the introduction of Urdu in Persianized script as a vernacular in the Punjab.

When the Hunter Commission was constituted in 1882 for the final determination of the medium of instruction in the educational institutions, its survey evoked split response as it could be surmised.⁴⁵ Muslims went the whole hog for Urdu in Persian script, Hindus lent support for the Hindi in Nagri script and the language spoken by the majority, Punjabi, was owned only by the Sikhs. Muslim Organizations like *Anjuman i Islamia* vociferously supported Urdu in

Persian script and also lamented the soaring opposition in the Province started off by outsiders with the collusion of influential Hindus. *Anjuman i Punjab* (*Anjuman-i-Ishaat i Mutalib i Mufida i Punjab* was its full name), an elitist organization conceived *ab initio* by Dr. Lietner, Principal, Government College Lahore and Col. Holroyd, Director Public Instruction, and ardently supported by Mecloed, Lieutenant Governor of the province. It eventually came into existence on 21 January 1865 at Sikhsha Sabha Hall Lahore. The promotion of vernacular languages like Urdu, along with Persian Arabic and Sanskrit in the province, was its main objective.⁴⁶ The government of Punjab funded it on the recommendation of Dr. Leitner.⁴⁷ Urdu literary figures like Muhammad Hussain Azad, Altaf Hussain Hali and Nazir Ahmed worked in cahoots with the above-mentioned British officers for the promotion of Urdu. S M Ikram hails the meritorious services of Azad that he rendered for the cause of Urdu making Lahore the 'heir of Delhi.'⁴⁸

Those who were the supporters of Hindi opined that 'the *bhasa* written in Nagri was a dialect of "Hindi" and in Gurmukhi characters became "Punjabi".' According to them the real language of Punjab was an offshoot of Sanskrit and Prakrit.' If the original language of the region with Nagri script were employed as a medium of instruction, it would give a phenomenal boost to primary education, 'which was faltering on account of inappropriate medium of instruction.' The statement of Sardar Attar Singh, chief of Bhadour, to the Hunter Commission as recorded by Aysha Jalal reads, '...the mother tongue of the "poor simple people" was Punjabi which was neither Hindi nor Urdu.' A series of Sikh deputations made it clear that 'Punjabi in Gurmukhi script was used by every one of any race or creed who wants to write or read Punjabi' and the 'easiest, cheapest, and surest mode of imparting elementary instruction to all sorts ...of people'. Elevating Hindi to the status of a vernacular would amount to 'killing the Punjabi language.'

Some exceptions and aberrations however were noticed in the sense that more than a few Muslim voices were raised in favour of Punjabi as the medium of vernacular instruction. Two members of the senate of the Punjab University College, Nawab Abdul Majid Khan and Fakir Sayad Kamar ud Din submitted memorandums and pleaded for not neglecting the vernacular languages (including Punjabi). They also recommended Punjabi not to be excluded from the examination list.⁴⁹ Similarly a member of the select committee of the *Anjuman i Punjab* thought it advisable to have primary instruction in Punjabi, which would be 'a great improvement' and for the time being Urdu ought to be 'discarded'. In spite of these instances, the divergence cultivated because of the growing consciousness of difference accruing from 'otherness' in terms of religious persuasions, articulated through the agency of languages or scripts vitiated the communal mutuality, which did not stop short of the creation of a separate state in 1947.

At the risk of being branded as having politically biased view as regard Urdu, one can easily draw from Sheerani's contention about the intrinsic relationship the two languages have, point towards the underlying notional and cultural underpinnings of Punjabi identity as mutually exclusive from the social

and cultural ethos of mainland India. It does not require much of an effort to decipher that communal hostility crept substantially deep among the Muslims of U.P and Bihar by the closing years of 1920s. Impact of print media and far superior means of communication had brought an end to the insularity of the Punjab, which had accepted UP as its nerve center by then. Consequently, like 19th century France, it had acquired the habit of sneezing whenever UP caught cold. The third decade of the 20th century was particularly marked by the estranged relationship between Hindus and the Muslims of the Sub Continent. With the collapse of the *Khilafat* movement in 1924, the communal antagonism became ubiquitous leading both the communities to wean further away from each other. The recommendations of Nehru Report failed to pay any heed to the demands of urban Muslims, thus, wedge was driven quite deep, uprooting any possibility of communal rapprochement and the Hindu-Muslim alienation went quite a few notches up. Separatism pervaded all the way through. Those separatist proclivities found its resonance in 'Urdu', an imagined cultural symbol for an imagined community, which had its genealogical roots in the speeches of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who redefined the Indian Muslims as a *Qaum*, a distinct social and political entity having no commonality with the Hindus, giving rise to fresh polemics within the Muslims on the issue of legitimacy of that concept. That polemic eventually culminated in the debate, raged with full force and vehemence between Iqbal and Hussain Ahmed Madni. The former espoused *Qaum* or nation as completely in consonance with Islamic injunctions whereas the latter plead the concept of *Millat* or *Ummah* as valid in Islam.⁵⁰

While concluding the argument, Partha Chatterjee's concept underlining the insularity of the cultural 'inner domain' from the colonial modernity on the colonized stands strongly contested, if the issue of the language as an identity marker is studied in the perspective of the colonial Punjab and particularly the official policy of introducing Urdu as vernacular in the Punjab. Urdu adopted and promoted for administrative convenience was subsequently 'imagined' as the prime cultural symbol for the Muslim urban elite of the Punjab. History of Urdu language was reworked and the scholars like Sheerani relocated its wellsprings in the Punjab, deconstructing the view held since quite long.

Notes

¹ Bernard Cohen, *Colonialism & Its Forms of Knowledge: British in India*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 1-3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, pp. 1-4.

⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.6.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ K.N. Panikkar, 'Culture, Nationalism and Common Politics.' in K.N. Paniker; Terence J. Byres and Utsa Patnaik (eds.), *The Making of History: Essays Presented to Irfan Habib*, (London: Anthem Press, 2002) p.536.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Percival Spear, 'Bentinck and Education.' in Thomas R. Metcalf, ed., *Modern India: An Interpretative Anthology*, (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 173.

¹⁰ Chaudhary Nazir Ahmed. *Development of Urdu as Official Language in the Punjab (1849-1974)*, (Lahore: Government of the Punjab, 1977), p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, p. 17.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 17-19.

¹⁴ Government of the Punjab, *Administrative Report of the Punjab, 1851* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, n.d.), p.2.

¹⁵ Chaudhary Nazir Ahmed. *Development of Urdu as Official Language in the Punjab (1849-1974)*, (Lahore: Government of the Punjab, 1977), p, 13.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 26-27.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁸ Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (Reprint. New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005), p. 45.

¹⁹ J A Richey, (ed.), *Selections from Educational Records Part II, 1840-1859* (Delhi: India Bureau of Education, 1922).

²⁰ Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, p. 51.

²¹ Ibid, p.57.

²² Chaudhary Nazir Ahmed, *Development of Urdu*, p.181.

²³ G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab since Annexation and in 1882*. Reprint (Lahore: Republican Books, 1991) (first edition published in 1882), pp. 110-12.

²⁴ James Wilson, Note on Primary Education in the Punjab and the teaching of Punjabi in Roman Character, 21 April, 1894 in Chaudhary Nazir Ahmed, *Development of Urdu*, pp.169-177.

²⁵ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power: Language Learning Among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 115.

²⁶ Bernard Cohen, *Colonialism & Its Forms of Knowledge*, pp 1-4.

²⁷ Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), p. 3.

²⁸ Paul R Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 49.

²⁹ Hafiz Mahmood Sheerani, *Punjab Mein Urdu*, Vol. 1. (Islamabad: Muqtadirah Qaumi Zaban, 1998).

³⁰ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power: Language Learning Among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³¹ Ain-ul- Haq Farid Koti, *Urdu Ki Qadeem Tarikh*, (Lahore: n. d., 1972).

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- ³² Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2001), p.110.
- ³³ Ijaz Qureshi, *Punjabi Adab Di Mukhtasar Tarikh* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 2002), pp. 347-8.
- ³⁴ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power*, p. 387.
- ³⁵ Jameel Jalibi, *Tarikh Adab-e-Urdu*, Vol. 1. (Lahore: Majlis-i-Taraqi Adab, 1986).
- ³⁶ Muhammd Hussain Azad, *Aab-e-Hayat* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1985).
- ³⁷ Hafiz Mahmood Sherani, *Punjab Mein Urdu*, Vol. 1. (Islamabad: Muqtadirah Qaumi Zaban, 1998), pp. 110-117.
- ³⁸ Ahmed Saeed, *Musilmanan-I-Punjab Ki Samaji Aur Falahi Anjamaanain: Aik Tajziati Mutalia*.(Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, Punjab University, 2004), pp. 70, 130.
- ³⁹ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power*, pp. 395-6.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 396-7.
- ⁴¹ *Paisa Akhbar* (Lahore), December 1908-April 1909.
- ⁴² *Paisa Akhbar* (Lahore), 7 June 1909.
- ⁴³ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power*, p. 397.
- ⁴⁴ Jameel Jalibi, *Tarikh Adab-e-Urdu*, Vol. 1. (Lahore: Majlis-I-Taraqi Adab, 1986), pp. 20-22)
- ⁴⁵ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution.' in Thomas R. Metcalf, (ed.), *Modern India: An Interpretive Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 210-11.
- ⁴⁶ Zarina Salamat, *The Punjab in 1920's: A Case Study of Muslims* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1997), pp. 11-12.
- ⁴⁷ Tabasum Kashmiri, *Tahqiq-namma* (Lahore: Oriental College, 2000), pp. 56-7.
- ⁴⁸ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and Birth of Pakistan* (Lahore: Idara-i-Saqafat-i-Islamia, 1970), p. 201.
- ⁴⁹ Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power*, p. 394.
- ⁵⁰ Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Maslai' qumiat* (Lahore, n.d. 1988), pp. 41-53.