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The Future of Literature and Culture*

AT A TIME when internecine political squabbles have stirred up communal riots between Hindus and Muslims and fragmented the country, as a consequence of which the question of Urdu and Hindi has been pushed into the political arena, we take pride in the fact that today in the whole of India our Progressive Writers' Association is free of internal fighting and writers of diverse languages are working in unison to create a literature intended for the masses.

First off, we would like to remove a misunderstanding that is being spread deliberately, viz., that Urdu is the language of only Muslims and Hindi of Hindus alone, and now that Pakistan has been created for Muslims, Urdu cannot be considered at all as a national and official language in the Indian Union and should be treated as the language of a community at best.

Urdu is the shared language of Hindus and Muslims, who have participated equally in creating it. Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar, Pandit Brij Narain Chakbast, and Munshi Premchand enjoy a status in Urdu literature in no way less than that of Mir, Ghalib, Hali, and Iqbal. The number of Hindu writers of Urdu is even greater today than before, indeed it is considerably greater. Even Sikh writers are producing their work in Urdu. Krishan Chandar, Raghupati Sahae Firaq, Upendranath Ashk, Mahendar-nath, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Balwant Singh, Fikr Taunsvi, Vishwamitr Aadil, Madhusudan, Devindar Satyarthi, and Kanhaiya Lal Kapur are considered among Urdu's top prose writers and poets. Urdu's Progressive Literature would be incomplete without them. In this connection Munshi Naval Kishore's name stands out particularly as Urdu's greatest publisher because he published the entire corpus of classical Urdu literature.

The misunderstanding is rife in some circles that the religious literature of Muslims is in Urdu and that of Hindus in Hindi. If on the one hand some part of Muslim religious literature does exist in Urdu, although it is quite small and one cannot make do with it to the exclusion of Persian and Arabic, on the other hand Hindu religious literature too is found in Urdu and studied by many Hindu families. Not just translations of the

*"Adab-o-Tehzīb kā Mustaqbil," *Savērā* No. 3 (n.d.), 85–88.

Qur'an and the Hadith, but a good portion of the Vedas, a considerable part of the Mahabharata, the complete Ramayana, and several translations of the Bhagavad Gita are found in Urdu prose and poetry. Many Hindus who acquired their religious education only in Urdu do not know Hindi at all.

And the matter does not stop with translations. Urdu literature reflects not just Islamic but also Hindu religious traditions. In addition to the Ramayana which Chakbast had left unfinished, Nazir Akbarabadi, Iqbal, Munshi Premchand, Josh Malihabadi and scores of other Urdu writers have produced work that betrays an unmistakable Hindu religious ambience, or derives its moral tone from Hindu traditions and mythology. For example, Rama, the birth of Kanhaiyaji, Krishna's childhood, Kanhaiyaji's wedding, Baladevji's fair, the vision of Durgaji, Mahadevji's marriage, and the story of Tulsidas's encounter with a widow. This is only a smattering of subjects Urdu authors have been continually writing about. Inspired by Firaq Gorakhpuri's new quatrains, Hindi prose writers have given Urdu poetry an unprecedented freshness representative of such a beautiful blend of Hindu and Muslim culture that it reminds one of Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj Mahal. All this proves that Urdu is not a language merely for Muslims but has all along also satisfied a myriad of religious, cultural, and emotional needs for the Hindus.

We take particular pride in the fact that Urdu literature is thoroughly permeated by a spirit of patriotism and freedom. It has produced numberless pieces on the visual beauty of Indian mountains, rivers, forests, and plains. The single most noteworthy characteristic of modern Urdu literature and language is that they have grown alongside the national movement for Indian independence, and their eminent writers have actively participated in the freedom struggle and endured the hardship of imprisonment. They are not just writers but also freedom fighters.

One could easily construct the entire history of the ninety-year-long battle for freedom in a selection of just Urdu poems, short stories, and articles. It is doubtful that such a richness of sources could be found in any other Indian language. A person would be hard pressed to find a single event in the national struggle for independence between 1857 and 1947 that has escaped the pen of Urdu poets and prose writers. Our martyrs' blood has nourished the sapling of contemporary Urdu literature exactly with the same dedication as it has the full-grown tree of freedom that provides you and us today with its pleasant shade.

Urdu authors have written fiction and poetry on just about every subject and event, and they happen to be our topnotch writers. From Ghalib, Hali, Sir Syed, Shibli, Iqbal, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Chakbast,

Akbar, Premchand, and Josh Malihabadi to Kaifi Azmi there is an interminable string of writers keeping a record of every drop of our national blood and assembling an account of our nation's history for generations to come in the language of literature. It is obvious that had Urdu been the language only of Muslims, its literature would be bereft of such dazzling riches.

Until now the policy of the Progressive Writers' Association has been that it has accepted a separate status for the Hindi and Urdu languages, each of which has its own traditions and literature.

Even allowing that Urdu and Hindi are two separate languages, it cannot be denied that both also share a lot in common. They enjoy a pan-Indian character. They are understood not just in their own areas but also in the greater part of India. They are daughters of the same mother, the Khari Boli. They have grown together and the people who have nourished them, the speakers of Hindi and Urdu, come from the same areas and betray no difference at the level of their everyday speech. More importantly, the basic grammar of both languages is the same.

And yet at this point neither is developed enough to work efficiently in the areas of science, philosophy, and a few other branches of knowledge. To acquire sufficiency for this purpose, inevitably we will have to borrow a lot from other developed languages of the world. This should not intimidate us. No language in the world is entirely unalloyed or pure. India has absorbed several nations and cultures from abroad, which is a proof of our spirit of inclusiveness and expansiveness. We can also assimilate new words so that they enrich our language. This makes it even more essential that Hindi and Urdu remain together. If one of them sustains injury, the other will inevitably become poor and frail.

There are several ways in which we can keep the two languages together:

Accept both Urdu and Hindi as official languages, mandating instruction in both languages in areas where they are both spoken;

Following upon such acceptance, ordinary people should be entitled to receive their education in whichever of the two languages and scripts they choose; and

Consider Hindi and Urdu two literary styles of a common language called Hindustani which can be written in two different scripts, to be kept operational for the time being, with efforts conducted to gradually evolve a single script. The common script could be Roman, or Devanagari, though it will be necessary for the government to have the entire corpus of literature transcribed into the one that is ultimately adopted. This is a task requiring millions of rupees and many long years to accomplish, and

also requiring that both scripts be kept alive until all literature has successfully migrated to the new script. About this we can seek guidance from Turkey and the Asian republics of the Soviet Union.

In regard to the script, one argument often given is that the scripts in vogue in the different provinces of the Indian Union closely resemble the Devanagari script; hence it is not essential to continue the Urdu script for the official language.

This sort of argument is a product of political intolerance. To begin with, aside from 40 or 50 million Muslims, there are some 15 to 20 million other individuals scattered throughout India who read and write in Urdu. Secondly, we do not think that if our country is split into two parts today, those two parts will remain constantly at each other's throats. We feel that in the future India will be a homeland for many free and independent nations that will unite federally of their own desire and volition. The question of an official language and script for the center will arise again. One will have to consider that while the Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali and Oriya scripts resemble Devanagari, the scripts of the Moplas, Sindhis, Baluchis, Pathans, Kashmiris, and Punjabis resemble the Urdu script. We, the Urdu Progressive Writers, do not wish to pour salt on our wounds by splitting Hindi and Urdu like India and Pakistan. We cannot partition our civilization, our culture, and our language. Our misery will increase if our language and culture are divvied up like our country, and our literature, culture and life will suffer incalculable loss. □

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—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*