

The First Book of Old Urdu in the Pashto-Speaking Areas

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Despite the scholarship on the origins of Urdu school textbooks in Pakistan still repeat the myth narrated by Mir Amman Dehlavi (d. 1806) that Urdu was born in the Mughal military camps and matured during Shahjahan's time (r. 1628-58) in Delhi.¹ This brief article supports the views of the scholars mentioned above adducing evidence from the present-day the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan the existence of Urdu, or Hindi as it was called at that time, in this area. In this article the terms Old Urdu, Urdu, Hindi and Hindvi have been used for the language which is the ancestor of both modern Urdu and Hindi.

While there is much evidence of writing in the ancestor of Urdu-Hindi from Gujrat and the Deccan² not much work in this language, or varieties of it, exists in north India. Ismail Amrohvi's [1694-1711] (1054?-1123 AH) '*masnavis*' which are popular stories in verse are specimens of this early writing. The first is about the death of Prophet Muhammad's [PBUH] daughter Fatima (*Wafat Nama Bibi Fatima*, 1105 AH [1693 or 1694] and the

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1 Mir Amman, *Bāgh-o-Bahār* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1992). [From the London, 1851 edition], p.11.

2 Hafiz Mahmud Shirani, *Maqālāt-i Hāfīz Mahmūd Shīrānī* Vol.1 Comp. Mazhar Mahmud Shirani, (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab; 1965), pp.159-216; Jamil Jalibi, *Tarīkh-i Adab-i Urdū*, Vol.1 [Urdu: History of Urdu Literature], (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-i Adab), pp.159-200; Shamsur Rahman Faruki, 'Urdu Literary Culture', Part-1. In Pollock, Sheldon, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.821-25.

second, called *Mu'ajzā Anār*' (the miracle of the pomegranate), about a legendary king and about the conversion of the pagan Arabs to Islam (written in 1120 AH) [1708]. The poet, like other writer, calls his language 'Hindi'.

Nabī ke sabhī muájze ka bayān
*Fikar mẽ hindī bīch lāya picchhān*³

(The narrating of the miracles of the Prophet I brought in the Hindi language — note it!)

But, while poetry in old Urdu was flourishing even in north India by the first quarter of the eighteenth century — in 1731 Shah Mubarak Abru (1683/85-1733) composed his *divan* — the first prose work in Urdu is said to be Fazal Ali Fazli's (b. 1710) *Karbal Katha* (Story of Karbala, c. 1747). This too is a religious work, its theme being the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. The preface, which addresses learned people, has an abundance of Arabic and Persian words such as the ones which the *ulema* use in their writings. The rest of the narrative is in accessible Urdu-Hindi which is easily understandable today. It is called Hindi which, the author clarifies, is the language of women and ordinary people who do not understand Persian and Arabic. Fazli says that the Persian version of the classics on Karbala could not be understood by 'women' (*nisā o aurāt*) and, therefore he decided to translate it in 'Hindi' intelligible to ordinary Muslim men and women (*qarīb ul faham ām mominīn o momināt*).⁴

This means that not only women but also men — presumably all those who were not poets and scholars — did not understand the Persianized diction of the learned. The language of ordinary usage was 'Hindi' among the urban people of north India.

With this background it is significant that there is a prose work in the extreme north western part of the subcontinent which is in 'Hindi' almost two centuries earlier than this time. This is Bayazid Ansari's *Khairul Bayān*, well known as the first book of Pashto in existence. This first book of Pashto is also the first book of old

3 Ismail Amrohvi, *Urdu ki Do Qadīm Masnaviyān* [Urdu]. Comp and ed. Naib Husain Naqvi. (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-e-Adab, 1970).

4 Fazal Ali Fazli, *Intikhāb Karbal Kathā* [Urdu]. Comp and ed. Hanif Naqvi. (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 2002), p.35.

Urdu in the Pashto-speaking parts of South Asia. The book has been noticed by Jamil Jalibi who calls it the only specimen of prose in this language (Urdu of this period) in the north.⁵ However, Jalibi has not given it the detailed treatment which is the object of this article.

Bayazid Ansari was born in 931 AH [1526-27] 'in the city of Jullundhar in the Punjab' (*dar shahar-e-Jullundhar Punjab mutavallid gasht*).⁶ The Mughal perspective on him is summed up by Nizamuddin Ahmed Bakshi in his *Tabākāt-i-Akbari* as follows:

In former times a Hindustani soldier had come among the Afghans, and set up a heretical sect. He induced many foolish people to become disciples, and he gave himself the title of *Pīr Roshnā*.⁷

This indicates that, although his family was from Kaniguram, he was regarded as a 'Hindustani' by some contemporaries. The nearest contemporary source, however, is Ansari's rival, Akhund Darweeza's (1533-1615) account in his compendium of orthodoxy, the *Makhzan ul Islām*, the available manuscripts of which are dated A.H. 1024 [1615].⁸ There are two sections in this book, one in Persian and the other in Pashto. Yet another source is the Persian book *Dabistān ul Mazāhib* by Danishmand published in 1262 *Hijri* (1846) referred to above. Later researchers have based their narratives upon these sources.⁹ The following summary is based on all available sources.

It appears that Bayazid's family came from Kaniguram, a town in South Waziristan, where the Barki or Ormuri-speaking people reside. Legend has it that one of his ancestors, a certain Sheikh Ibrahim Danishmand, descended from the companion of the Prophet of Islam [PBUH], Hazrat Abu Ayub Ansari, was sent

5 Jamil Jalibi, *Tarīkh-i Adab-i Urdū*, Vol.1 [Urdu] (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-i Adab), p.58.

6 Mobid Danishmand, *Kitāb Dabistān ul Mazāhib* [Persian: Book of the Schools of Religions] (Mumbai: Maktba 'a Lachman), p.254.

7 Nizamuddin Ahmad Bakshi, *Tabakat-i-Akbari* trans. from Persian. H.M. Elliot (ed.) and John Dowson. First ed. 1871. (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1975), p.119.

8 J.F. Blum Hardt, and D.N. Mackenzie, *Catalogue of Pashto Manuscripts in the Libraries of the British Isles* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum and Commonwealth Relations Office, 1965), p.2.

9 Abdul Quddus Qasmi, 'Dībācha' [Pashto: Preface], 1967, pp.1-92.

by Sheikh Bahauddin Zakariya of Multan in order to preach to the Barkis. Later, during the Lodhi period (1479-1526), some of the Barkis, including members of the Ansari family, migrated to Jullundhar and settled down there. Their village came to be known as *Basti Danishmandan* and they adopted aspects of the local culture and the languages of their neighbours in the forty- seven year period between the Lodhi sultanate and the arrival of the Mughals in 1526 when Bayazid was born.

The paternal grandfather of Bayazid, Sheikh Mohammad lived in Kaniguram while his maternal grandfather, Haji Mubarak, lived in Jullundhar. However, the two agreed to marriage between their children. Sheikh Mohammad consequently asked Haji Mubarak for the hand of his daughter Bibi Ameena. The later agreed on the condition that the bridegroom would come to live in Jullundhar and so this is what happened. However, the young man died and, according to the customs of the Pashtuns, his brother Abdullah had to marry Bibi Ameena. However, Abdullah had a family — including a son called Yaqub and a daughter called Fatime — in Kaniguram and his new wife still refused to accompany him to that ancestral home. Thus, their son, Bayazid, was born in the Hindi-Punjabi-speaking Jullundhar rather than the Pashto-Ormuri-speaking Kaniguram. Eventually, however, Abdullah had to leave his wife and son and return to his homeland now much disturbed by wars with the Mughals. The family at Jullundhar too was finally forced to move away and in 937 A.H. [1532-1533] around the age of six, Bayazid went to settle down in the Pashto-speaking area. In short, during the most critical age for language-learning, he was probably exposed to more Hindi-Punjabi than Pashto orOrmuri. His peer group, mother's family, and even the mother herself, would probably have been more at home in the language of their adopted homeland than the languages of Kaniguram with which the link could have been only tenuous at best.¹⁰

Unfortunately for Bayazid his mother returned to Jullundhar leaving the young boy to be brought up in Kaniguram almost like an orphan. He was taught the traditional subjects of study by the local teachers but must have been a good student since he could

10 *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

write in Arabic, Persian and Hindi (old Urdu) in addition to Pashto — now his adopted language. He is said to have traveled to India as a horse dealer and it was here that he met a man described by Darweeza as Suleman ‘the heretic’ (*mulhid*). Perhaps because of this meeting, when he returned from India he started expressing heretical ideas.¹¹ Such ideas provoked his father’s ire. Indeed, they proved to be his reason for leaving home as his father was so enraged that he stabbed him with a knife. This cowed down the young dissident and was probably the main reason for his leaving his father’s house.¹² He travelled in the Pakhtun country including a journey to Kandahar (probably in 1550) and also spent time in contemplation. He also wrote a number of books including the *Khairul Bayān* probably in 978 (A.H.) [1570]. The date of his death is not confirmed but is said to be roughly between 980 to 989 A. H. [1572-1581] while some researchers put the date more precisely between 986-987 A. H. [1578-1579].¹³

The manuscript of the book¹⁴ from which the published version¹⁵ has been printed, is in the University of Tuebingen and is dated 1021 A.H. [1611-12]. However, as Akhund Darweeza has denounced his work for heresy in his own book *Makhzan ul Islam* the manuscript of which dates from 1014 A.H. [1605], it is certain that *Khairul Bayān* was in circulation and was taken seriously enough to cause so much anxiety among the *ulemā* of the period.

The present version of *Khairul Bayān* has only 16 lines in the language called ‘Hindi’ by the author, some consisting of only two words. These are found only in the first four pages. These pages have Arabic, Persian and Pashto in equal portions. The Persian portion, however, gets reduced later while the Arabic and Pashto remain till the end. However, since the Pashto version is longer than the Arabic one it appears that is not an exact translation. In short, the book as it stands today, can hardly be called a book in

11 Akhund Darweeza, *Tazkarat ul Abrār wal Ashrar* [Persian] (Peshawar: Idara Isha’at Sarhad, n.d.), p.128.

12 *Ibid.*, p.129.

13 Abdul Quddus Qasmi, pp.32-33.

14 Bayazid Ansari, *Khairul Bayān* [Arabic, Persian, Pashto and Hindi].

15 Abdul Quddus Qasmi, pp.1-92.

four languages. However, that is precisely what the author and his critics call it.

Bayazid himself writes in the end of the book in Pashto.

گوره هرچه لولې خیرالبیان او په چار کا ورپه و منیم وده
 وده خلور زے خیر به یے کیم ذکره نه کپه له چارے
 دهر مقام¹⁶

(Anyone who reads *Khairul Bayān* and makes use of it [in life]. I will teach him four languages, and I will give him knowledge about how to behave in every event in life).

In the *Halnama*, an autobiographical account mentioned in the *Dabistān ul Mazāhib* but no longer available, during a debate with his critics, Bayazid says in Persian.

حق تعالیٰ از روی الهام بر دل من کتاب نزول فرموده است نام آن خیرالبیان است -
 چهل بیان دران مکرراست¹⁷

(The Truthful God has sent this book through direct communication upon my heart and its name is *Khairul Bayān*. There are four types of narratives in it)

His great rival, Akhund Darweeza, also says in Persian:

افغانان رابزبان افغانی یگان سخن موافق طبع اوموزون ساخته می داده و بعض جهلا فارس
 رابزبان فارسی و هندوان رابزبان هندوی...¹⁸

(He had made certain sayings for the Afghans in the Afghani language suiting their temperaments. And some of the uneducated out of the Persians, he had addressed in Persian and the Hindus, he had addressed in the Hindvi language...).

In another book entitled *Tazkara-tul Abrar* Darweeza again names these three languages as well as Arabic. However, while for Arabic he says that his rival lacks understanding of idiom and syntax (*bilā idrāk tarkīb o tartīb*), he expresses no such doubts

16 *Ibid.*, pp.296-97.

17 *Ibid.*, p.78

18 Akhund Darweeza, p.123.

about his skills in Hindi.¹⁹ Moreover, at no place does he say that the Hindi portion was less in number than that in the other three languages which suggests that the original version of *Khairul Bayān* was, indeed, in four languages.

The *Dabistān ul Mazāhib* mentions a number of Bayazid's writings in four languages:

اور تصانیف بسیار است بہ عربی و پارسی و ہندی و افغانی۔۔۔

It also mentions *Khairul Bayān* as a book in four languages and adds:

ہمان یک مطلب را بہ چہا ر زبان گفتہ۔

(His writings are many in Arabic and Persian and Hindi and Afghani [Pashto] — all the same meanings were expressed in four languages).²⁰

If this is true then *Khairul Bayān* is not only the first Pashto book but also the first old Urdu one in the Pashto-speaking area of present-day Pakistan. The language I call old Urdu is called Hindi — the usual name given to Indian languages by Muslims in those days — and has been identified as Punjabi by some scholars.²¹ However, it appears to be closer to old Urdu than present-day Punjabi. Certain words like *akkhar* (word), *karan* (reason), *jeeb* (tongue) are still used in some varieties of Hindi and Punjabi. Most of the other words are easily intelligible to present-day speakers of Urdu and Hindi as well as Punjabi. Some words, like *thaeen* (are), are used in Siraiki — which Grierson calls Lahnda²² and which was subsumed under Punjabi till the census of 1981 which gives separate figures for it²³ — even now. In short, even if some words of this extract are no longer in use, most are intelligible to speakers

19 *Ibid.*, p.148.

20 Mobid Danishmand, p.257.

21 Abdul Quddus Qasmi, p.60.

22 G.A. Grierson, (Comp. & ed.) *Linguistic Survey of India*. Quoted from *Linguistic Survey of Pakistan Vol.IV. Indo Aryan Family* (Lahore: Accurate Printers. n.d.), pp.233-34.

23 *Census 1981: Census Report of Pakistan* (Islamabad: Govt of Pakistan, Statistics Division, 1984).

of Punjabi, Siraiki, Urdu and Hindi as used in Pakistan and north India.

In my view the distinction between what we call Punjabi, Siraiki, Urdu and Hindi developed later than the middle of the sixteenth century when *Khairul Bayān* was written. The ancestor of these modern languages, whether it was called Hindi or had other local names, was the sum total of a number of mutually intelligible varieties — as all languages are — which stretched from the Khyber pass till Bihar in the plains of Hindustan. Local names, such as the ones used by Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) earlier — Lahori, Multani — should not make us assume that these were languages in the sense of being mutually unintelligible. It is most likely that they were the dialects of one huge language which is most probably the ancestor of present-day Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi etc. The lines from *Khairul Bayān* are given in appendices-1 and 2. The first four lines which begin the book are in Arabic followed by Persian, Pashto and then ‘Hindi’. The ‘Hindi’ words are as follows:

رے بایزید: لکھ کتاب کے آغاز کے بیان جن کے سارے
اکھر سہن بسم اللہ تمام: میں نہ گنواؤنگا
مزدوری انہن کی جے لکھیں پرہن بگاڑن اکھر
کہ تمکنی پرہن لکھیں اس کارن جے سہی ہوئے بیان!

(O Bayazid: write in the beginning words all with the name of God. I will not waste the wages of those who write words without distorting them. But only if they write that which expresses the meaning correctly)

If we remember that 438 years have passed to the writing of *Khairul Bayān* it is amazing that it is still intelligible to those of us who know Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Siraiki etc. Moreover, Bayazid must have chosen it because it must have been an important language outside the Pashto-speaking world he was living in. As Jamil Jalibi has opined, he must have wanted to influence people in the plains of India²⁴ and this could only make sense on the

24 Jamil Jalibi, *Tarikh-i Adab-i Urdū*, Vol.1 [Urdu], (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-i Adab, 1975), p.58.

assumption that this must have been the language most commonly understood there as, indeed, its descendants Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi are even now. It appears as if Bayazid's followers also followed his fashion of writing in more than one language. A poet called Arzani who was 'intelligent' and a master of correct language (faith zabān būd) also wrote poetry in 'Afghani, Farsi, Hindi, Arabi' like Bayazid Ansari.²⁵

Besides these lines in the ancestor of Urdu-Hindi in *Khairul Bayān* at least one couplet in the same language is attributed to Bayazid by Ali Muhammad Mukhlis (1610-11 to 1664-65) who is said to be one of his followers. This occurs in the Mukhlis's own collection of Pashto verse. He introduces it in Persian as a 'couplet of Bayazid in the Hindvi language'.

سچا بول بايزيد کا جو بنياوی کوی
چو مرنی پھر پہلے وی پر نہ مری سوی

The true saying of Bayazid he who recites

*At the time of death he does not go on the path of annihilation.*²⁶

Mukhlis's work — at least this poetic collection — is only in Pashto but he lived in India for the latter part of his life and possibly that is why words like 'anand' (pleasure, joy, happiness) — used even now in modern Hindi — are found in his Pashto. All the samples of the ancestor of Urdu-Hindi given above are intelligible for the modern reader.

The literature of this period does indicate that people from the plains of North India, where 'Hindi' was spread out widely, met people from the Pashto-speaking areas for several purposes. Akhund Darweeza, for instance, names several such people by name: Suleman 'the Haretic', Mulla Jamaluddin Hindustani etc. as Ansari learned from Suleman, Darweeza got his learning from Hindustani (*a zoo taehsīl mī namūdām*).²⁷ The medium of instruction was probably Persian but words in Hindi must have been exchanged. Indeed, considering the use of Hindi by Bayazid

25 Akhund Darweeza, p.149.

26 Ali Mohammad Mukhlis, *Dā 'Alī Mohammad Mukhlis Dīwān* (ed. & Comp.) Pervez Mahjoor Khaweshke. (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, n.d), p.581.

27 Akhund Darweeza, p.160.

Ansari and his followers it is possible that Hindi was much more in informal use than we imagine.

If we look at English of this period we find that it is just as intelligible to the present-day speakers of English — as opposed to specialists — as this language is.

Writing at roughly the same time the famous English poet, Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), has the following lines.

But never let th' ensample of the bad
offend the good: for good by paragone^o
Of evil, may more notably be rad^o,
As white seems fairer, macht^o with blacke attone^o;
Ne^o all are shaméd by the fault of one:
For lo in heaven, whereas^o all goodnesse is,
Emongst the Angels, a whole legione
Of wicked sprights did fall from happy blis;
What wonder then, if one of women all did mis^o?²⁸
(Spenser in Eastman *et.al* 1970: 127).

Although this is only a small excerpt and no generalization based upon it are valid, yet it may be worth noting.

The words with circles have been explained by the editors as follows: paragone= comparison; rad= read, discerned; macht= matched; attone= together; Ne= nor; whereas= where and mis= go astray. Out of 71 words 7 require an explanation for the contemporary reader because they are extinct or their meaning has changed. Out of the *Khairul Bayān* extract of 130 words there are 5 words which are not intelligible to the ordinary reader of Urdu and Hindi today. These are:

تھمکنہ; (pahen) پھین ; (sahen) سہن
پہن; (paran) درہاں; (darhan) درہاں; (tamkana)

In other words while 9.86 percent of the diction of early 16th century English is no longer intelligible, only 3.87 percent of the diction of the Urdu-Hindi of that period is unintelligible today at least far as the variety used by Bayazid Ansari is concerned.

28 Arthur M. Eastman, Alexander W. Allison, Herbert Barrows, Caesar R. Blake, Arthur J. Carr and Hubert M. English (eds.). *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1970), p.127.

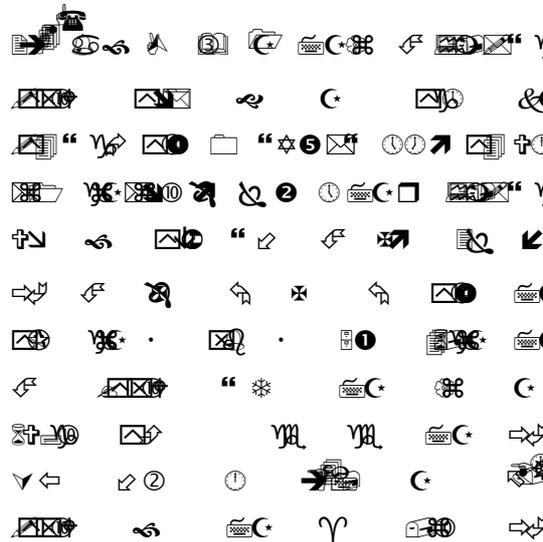
Admittedly, if longer texts of both languages were taken the difference might not be significant but it still seems reasonable to argue that if Spenser’s language can be called English, then Bayazid’s language too should be called Urdu and Hindi.

The significance of this finding is that Urdu-Hindi is an ancient South Asian language which can be traced back to different parts of the subcontinent and times stretching back to the thirteenth century at least. Moreover, as early as the middle of the sixteenth century it was important enough to be used in the Pashto-speaking areas on the fringes of the Mughal empire by a man who seems to have felt it could enable him to influence people in the plains of India. In short, to assume that it was a pidgin created in the Mughal military camps does not seem to be true.

Appendix-1

Extract in Old Urdu

Out of 15 lines of integrated text in the edited version of the manuscript of *Khairul Bayān*, the first 8 lines given below have been quoted by Jamil Jalibi.²⁹ However, he has not adhered to the text of the edited manuscript. The lines as given in the edited version of the manuscript of *Khairul Bayān* are as follows:



29 Jamil Jalibi, p.58.

Spellings used by Jamil Jalibi³⁰ are given below. They are different in some cases from the spellings given in the extract above. Jalibi has also left out words and lines.

(Like whom; similar to; for example) جیسے 1

(were) تھیں 2

(to me; from me) مجھے 3

(on; upon) اوپر 4

(meaning not clear?) تگنا 5

(Persian for 'in the circumstances') درحال 6

(The meanings are as follows):

O Bayazid: Write those words which fit the tongue for this purpose that you find benefit, O Men!

You are the Pure and Elevated One of some. I know not anything but words of the Qur'an O Pure One!

O Bayazid: Writing of the words is from You, to show and to teach is from Me. Write my sayings words wearing the forms of the writing of the Qur'an, Write some words and put on them diacritical marks so that the readers recognize words, O Men! Write some words in four forms clearly in them. So that they learn and intone with breath. Some two words out of them O Men!?

The question mark “?” indicates that the meaning is not clear to this author.³¹

30 *Ibid.*

31 Bayazid Ansari, p.3. Also see, Abdul Quddus Qasmi, ‘*Dībācha*’ [Pashto: Preface], 1967, pp.1-92.

Appendix-2

Separate Lines in Old Urdu

The following phrases and words are dispersed on pages 3 and 4 of *Khairul Bayān*.

الف ایک ہے
ہے بیان
پڑھن آدمیان!
پچا نہن تو جان
سچ ہے عیان
پڑھو جیب پہن از زبان
اسے سمجھیں سجان آدمیان
سکھن تمام

Alif is One

This is the narrative

Read O! Men!

If you recognize then understand

The truth is manifest

Read what is on the tongue

It is understood by intelligent men.

All of them learn [it].³²

32 *Ibid.*, pp.1-4.