

# Will Urdu be Totally Wiped Out in India: Understanding The Same Through Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto and Sahir Ludhianvi

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## Abstract

'Urdu' as a word is very often heard in India and we as Indians know Urdu because we are introduced to Urdu as the 'zuban e adab and tehzeeb' meaning the language of literature and respect, this language carved its niche in the vicinity of Delhi and gradually grew thus making its existence known throughout the subcontinent. Urdu is a sub-branch of Hindustani which evolved during the medieval ages approx. 6th to 13th century. Urdu bears its origin to languages like Shaurseni, Khariboli, Persian, Turkish, Afghani, etc. Urdu like the holy Ganges has passed through mountains, hills, plains, plateaus, thus falling into the Bay of Bengal becoming a larger part. So, it is commonly known as 'Rekhta' or 'a rough mixture of languages.' During its evolution, it passed many stages from being called Lashkari to Lahori to Dehalvi to Hindavi to present-day Hindi.

Due to the great writers that Urdu Language produced, Urdu is also known as the language of Love and Pain. And it is true that no other language can feel and express the ecstasy of Love and the Pain of separation together. But today the followers of Urdu language face a grave question, which is 'will Urdu be totally wiped out in India?' It is a cause of concern as well as a thought to ponder because, it has been facing the same neglect and is being ignored continuously since the partition. Two major writers of their times, Saadat Hasan Manto and Sahir Ludhianvi raise questions on the future of existence of Urdu. And it should be raised by every Indian, because a language which was born, bred and rose in Urdu is struggling to live in its motherland. This paper presents the views of two Indians in post partition era and their concern on a common subject : Urdu.

**Keywords:** Urdu, Partition, Saadat Hasan Manto, Sahir Ludhianvi, Pain Of Separation, Language, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Daagh Dehalvi, Meer Taki Meer, Munshi Premchand

## Introduction

Urdu's literature is vast and apart from the religious literature of Urdu like Hadith, Fiqh ; History and Sufism, it also made its mark known in Hindi Scriptures. Urdu during the middle ages knew no boundaries. Apart from the religious literature of Urdu like Hadith and Fiqh, we find the history of Urdu in collaboration with Sufis and their movement. Urdu as a language knew no boundaries and this is proved since we find the go to book of Vedic Astrology Lal Kitab written in Urdu by Pandit Roop Chand Joshi. Urdu is not only about Ghazals, Nazams, Masnavis, Narsias, Qasidas, or the Sufi writings but also about short stories, novellas, film lyrics, and many other things.

Referring to the language, Gulzar Saheb in an annual cultural fest ' Jashn Urdu', organised in honour of Urdu language states about keeping intact the Ganga - Jamuni Tehzeeb; he says,

About the language, as is spoken by Gulzar Sahb, in Jashn-e-Urdu, an annual cultural fest in honour of Urdu language and to keep intact the Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb, marked about 'Urdu' :

*ye kaisā ishq hai urdu zabāñ kaa,  
mazā ghultā hai lafzoñ kā zabāñ par  
ki jaise paan meñ mahñgā qimām ghultā hai*

*ye kaisā ishq hai urdu zabāñ kaa....  
nasha aatā hai urdu bolne meñ  
gilaurī kī tarah haiñ muñh lagī sab istelāheñ  
lutf detī hai, halaq chhūṭī hai urdu to, halaq se jaise m  
ai kā ghoñT utartā hai  
baDī aristocracy hai zabāñ meñ  
faqīrī meñ navābī kā mazā detī hai urdu*

The very renowned poet Daagh Dehalvi, says about Urdu :

*Urdu hai jis ka naam hamin jaante hain Daagh  
saare jahaan main dhum humaari zubaan ki hai*  
Also narrating about the difficult vocabulary of the language Daagh writes :

*nahin khail ay daag yaroon se kahdu  
kh aati hey urdu zaban aatey aatey*

Urdu changed many formats and styles but the manuscript remained the same. Like all languages the stages of Urdu derived their name from where it began, for example, its earliest name:

#### **Lashkari**

India was invaded by many foreign invaders from time to time. Bearing its closeness to Afghanistan, Turkey, Sindh, Balochistan, Mongol etc. the attackers invaded through the doab region of Punjab and attacked Delhi, looted and plundered the areas and went back to their respective lands with the looted war indemnity. During these invasions, the armies used to walk on foot, and evidently, they used to camp at several places during the night or during summers when the heat was unbearable since they belonged to colder regions. Over time, after frequent attacks, these armies and their chiefs started understanding and speaking the language which was a mixture of the native language spoken in these areas. Thus incorporating the words, meanings, and enhancing vocabulary of both the languages spoken by the armies and that of native people respectively. This common language came to be known as 'Lashkari'. As 'Lashkar' means literally an army camp or an army that lived in canopies, tents and halted at places. Thus, Lashkari came into existence as a language which was developed and coined by the soldiers and natives collaboratively. 'Urdu' is closest to Lashkari in a literal sense as in the Turkish language 'Ordu' or 'Orda' means 'the language of the camp and consequently, it came to be known as 'Urdu'.

#### **Lahori**

As the name suggests, it is a language that comes from the city of Lahore, which is a port in Gujarat. Thus armies that entered through Gujarat spoke this language which majorly constituted the words of Persian language, since the Parsis were traders and businessmen, and came through this route.

#### **Dehalvi**

As evident, the language of people living in and around Delhi or the language of people residing in Delhi. Since Delhi, had been the capital of every possible empire that came into existence since Ancient India. It's named changed but the area remained the same.

#### **Hindavi**

This is the closest to Shaurseni Apbrahmsa or the language spoken by the people who resided on the other side of Indus Valley Civilization. It can also be called a predecessor of the modern-day Hindi language.

#### **Hindi**

This is again a very modernized form of Khariboli or Hindavi that rose during the time of Aamir Khusro, a Sufi poet and disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.

Urdu is written in the 'Nastaliq' style of Persian calligraphy from right to left in an extension of the Persian alphabet, which is again an extension of the Arabic language. The trend towards Persianisation began in the 18th century by the Delhi School of Urdu poets or rather by the saints of Sufi and Bhakti era. It is also worth noticing that the great Bhakti poetess Meeraji wrote in the Sanskritised form of this language.

Urdu undoubtedly enjoyed the elite and courtly status for a very long time. Since it was patronized by all the emperors of India alike. Also during this patronization, Urdu gave its best poet like Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Daagh Dehlavi, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Meer Taki Meer, Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Urdu enjoyed its peak from the 17th century to the 19th century. In the 19th century, Urdu left the royal courts and came to be spoken by the common people of India, and thus there are writers like Munshi Premchand: who is considered the best short story writer in Hindi. Saadat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Amrita Pritam, Krishan Chander, Qurat-ul-ain-Haider etc.

#### **Concern of both Saadat Hasan Manto and Sahir Ludhianvi for Urdu Language Post Partition**

One of the most important aspects of Manto's writing in Urdu. Urdu was not just a language for the people of those times but a means of communication, most importantly of expression. Since Urdu was established as the court language of Delhi Sultanate and later the same was adopted by the Mughals. But after the British administration took over, Urdu was not the same anymore and partition worsened the condition. Both Sahir and Manto were concerned about the fate of the Urdu and Urdu speaking population in the Indian subcontinent. They also had specific questions about the Urdu Literature, which had blossomed in the subcontinent. Along with this question, Manto also anticipated a larger problem: cultural existence – a reality that partition had brought with itself, which would remain now forever. However, the existing generation of 1947's would live with it, and the coming age would gradually forget it. Thus, the cultural difference would sink in.

About the literature in Urdu, Manto wrote, in Lahore, (as quoted from "Introduction", Manto Selected Stories translated by Aatish Taseer; also featured in an e-article by Shruti Sonal, titled "Understanding Manto and Partition" and the same as referred by Ayesha Jalal in her book on his 107th birth anniversary dated May 11, 2019):

'Try as I did, I wasn't able to separate Pakistan from India and India from Pakistan. Again,

and again, troubling questions rang in my mind. Will Pakistan literature be separate from that of India's? If so, how? Who owns all that was written in undivided India? Will that be partitioned too? Are India's and Pakistan's core problems not the same? Will Urdu be totally wiped out in India? Will our state at the costs eliminate Urdu but does that means that we won't have permission to criticize its government? As an independent country, will our condition be different from what it was under the British? (xxvi)

From what is called an armchair activist, Sahir also wrote a lot on the state of Urdu post-partition. The only difference between Sahir and Manto on the fate of Urdu is – Manto has forecasted that Urdu will die in India, and not an ordinary death. Still, it will be strangled, and the literature shall be curbed and destroyed, whereas Sahir saw all this happening with Urdu, with his own eyes. He has penned it down very beautifully in his nazm : Jashn - e- Ghalib ; which very clearly indicates that 21 years after freedom, the nation remembers the genius of Ghalib and his poetry or rather writings in Urdu. He cries on the plight of Urdu and its greatest writers (as quoted from the poem "Jashn - e- Ghalib," in the web version of the book *Kulliyat-e Sahi*):

Sau saal se jo turbat chadar ko tarasti thi  
Ab us par akidat paar phulo ki numaish hai (rekhta)  
Meaning,  
'For a hundred years this grave craved for one sheet  
of flowers as a token,  
Now the same grave of the great poet Mirza  
Ghalib has innumerable show-off of flowers'

He further feels sad upset about the plight of the same Urdu language and its custodians. He says, "Urdu, which was the language of locals once, is now facing complete ignorance all around, the cities which were once known because of 'Urdu Tehzeeb' have now forgotten the language itself. The language yearns hard for recognition and existence. Sahir compares the language 'Urdu' to the letter in the wrong hands as the landlords or owners of the house have sold off or left their dwelling place, and nobody knows the whereabouts of those people's new address is also unknown to them.

Urdu as a language was popularised by the Mughal invaders who decided to stay in India, making India their home for centuries. It was in Mughal courts that the language reached its zenith and attained the status of official language. Urdu as a language has been associated with the Muslims mainly because Urdu bears an extensive influence of Persian and Arabic languages. Urdu reached the heart of India through the Nawabs and Nizams of numerous states and thus was spoken and supplemented in the local markets along with the local people. The residents of India, before the partition, spoke and wrote Urdu, and Urdu was an intimate part of everybody's life. Most of the works of the then writers are in 'Nastaliq,' the script writing that Urdu is written in. But partition infamously made Urdu an accursed, mistreated, and liable language. It was also termed the language spoken by the people who had necessitated a dispersed state for themselves, who within a night became Pakistanis from Indians. It is such a shame

that the language suffered like many other things, and a detached piece of land caused abhorrence even amongst India's third language. Sahir's pain on the death of the Urdu language can be felt in the following verses (again quoted from the poem "Jashn - e- Ghalib," in the web version of the book *Kulliyat-e Sahi*):

Jis ahad – e – siyasat ne thi zinda zaban kuchli,  
Us ahad – e – siyasat ko marhum ka gham kyu hai  
'Ghalib' jise kehte hai, Urdu hi ka shayar tha  
Urdu par sitam dhakar 'ghalib' par karam kyu hai  
(rekhta)

Translates as:

The government which has killed this living language, why is that government now organising events and paying tribute to the Urdu laureate Ghalib ? Why is Urdu being treated poorly while its greatest laureate Ghalib being given such high position?

While giving a reference to Urdu– the language, Sahir questions the authorities that while it is not concerned on the slowly dying language Urdu, why is it so concerned about the genius of Urdu language Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Why is Urdu as a language put down, and why is Mirza Ghalib elated? Why this behaviour?

In another poem, "Ghalib and Gandhi", Sahir states that both these people have not been given their due. He mentions that the very idea of partition and later the massacre that followed it had completely killed Gandhi's very basis, i.e., Non - violence during partition and similarly after partition, the language of Ghalib, i.e., Urdu, was completely killed. Is this how a civilized and progressive society behaves? In this sense, when we have killed the very essence of these two, then we are all murderers of both Gandhi and Ghalib because we have not let their ideas, thoughts, simplicity, and extraordinary life reach the masses. 'Masses' have been an inseparable unit of both these legends and their works. One worked for the betterment of society by making them self-dependent and installing in them the ideas and ideals of peace and non-violence and the other by the best of verses which reached them and it came as a fresh air amidst the old poems. In government offices, one can see the picture of Mahatma Gandhi hung on the wall and is only garlanded on special occasions as decided by the government; in the same way, a failed lover is often seen reciting the verses of Ghalib. Likewise, both are remembered, and tribute is paid upon necessity and not out of love or their due credit to greatness.

The sad and unfortunate, distasteful ending of Urdu in India was predicted and seen much before by these two writers. They had written about it much in advance before the actual damage was done.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The language 'Urdu' holds a special and unique place in the Indian Cultural History because it was not a means of communication and comprehension but also a great contributor in terms of giving India its first Indo – European manuscript and forming alliances both socially and militarily. Urdu like sanskrit is called the Predecessor of the Hindi language that we speak today. It also traces the rise

and fall of empires in the sub – continent along with language itself. The fall of Mughal empire and the establishment of East India Company and the Crown, basically traces the rise of English as a language and the fall of Urdu again as a language. The paper also attempts capturing the nerve that two absolutely different scripts, pronounciations, and literature are now translated, transliterated and transcribed into each other. Urdu is now, a forgotten language in India, only a few people can actually write, read and follow the same. Was this done purposely or it was just the law of nature, that whatever reaches its zenith has to come down eventually and now, whatever is being done to save this language from extinction in the sub continent.

### Conclusion

In India, Urdu is an Eighth Schedule language whose status, function, and cultural heritage is recognised by the Constituion of India; it has some form of official status in several Indian states. Urdu has been described as a Persianised standard register of Hindustani language. In spite of all such, reservations and patronisation, Urdu is struggling in the sub continent and even after 73 years of independence Urdu faces the same threat to its existence which it faced when English came in. The sad and unfortunate fate of the language is so much so that it is now not even accepted as an Indian language. It is related more to a religion rather than just being given the status of a language. In a brilliant article titled, 'The status of Urdu in Hindu Rastra' written by Sumit Paul in Deccan Herald dated 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020, he states, " The Education Policy 2020, first excluded Urdu and then re included it under pressure. Alas, a fabulous language has become a shuttlecock. If sanskrit is already a functionally dead language, Urdu is culturally moribund tongue in a rabidly Hindu-ized India. Such a beautiful tongue is being expunged slowly and systematically.' In another article titled , "The curious case of Urdu in India" by Saad Razi Shaikh, it is mentioned, how people just identify one because of the language they speak, Saad quotes, "I was invited to deliver a talk once after which a girl came to me and said, 'Your Urdu is so good. Are you from Pakistan?' I was taken aback first, says Delhi based visual artist Shiraz Husain. 'If my Bengali was good, would I be considered from Bangladesh? What Lincoln had said regarding

democracy, the same can be said of Urdu in India. A language by the people, for the people.'

A sigh of relief comes in, when organisations like 'Rekhta', who promote and disseminate Urdu literature , especially Urdu poetry to n audience beyond those with the Urdu script free of cost on their website Rekhta.org. Also, the contribution of 'Jashn-e-Urdu' cannot be forgotten. Along with with 'Jashn – e-Rekhta' the three day event held annually also adds to growing and re – planting this language in its motherland. Thus, the New India awaits and hopes the revival of a language it ancestors once associated with, freeing itself from the narrow vision of religion or caste or specific state.

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