Language, Religion and Politics: Urdu in Pakistan and North India

Résumé. Langue, religion et politique : l'ourdou au Pakistan et dans le nord de l'Inde.
L'ourdou, langue nationale du Pakistan et symbole identitaire des Indiens musulmans est associée à l'islam en Asie du sud. Cette association a été forgée pendant la période coloniale britannique. Les Britanniques ont remplacé le persan - langue du pouvoir moghol - par l'ourdou (aux échelons inférieurs) et l'anglais (aux échelons supérieurs) dans plusieurs régions du nord de l'Inde et de l'actuel Pakistan. L'ourdou s'est diffusé par le biais des réseaux scolaires et de communication dans l'Inde coloniale. Il devint le principal médium d'instruction dans les séminaires musulmans (madrasa-s) et la principale langue des écrits religieux. L'ourdou est également devenu un symbole important de l'identité musulmane et a contribué, juste après l'islam, à mobiliser la communauté musulmane pour demander la création du Pakistan en 1947. Au Pakistan, l'ourdou et l'islam sont des composantes symboliques importantes de l'identité nationale et s'opposent à l'expression des langues autochtones. Cette identité est principalement défendue par les partis politiques de droite et se positionne comme opposée non seulement aux identifications ethniques mais également à une identité occidentale plus globalisée et libérale qui serait symbolisée par l'anglais. En Inde cependant, l'ourdou soutient la minorité musulmane contre la domination hindoue nationaliste. De fait, l'ourdou, dans sa relation avec l'islam, joue un rôle complexe et parfois contradictoire au Pakistan et au nord de l'Inde.

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Abstract. Urdu, presently the national language of Pakistan and the identity symbol of Indian Muslims, is associated with Islam in South Asia. This association was forged during British colonial rule. The British replaced Persian, the official language of Mughal rule, with Urdu at the lower level and English at the higher one in parts of North India and present-day Pakistan. Urdu was disseminated by networks of education and communication in colonial India. It became the medium of instruction in the Islamic seminaries (madrasas) and the major language of religious writings. It also became part of the Muslim identity and contributed, next only to Islam itself, in mobilizing the Muslim community to demand Pakistan which was carved out of British India in 1947. In Pakistan, Urdu and Islam are important symbolic components of the national identity and resist the expression of the local indigenous languages. This (Pakistani Muslim) identity is mainly supported by right-wing politics and is antagonistic not only to ethnic identification but also to the globalized, liberal, Westernized identity based upon English which is the hallmark of the elite. In India, however, Urdu supports the Muslim minority against right-wing Hindu domination. Thus, Urdu plays complex and even contradictory roles in its association with Islam in Pakistan and parts of North India.

Urdu is the national language as well as the language of wider communication of Pakistan. It is also associated with the Muslim community in India. Unlike Arabic, Urdu is not considered sacrosanct in itself though it is written in the script of Persian (nastaliq) which, in turn, is based on the Arabic one (naskh). It contains a number of words of Arabic origin although it has even more words of Persian and some of Turkish origin. Urdu is a derivative of Hindvi, the parent of both modern Hindi and Urdu (Rai 1984). The oldest names of Urdu are: “Hindvi”, “Hindi”, “Dihlavi”, “Gujri”, “Dakani”, and “Rekhtah” and ‘Hindustani’, a term which existed earlier, but was popularized by the British. In the north, both “Rekhtah” and “Hindi” were popular names for the same language from sometime before the eighteenth century, while the name ‘Hindi’ was used, in preference to “Rekhtah”, from about the mid-nineteenth century. The name Urdu seems to have been used for the first time, at least in writing, around 1780 (Faruqi, 2003: 806). In short, during the period when Urdu became the language of Islam in South Asia, it was called Rekhtah, Hindi and, only sometimes, Urdu. The ordinary, spoken version (bazaar Urdu) was and still

Table 1. The estimated number of speakers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Mother-tongue Speakers</th>
<th>Second-language speakers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>180 764 791</td>
<td>120 000 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>60 503 579</td>
<td>104 000 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>241 268 370</td>
<td>224 000 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total:</td>
<td>465 268 370</td>
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is almost identical with popular, spoken Hindi. However, whereas the script of Urdu is Perso-Arabic, as we have seen, that of Hindi is Devanagari. Moreover, the learned vocabulary of Urdu draws on Arabic and Persian whereas that of Modern Hindi draws on Sanskrit. Thus, at the symbolic level Urdu is associated with the Islamic culture whereas Hindi is associated with Hindu culture. In sheer size, however, the spoken language is a major language of the world (Table 1).

As Urdu is associated with the Muslim identity in both pre- and post-partition India, with Pakistani Nationalism in Pakistan and with Islam in South Asia in general, the key to understanding the relationship between religion, language and modernity is to study the rise of Urdu as the language of Islam in British India and its role in Pakistan. While most of the following article will deal with this theme, attention will also be given to the role of the other languages of Pakistan – Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki, Balochi, Brahvi etc – as far as the religious identity or needs of the people are concerned.

Urdu was not the mother language of the people of the area now called Pakistan (see below footnote 4). Therefore, this study of Urdu as the language of South Asian Islam will take us to North India, the home of Urdu, and to the British role when both European ‘modernity’ and Urdu first became social forces to reckon with in the construction of the contemporary Muslim culture and identity.

The article traces out chronologically how Urdu came to be associated with Islam in the areas now called Pakistan from the 14th c. until the British rules; its use as a religious oral and written language from Sufi verses to translation of the Quran. The active involvement of a number of reformist Muslim movements to promote Urdu make it the language of Islamic Revival in pre-partition India, a fact that impacted post partition Pakistan due to the influence of those movements in the political structure of the country. In the second part, the paper analyzes the impact of the British rule in making Urdu the symbol of a unified Indian Muslim identity to the detriment of other vernaculars. It highlights the fundamental symbolic value of language in the creation of the politicized modern Muslim and Hindu identities and analyzes the changes in the perception of Urdu in both Pakistan and North India. It ends by examining the religious functions of the other languages (vernaculars and English) of Pakistan.

The Association of Urdu with Islam in Pre-Partition India

Unlike Arabic, but like Persian, there was nothing intrinsically holy about Urdu. Indeed, there was a debate among early Muslim scholars (ulema) whether any language but Arabic could be used for worship or other sacred purposes. However, notwithstanding their legal position about such matters, other languages were used for quasi-religious purposes as soon as non-Arabs converted to Islam.
Urdu was part of the Islamic culture and Muslim identity in India because it was the language of the dominant elite. When this elite lost its political power in the wake of British colonialism, it consolidated its cultural power through the techniques and artifacts of European modernity during the nineteenth century. The most important changes were a formal chain of schools, the printing press, an orderly bureaucracy and the concept of the unity of India. The schools in North India used Urdu as a medium of instruction (Rahman 2002: 210-211). The printing press created and disseminated books in Urdu in larger numbers than could have been possible earlier. Indeed, as Francis Robinson points out, “the ulema used the new technology of the printing press to compensate for the loss of political power” (1996: 72). The lower bureaucracy, especially the courts of law and the non-commissioned ranks of the army, used some form of ‘Hindustani’ (or Urdu) in the Persian and the Roman scripts respectively. And the idea of ‘India’ or ‘Hindustan’ was spread out widely by the British sahibs and memsahibs who spoke a few words of ‘Hindustani’ wherever they traveled by rail or otherwise over India as if the language of the sub-continent was somehow Urdu—or, at least, some bazaar variant of it.

Early Indian Sufi writing in Urdu.

The mystics (sufis) had started using the ancestor of Urdu (Hindvi) in informal conversation and occasional verses, as attested by many sources. Khwaja Banda Nawaz Gesu Daraz (1312-1421), who was born in Delhi and lived there for 80 years, migrated to Gulbarga when Amir Taimur destroyed Delhi in 1400. Sultan Feroz Shah Bahmini (1397-1421), who himself is said to have composed verse in Urdu (Shareef, 2004: 85), was the ruler and he welcomed the saint. Khawja Gesu Daraz gave sermons in Dakkani Urdu since people were less knowledgeable in Persian and Arabic and several works in Hindvi are attributed to him (Shareef, 2004: 59). According to Jamil Jalibi, however, Gesu Daraz could not be author of these works (Jalibi, 1978: 159-160). However, whether these particular writings are by Gesu Daraz or not, there is no doubt that there are a number of malfuzat, recording the conversations of sufi saints, containing Hindvi words (examples given in Naseem 1997; Jalibi 1978: 95-103). This language was not, however, considered appropriate for religious writing so Shah Muran Ji (d. 1496) writes in a didactic poem in Hindvi that this language was like the diamond one discovered in a dung heap. He makes it clear that the poem is intended for those who neither knew Arabic nor Persian. Then, in easy Hindvi verse which contemporary Urdu readers can understand with some effort, the author explains mysticism in questions and answers (Haq, 1977: 48-50). Another mystic, Shah Burhanuddin Janum, wrote a Hindvi poem composed in 1582. He too apologizes for writing in Hindvi but argues that one should look at the meaning, the essence, rather than the outward form (Ibid, 62-63).

The attitudes of these fifteenth and sixteenth century mystics is similar to
that of the Mahdavis – pioneers of a new religious sect – who followed the teachings of Syed Muhammad Mehdi of Jaunpur (1443-1505) which were considered heretical at that time. In a poem written between 1712-1756 in Hindvi, the Mahdavis say that one should not look down upon Hindi as it is the commonly used language of explanation (Sheerani, 1940: 207). Indeed, even earlier than this period, there were poems in Urdu explaining the rudiments of Islam such as Syed Ashraf Jahangir Samnani’s (d. 1405) ‘risala’ (dissertation) on ethics and mysticism written in 1308 (Naqvi, 1992: 23). There is also Shah Malik’s Shariat Nama (1666-67) in Dekkani verse. A large number of versified stories on what may be called folk Islam or popular Islam in Hindvi were also in circulation: these were on the Prophet Mohammad’s radiance or spiritual essence (nur namas) or his passing away (wafat namas); on the battle of Karbala\(^2\) (jang namas, Karbala namas); life after death (Lahad namas) and holy personages (Bibi Fatima). They proliferated in the Deccan during the 17th century. Jamil Jalibi tells us that they were read out and people believed that such recitations would make their wishes come true (Jalibi 1978: 493-496). The other favourite theme referred to above, was the Pand nama, a book which explained the rituals and rudimentary principles of Islam. These can be called the Sharia’h guide books and can be seen in the catalogues of the British Library (Blumhardt 1926; and Quraishi and Sims-Williams 1978).

### Religious Writings in Urdu After Shah Waliullah (18th c.): Quranic exegeses and translation

Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) is a major figure in the renaissance of Islamic reform and revivalism in India and the pioneer of fundamentalist, puritanical Islamic practice as well. Although he himself wrote in Arabic and Persian, he encouraged his son Shah Abdul Aziz to learn idiomatic Urdu (Rizvi, 1982: 77). This was probably because Urdu was so commonly used among the urban Muslims of north India by this time that it was a better vehicle for reforming Indian Muslims than either Persian or Arabic. His other sons, Shah Abdul Qadir (1753-1827) and Shah Rafiuddin (1749-1817) translated the Quran into Urdu (Rizvi, 1982: 104-105). An earlier venture initiated by J.B. Gilchrist (1759-1841), the pioneer of Urdu studies at Fort William College, was forbidden by the government in 1807 because the ulema had been highly incensed even with Shah Waliullah’s Persian translation to countenance an Urdu one (Siddiqui, 1979: 155-157). Hashmi mentions Qazi Mohammad Azam Sanbhli’s translation in “the language born out of the contact of Arabic and Persian” (by which he means eighteenth century Urdu) in 1719 and that of an unknown translator.

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\(^2\) The battle of Karbala (in Iraq present-day) took place on 9 or 10 October 680 CE between Husain (son of Ali) and Yazid I (son of Muawiya), the Umayyad Caliph. Husain was killed and his martyrdom is commemorated every year in Muharram especially by the Shia sect of Islam.
in 1737. Both are available in manuscript since they were never published (Khan, 1987: 12). Exegeses came to be written as early as the end of the sixteenth century and some of the early ones are anonymous. Gujarat and Deccan fare prominently as centres of Islamic writing in this early period (Naqvi 1992: 23). A notable attempt is that of Murad Ullah Ansari Sanbhli who gives reasons for having written his exegesis *Tafsir-e-Muradi* (which ended in 1771). Sanbhli argues that, since millions of people spoke Hindi and were keen to learn from his explanations of the holy book, he was requested by many of his companions to write his explanations for them. He therefore undertook the writing of this exegesis (Naqvi, 1992: 26). This, however, was the period (middle of the 18th century) when there was a great increase in religious writings in Urdu. While the popular poems such as *nur namas* and *jang namas* continued to be written, serious prose literature – translations of the Quran and the Hadith, exegesis, collections of legal judgments (*fatawa*, sg. *fatwa*) – now started supplementing Persian works in these genres. Such literature is described in some detail by Gaborieau (1995), Ayub Qadri (1988), Naqvi (1992) and Khan (1987), but a study with reference to its production and consumption still needs to be done.

Among the most notable works are those by the pioneers of the *jihad* movement against the Sikhs and the British. Sayyid Ahmad (1786-1831), who died fighting the Sikhs at Balakot, wrote two pamphlets (*risalas*) in what he called ‘Hindi’ to guide the ordinary Muslims about saying their prayers and understanding the verses of the Quran. The work on prayers was published in 1866 and was part of this overall effort to reform Islam in India (Qadri, 1988: 113-118). Shah Ismail (1779-1831) translated his own pamphlet on the refutation of innovation and heresy into Urdu renaming it *Taqwiat ul Iman* “The strengthening of Belief” (1821). This became an important source of inspiration for the whole reform movement and was reprinted several times (Qadri, 1988: 124-125). Similarly Maulvi Syed Abdullah translated Shah Rafiuddin's Persian pamphlet *Qiamat nama* into Urdu calling it *Dab ul Akhirat* (1863) (Qadri 1988: 199). In short, Urdu, generally called Hindi in those days, played an important role in the reformist movement associated with Shah Waliullah, his family and disciples.

**The Role of the Sub-Sects in the Spread of Urdu (18th – 19th)**

While the major sects of Islam remained the Shia and the Sunni (for the origin of Shia Islam see Jafri 1979), with the latter in overwhelming majority in India, the sub-sects of the Sunnis (also called *maslak*) which emerged during the British period were the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Deobandi and the Barelvis. These sub-sects formed madrasas of their own, published pamphlets (*risalas*) and indulged in oral debates where the major medium of communication was Urdu. Thus their role in the dissemination of Urdu needs to be highlighted.
The Ahl-i-Hadith

The Ahl-i-Hadith, in common with many 18th century Muslim thinkers inspired by Shah Waliullah, wanted to reform Indian Islam. This was their response to the political weakness of the Muslims in India. The Ahl-i-Hadith, moreover, were also inspired by Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) of Saudi Arabia who was completely antagonistic to the veneration of the tombs of saints and sufism as it flourished in his day. The Ahl-i-Hadith or Wahabis as they were called in India, wrote learned treatises in Persian but they also understood the value of spreading their message in Urdu and other languages, especially Bengali, to the laity. Wilayat Ali (b. 1790), one of their leaders in Patna, taught the rudiments of the faith in simple Urdu. He got the translation of the Quran by Shah Abdul Qadir as well as some writings of Shah Ismail in Urdu printed locally and distributed among the numbers of the gatherings, which included some women also (Ahmad, 1966: 84). Another Ahl-i-Hadith thinker, Haji Badruddin, wrote his fatwa in Bengali verse which, of course, must have appealed to ordinary people (Ahmad, 1966: 237).

As the Wahabis fought the British as well as the Sikhs in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) they emphasized jihad “religious war or Bellum Justum”. Some of their tracts, such as the Risala Jihadiya and Harqial Ibrar (1866-67), praised the concept of the ‘just war’. Both these works, as well as other tracts, were in Urdu and were, therefore, easily accessible to the public. The British were well aware of the “Rebel camp on the Punjab Frontier” as W. W. Hunter calls it. It was established in 1831 and finally defeated in 1868 (Hunter, 1871: 3). The main leader of the fighters, Sayyid Ahmad, preached between 1820-22 and Hunter reports that a number of Urdu poems foretelling the downfall of the British were in circulation (Hunter, 1871: 53-54). The itinerant Wahabi preacher whom Hunter describes must also have preached in the same language. The Ahl-i-Hadith created prose literature in Urdu which has been described as follows:

Addressed mainly to the common people the manner of presentation is geared to their mental level. The narrative is simple and conversational. It is in sharp contrast to the ornamental rhymed prose then generally in use. Arguments are backed with quotations from the Quran and Hadith, translated in Urdu. Didactic stories and similes are used to illustrate the points (Ahmad, 1966: 282).

Thus, at least by 1820, as the Awadh Akhbar of 15 January 1870 noted, “religious works of fifty years are now all being compiled in Urdu”. However, as Marc Gaborieau has pointed out in his well-researched study on this subject, most Wahabi writings (as well as those of other sects one might add) were in Persian. It was only after 1857 that “the ratio of Persian to Urdu is reversed” (1995: 172). However, the fact that there were Urdu writings at all from the 1820s onwards – Gaborieau identifies Khurram ‘Ali Bilhauri’s (d. 1855) Nasihatul-Muslimin written in 1822-23 as the first book in Urdu in this category – suggests that
Urdu was considered by the Wahabi preachers as having the potential to advance their cause. It might be added that the period of lofty Urdu poetry, at least in North India, is generally dated to Vali Dakani (d. 1707) whose poetry stands at the beginning of the classical age of the Urdu ghazal.

The Deobandis

The famous madrasa established at Deoband in 1867 which pioneered this movement was the brainchild of Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877) and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905). The Darul Uloom, as it was called, used Urdu as a medium of instruction. Thus, as Barbara Metcalf has pointed out, it “was instrumental in establishing Urdu as a language of communication among the Muslims of India” (Metcalf, 1982: 102-103). The Deobandi interpretation of Islam, which is strict and puritanical, goes against the saint-ridden, folk Islam of ordinary Indian Muslims. However, it spread widely as the graduates of Deoband occupied mosques and the Bahishti Zewar (“The Jewellery of Paradise”) of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943), a detailed and comprehensive Shariah guidebook primarily meant for women, become a household name in North India and the areas now in Pakistan.

In Pakistan the Deobandi madrasas have increased from 1779 in 1988 to nearly 7000 in 2002 (GOP 1988; Rahman 2004: 191-192). They are also associated with militant and extremist Islam since the Taliban, who imposed a very stringent version of the Shariah on Afghanistan (Rashid 2000), were students of these madrasas. They are concentrated in the NWFP and Baluchistan, both areas being also associated with Islamic radicalism. The language of the Deobandis, even in the NWFP where the mother tongue of most students is Pashto, remains Urdu. It is also the language of examination of these madrasas as well as the language of the preachers in mosques, of pamphlets meant to refute other sects and for carrying out administrative functions of the Deobandi seminaries, Thus, Urdu is the main language for the dissemination of the Deobandi ideology in South Asia.

The Barelvis

The Barelvis—or Ahl-i-Sunnat as they call themselves—centered on the work of Ahmed Raza Khan (1856-1921). Ahmed Raza, belonging to an ashraf family of Pathan origin from Bareilly, belonged to the Urdu culture of United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). He founded a madrasa called Manzar al-Islam. By this time Urdu was the established language of Islam in India and, therefore, the Barelvis used it in their sermons, popular poetry and the theological debates with their rivals the Deobandis and the Ahl-i-Hadith. They also had two major presses in Bareilly, the Hasani Press and the Matba’ Ahl-i-Sunnat wal Jama’at. They published almost all the fatwa of Ahmed Raza Khan (Sanyal, 1996: 83). Ahmad Raza’s own poems are in the lofty tradition of Urdu poetry of his times (see example in Sanyal: 146-148). The main text of the Barelvi maslak is
devotion to the Prophet of Islam and many of the verses are about this subject (ibid, 155-158). Besides, there is a large number of *nur namas*, and not only in Urdu but in all major languages of South Asian Muslims, on this theme. Barelvi Islam, affirming the intercession of saints, is the folk Islam of South Asia and fulfills the spiritual needs of the people. Its tenets and interpretation of Islamic law spread widely by an Urdu work, Amjad 'Ali Azami’s *Bahar-e-Shariat* (The Spring of Shariah), which is the equivalent of the Deobandi work *Bahishti Zewar*.

**Other Schools of Islamic Thought**

In Lucknow the Farangi Mahalli family of religious scholars had been teaching Islamic studies since the 18th century. Mulla Nizamaddin, the inventor of the curriculum called the *Dars-i-Nizami*, was a speaker of Urdu (Robinson 2002: 46-52). In 1905 Maulana Abdul Bari created the *Madrasa-i Aliya Nizamiyya* which continued its work till the 1960s (Robinson, 2002: 71). Urdu was taught separately in this ‘Cambridge of India’ to those who did not undertake the study of the full *Dars-i-Nizmi* (Ibid 126). The Farangi Mahalli family of ulema had “produced some of the earliest Urdu newspapers which still exist, *Tilism-i-Lakhnaw*, which appeared in the year before the Mutiny uprising, and *Karnama*, which appeared in the three decades after it” (Ibid: 133). So common was the use of Urdu as a religious language that sects considered heretical – such as the Ahmedis (or Quaidianis) – also used it for writing and missionary work. Although Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (c. 1830s-1908) wrote in Arabic and Persian for authenticity, he also wrote extensively in Urdu to disseminate his message among the masses (Friedman, 1989: 135). His spiritual successors also continued to write in Urdu.

Another sect, considered heretical by mainstream ulema, the *Ahl-i-Quran*, argued that the *hadith* is not reliable and, therefore, guidance can only be obtained from the Quran. Ghulam Ahmed Parvez, the most well known proponent of the sect in the twentieth century, wrote extensively in Urdu. He even argued that prayers can be said in Urdu instead of Arabic (Mustafa, 1990: 241). This idea occurred off and on to many dissident thinkers, whether from heterodox sects or otherwise, and Mohammad Masud (1916-1985), a government officer famous for his individualistic, even eccentric, views upon many issues, argued that prayers should be said in a language one understands – hence in Urdu and, later in his life, Punjabi (Malik and Salim, 2004: 18-19). There is no evidence that people say their prayers in Urdu now.

Urdu is also the language of Islamic revivalism. Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi, (1903-1979), the pioneer of revivalist Islam through the efforts of his *Jama’at-i Islami*, wrote his entire work in idiomatic and accessible Urdu. He was himself from Delhi and spoke idiomatic Urdu at home (Nasr 1994: 3). He is a pioneer in using easily comprehensible Urdu rather than the Arabic-laden jargon of *maulvis* (“leader of prayers or Muslim priest”) which was used
by writers on religious subjects earlier. He is also an Urdu journalist whose journal *Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an* appealed to the middle class of the urban areas of North India and Pakistan. Mawdudi's books were read by middle class professionals in Pakistan who have a tremendous influence in the Jama'at. These people supported Urdu in Pakistan against all other languages.

All the debates and the writings of the Pakistani and the Indian *ulema*, refuting each other's beliefs, are, since the last century till present in Urdu. For instance, the criticism of Mawdudi and its reply are in Urdu (Yusuf, 1968); the status of all religious arguments is in the same language (Ludhianwi, 1995) and so are all the writings of the *ulema* whether against Western philosophies (Usmani, 1997) or other matters.

Besides the use of Urdu in the domains mentioned above, one may not forget the considerable influence of elegies in popular Islam. The elegies (*marsiyas*) about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain in the Battle of Karbala (680C.E), became an important part of the oral and written culture of both the Shia Kingdoms of the Deccan and the kingdom of Oudh. Indeed, they were an important part of the poetic sensibilities of even Sunni Muslims all over north India and present-day Pakistan. Such elegies were written in Urdu by poets, such as Hashmi Baijapuri (1656-1672) Mulla Vajhi etc, in the Deccan (Shareef, 2004: 767); Siddiqui, 1967: 716-717). Later, in Lucknow Mir Anees (d. 1874) and Mirza Dabeer (1875) became famous *marsiya* poets whose Urdu verses were part of the mourning for the martyrs of Karbala in Muharram (Siddiqui, 1967: 721-792).

In short, Urdu became the oral and written language of Islam in South Asia because of the highest number of translations and exegeses of the Quran available in it (Khan, 1987: 18; Naqvi, 1992); being associated with teaching in the *madrassas*; elegies commemorating the martyrdom of Hussain which is central to the Shia faith and the writings of revivalists and Islamic pressure groups in Pakistan and India. Let us now come to the implications of these facts for Pakistan.

**Urdu, Muslim Identity and Pakistan**

Islam and language both contributed to the creation of Pakistan, a state for the Muslims of British India, in 1947. Islam was the principal identity symbol of the Indian Muslims who got mobilized to give a united opposition to the Hindu majority to obtain maximum political and economic advantages (Jalal, 1985) and then, under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), partitioned India to create Pakistan and Bharat (India). Urdu, which had become a symbol of Muslim identity during the 19th century, was the subsidiary symbol of the Indian Muslim identity (King, 1994) which helped establish the new state. South Asia witnessed the adoption of a local language, Urdu, as the language of Islam – both
the identity symbol of the Muslim community and the medium of instruction, preaching and publication of Islamic material – rather than Arabic. This would not have occurred without the British intervention in South Asia. Indeed, the idea that numbers are politically significant – for quotas in jobs, admissions in educational institutions, government patronage – was created by the British who introduced modern concepts like representation of the people, equality before a secular legal system and the creation of an ubiquitous public service all over India. When the Indians experienced the census, they found that the category ‘Mahomedan’ (Muslim) could be disempowered or empowered, impoverished or enriched, deprived or benefited depending on a number of factors out of which they understood were numbers and loyalty to the rulers. This game of numbers created the perception of a monolithic Muslim community – suppressing sectarian (Shia, Sunni, Aga Khan, Bohre etc), class (asrāf = gentlemen versus ajlāf = commoners) and linguistic or ethnic divisions – which was held together by Islam and Urdu. The mirror image of this was the constructions of the Hindu ‘Other’ held together by Hindutva and Hindi (Dalmia, 1997). Besides investing political and economic significance in the categories of ‘Muslim’ and ‘Hindu’, modernity also made it possible to disseminate language much more widely than ever before. The printing press, the schooling system, the textbooks, the political speech and pamphlet and later the radio all spread out standardized versions of languages – mostly Hindi and Urdu in North India and the areas now comprising Pakistan – which created communities (Muslims and Hindus) much as literacy created nationalistic identities in modern Europe in a process described by Benedict Anderson (1983).

Almost a century of the Hindi-Urdu controversy (King 1994)3 – from the middle of the nineteenth century till the creation of Pakistan – makes us realize how potent the symbolic value of language was in the creation of the politicized modern Muslim and Hindu identities. But these constructions came at the cost of suppressing aspects of the communal self which manifested themselves later as we shall touch upon in passing.

The Politics of Urdu and Islam in Pakistan and North India

Both Urdu and Islam came to play different, and even opposing, roles in the power dynamics of post-partition Muslim communities in Pakistan and North India. In Pakistan the ruling elite, which was mostly Punjabi-speaking, continued to consolidate its dominance over the different ethnicities comprising Pakistan in the name of Islam and Urdu. The Bengalis, who were a majority in

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3 The Hindu-Urdu controversy refers to the controversy between the supporters of Urdu (generally Muslims) and Hindi (Hindus) about the use of the two languages in their respective scripts, Urdu in the Perso-Arabic and Hindi in the Devanagari in the domains of power like education, law courts, administration and the media from 1860 till the partition of India in 1947.
the new state, reacted to this dominance by mobilizing the symbol of language to give a united front to the West Pakistanis. This movement, the Bengali language movement, culminated in the deaths of protesting students on 21 February 1952 and laid the foundation for separatist nationalism (Umar, 2004: 190-229). At last, after a bloody civil war in 1971, the state of Bangladesh was created. In West Pakistan, the Sindhis, Baloch, Pashtuns and Siraikis have all used their respective languages as ethnic identity symbols to procure power and a more equitable distribution of power and resources in the state (Rahman, 1996). Thus, in Pakistan, Urdu came to be associated with the ruling elite as far as its domination over the weaker ethnic groups was concerned. The strongest religious influence on the educated, urban lower-middle and middle classes is that of the Jama’at-i Islami which was a strong supporter of Urdu. According to Seyyed Vali Nasr:

The party [Jama’at]... much like the Muslim league had viewed Urdu as the linchpin of the two-nation theory and a cornerstone of Pakistani nationalism. Allegiance to Urdu was therefore an article of faith in the Jama’at. The rural and urban poor are as deeply rooted in vernaculars such as Baluchi, Pashto, Punjabi, Siraiki, and Sindhi. Outside of the Muhajir communities of Sind, Urdu is not used below the lower-middle class (Nasr, 1994: 85).

To add to Nasr’s argument, the Jama’at considered Urdu as part of its cultural agenda of resisting both Westernization through English and the weakening of the nation-state through ethnic nationalism based on language identity.

Because of the religious right’s support of Urdu, both the ethno-nationalists, using the identity symbols of the indigenous languages of the people as well as the Westernized elite, using English, oppose Urdu. The latter feel that this language would empower the religious lobby which, in their view, would suppress women and probably inhibit creativity, arts and research. Hence Khalid Ahmed, a well known liberal intellectual from Lahore, argues that Urdu is intrinsically not a progressive language while English is (Ahmed, 1998). Other Westernized people oppose English both in the domains of education and in the media because it threatens to undermine their own elitist status.

While in Pakistan Urdu is often associated with pro-establishment and right wing, in India it is anti-establishment and generally stands for the autonomy, identity and rights of the Muslim community. Though spoken only in parts of North India, and that too in the urban areas, it is a symbol of the Muslim identity for most (but not all) Indian Muslims. Because the Hindus are in a huge majority, the Muslims feel that the fight to preserve Urdu is part of keeping India a pluralistic democracy (Farouqui, 2006). Apart from writings by scholars and Muslim politicians in India, the clergy regards Urdu as a language of Muslims, while others disagree (Gandhi, 2002: 139). In India, in fact, the madrasas are seen as repositories of skills pertaining to the Urdu script which is not generally taught in the secular stream of education (Winkelmann, 2006: 259). Even in Vellore in
South India where the mother-tongue is Tamil, the madrasas offer Urdu as well as Tamil as a medium of instruction in the first four years in the madrasa (Tschacher, 2006: 206). That feeling, though linguistically, historically and culturally correct, does nothing to change the perception that Urdu is associated with the Muslim identity in India both among Muslims and Hindus.

The Political Uses of Language Planning of Urdu in Pakistan

Mother-tongue speakers of Urdu have ranged between 7.2 to 7.6 % of the population. However, those who use it as a second language are all those who are literate (54 %), and urban, listen to radio or watch television, which could well be over 70 % of the population. However, the ruling elite, which is predominantly Punjabi, has used Urdu next only to Islam itself as a means to create national unity which should transcend ethnic division (expressed through language-based identity movements, Rahman, 1996) and remain a united entity against the Indian ‘other’.

Since the state used Urdu as a symbol of Islamic identity, its language planning activities revolved around it. One instance of legitimizing West Pakistani domination of East Pakistan was the Islamization of Bengali. The central government established adult education centres to teach Bengali through the Arabic Script (PO 4 Oct 1950). The Language Committee set up in 1950 recommended non-Sanskritized Bengali and the teaching of Urdu (LAD-B 31 Oct 1951: 25). At this period, because Bengali ethnic identity was expressed through the Bengali language, Urdu was seen as an imposition by the West Pakistani elite to dominate and exploit East Pakistan (as Bangladesh was then called). However, Urdu had a presence in the madrasas and the link with Deoband, which East Bengal shared along with other parts of Muslim South Asia, remained. Because of this link a number of Muslim clerics learnt Urdu and read Islamic literature in that language. Even quite recently in Bangladesh, Urdu remains associated with Islam in the madrasas and in the minds of those who see themselves as members of a South Asian Islamic community. Thus Farhad Mazhar, a writer of Urdu in Bangladesh, told the Pakistani writer Asif Farrukhi in 1988 “Urdu should be reclaimed as an integral part of the sub-continent’s Islamic culture” (Farrukhi, 1989: 86).

The figures for mother-tongue speakers of Urdu in the censuses of the years given below are as follows for Pakistan as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Urdu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>7.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mother-tongue speakers of Punjabi in the latest census (of 1998) are 44.15 %; Sindhi, 14.10 %; Pashto 15.42 %; Siraiki, 10.53 %; Balochi, 3.57 % and ‘other’ languages, 4.66 % (Census 2001: 107).

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4 The figures for mother-tongue speakers of Urdu in the censuses of the years given below are as follows for Pakistan as a whole.
Another area in which the Islamic identity was associated with Urdu and its script was in neologism – the coining of new terms to express modern concepts in the languages of Pakistan. Here, to begin with, Urdu itself was purged of Persian and Hindi elements (Allah hafiz replaced khuda hafiz, both meaning ‘God Preserve You’) during Zia ul Haq’s Islamization [1977-1988] because khuda is the Persian word for God whereas Islamic purism required the Arabic equivalent. The political vocabulary borrows extensively, self-consciously, from Arabic and Persian rather than the indigenous tradition. Thus words like chunao ‘election’, raj ‘rule’, common between Urdu and Hindi, are studiously avoided and their Perso-Arabic equivalents intikhabat and hukoomat are used. The Urdu script was considered the desiderated script for languages without an old established script such as Punjabi, Siraiki, Balochi, Brahvi and, of course, the unwritten languages of the country. In Balochistan, the convention on the Balochi script held in September 1972, became a battle ground between the left-leaning ethno-nationalists and the right-leaning Pakistani nationalists. The former rejected the Urdu script even preferring the Roman one to it while the latter insisted upon it (Rahman, 1996: 166).

This horizontal (ethnic) conflict is not the only one in which Urdu plays a political role. It is also part of the vertical (socio-economic class) conflict in the country. In this role it favours the mostly Urdu-educated lower middle class against the English-educated upper-middle and upper classes (the middle class falls unevenly in both divides). While the elites of wealth and power can buy English schooling, the masses are educated either in Urdu (in interior Sind also in Sindhi) or not at all. While English-medium schooling tends to disseminate liberal views making students more tolerant of religious minorities and sensitive towards women’s rights, it also alienates students from their culture and makes them look down upon their compatriots who are not as Westernized as themselves (Rahman, 2004: 71 and 161-176). In short, Urdu and Islam are used to subordinate the ethnic elites in favour of the Punjabi elite but, ironically enough, both are in fact subordinated to the interests of the Westernized, English-using, urban elite. The political uses of Urdu as a part of the Islamic and Pakistani nationalist identity are, therefore, complex and contradictory.

The Indigenous Languages of Pakistan and Islam

Although Urdu emerged as the major language of Islam in most of South Asia, the indigenous languages of Muslims – Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Brahvi etc – of these areas were also used for religious purposes. Thus, there are Shariah guidebooks in all these languages.

While most of these books were not part of the formal curricula in the madrasas, some were taught at one time or the other. For instance Richard Burton, the famous explorer and Orientalist, mentions the names of Sindhi books which
were taught in the schools before the British conquest (Burton, 1851 in Baloch, 1971: 48-48, see also Boivin this volume). Similarly the Baran Anwa, a rhymed Shariah guidebook in Punjabi, is mentioned in the great epic work Heer Ranjha (see Rahman, 2002: 630-632 for more details). The important point here, is that a large number of these works were written during the 18th-19th centuries when Muslim political power was weakening and the ulema felt that a Muslim identity based upon an internalization of Islam was desired. Such a reaction is evident in the case of Balochistan where the ulema took fright when the Christian missionaries translated the bible in Balochi and Brahvi between 1905 to 1907. One of them, Maulvi Mohammad Fazil (1823-96) from the village of Darkhan near Dhadar, created a movement for writing religious books in the local languages. This movement, known as the Darkhani school, got a number of Shariah guidebooks printed which are available in private collections in Balochistan (for brief descriptions see Rahman, 2002: 431-434). As the Baloch ulema also felt threatened by the Zikris, a sect which believed that obligatory prayers had been abolished, they counteracted this idea by emphasizing upon prayers (Baloch, 1996).

Therefore the threat produced the urge to promote Islamic orthodoxy through the peoples indigenous languages which were not otherwise considered worthy of formal transmission of religious knowledge. But even when there was no threat, there were products belonging to themes from folk Islam – the veneration of the prophet, members of his family (ahl-i-bait), saints and the martyrs of Islam. It should also be pointed out that, literacy being only about 54% in 2007, most people get their religious knowledge from oral sources even now. These are not just sermons in mosques but also mystical poetry in the form of qawwalis and anecdotes on religious and other themes people repeat to each other on all occasions. Moreover, nur namas, jang namas and Karbala namas are common in all languages. All these stories in verse are sung by people who have memorized them and were also known to completely illiterate people, especially women, who used to listen to them in their homes. These practices used to be common in the villages of Pakistan but the spread of the radio and television have weakened their hold upon the people. Even now, however, some forms of rhymed verse in other tongues are sung on occasions such as the maulud (the birthday of the Prophet) or the Muharram (the month of Karbala according to the lunar calendar). Moreover, despite the fact that, except for Sindhi, the indigenous languages of the people are neither used as media of instruction nor as compulsory languages in schools, small tracts (chapbooks) in these languages are still printed and sold. This means that the availability of religious literature in the mother tongue serves a persistent need which the availability of much richer religious literature in Urdu cannot fulfill.

English and Islam in the Pakistani Diaspora

English is associated with Westernization and liberal values in Pakistan (Mansoor, 1993: 143 and 189) while Urdu is the language of Islam. However
English is fast becoming the language of what Olivier Roy calls ‘globalized Islam’ (Roy 2004) through English Muslim websites. A virtual ummah exists on the internet where the anger about Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq and other Muslim grievances is expressed in an idiom which all Muslims with knowledge of English can understand. This role of English is explained by Roy as follows:

But this use of English (to translate Islamic books in it) also favours English-speaking preachers, these living in the West or in countries where English is an official language (such as Pakistan and South Africa). Transmitters are often people with a minimum of experience—the aged Wahabi Sheikhs based in Saudi Arabia rely on their English-speaking disciples to be translated but also to be informed (Roy, 2004: 169).

Thus, most Islamic centres operate in English in the United States. Even the maulvis imported from Pakistan are under pressure to learn English because the U.S. has a large middle class, professional community of Muslims who operate in English. In the United Kingdom, where the Muslim community is predominantly of Pakistani rural origin, Urdu was the preferred language with the older generation. The traditional maulvis from Pakistan fought to preserve Urdu too. However, the younger generation, including the neofundamentalists, are in favour of using English for religious purposes (Roy 2004: 263). In any case the younger generation of Pakistani (and north Indian) Muslims growing up in English-speaking countries, do not relate to the culture which uses Urdu. Nor, does Urdu have any special religious significance to them. Thus, those who turn to religion, try to make English the language of their desiderated international Islamic identity. However, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that English is growing in Pakistan because of its international significance. Nor, indeed, do Pakistani Islamic thinkers use English to reach international audiences.

Paralleling this development, there is a “recent configuration between the global demand for English and a new brand of Christian Evangelical activity that now confronts the world” (Pennycook and Makoni, 2005: 141). In fact, since English reaches out to more people than any other single language, all ideological preachers, use it as a tool to spread their world view. This makes English the most powerful carrier of competing world views ever seen on the globe. This is a sobering thought for those who are apprehensive of intellectual invasion and conquest to the exclusion of diversity.

As for Arabic, the primary language of Islam, it remains mainly an iconic language for Pakistani Muslims as well as the ruling elite of Pakistan which legitimizes itself in the name of Islam whatever its actual policies and practices. Pakistanis do not find it of much utilitarian value except for emigration to the rich Gulf states which has encouraged the learning of rudimentary Arabic but the number of those who learn it and gain real competence in it remains small (Rahman, 2002 :71-120).
Except for Arabic, there is no special language of Islam. However, a language used by a community of Muslims can become the language of Islam and the Muslim identity in a specific time period and region. Through contact with Western modernity, Urdu became a language with political, social, educational, economic and cultural consequences. It became part of (ashraf) Muslim identity replacing Persian which occupied that position earlier. It became a symbol of the Muslim political identity next only to Islam itself during the struggle for the creation of Pakistan out of British India. Then, in Pakistan, it became a part of the Pakistani (as opposed to the ethno-nationalist) and Muslim (as opposed to secular and Westernized) identity. In these roles it challenged the aspirations of the language-based ethnic elites at the horizontal (regional) and that of the lower middle classes for power at the vertical (socio-economic class) levels. It also became a language of education, again divided along ideological and class lines: Urdu-medium schools and colleges being mostly for the lower middle and middle classes and catering to right wing political and cultural views while English caters mostly for the upper-middle and upper classes and liberal political and cultural views. In journalism too Urdu is associated with the right; the indigenous languages with ethnic nationalism and English with liberalism. Thus, in Pakistan, Islam is associated with Urdu in complex ways which express how identity is constructed with reference to new realities created by modernity. The Indian Muslim community also perceived Urdu as part of their collective identity. This makes it an anti-hegemonic, liberal force acting on behalf of pluralism and liberal democracy in India while in Pakistan it is mostly seen as a symbol of the domination of the centre over the provinces; the hegemony of the Punjabis over other ethnic groups of the country and, generally, with right-wing, religious orientation. The association of Islam with language, then, is a complex, multi-dimensional and even contradictory phenomenon in Pakistan and north India.

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