

Urdu, the Beneficiary and Victim of Circumstances Struggle for Survival

Talmeez Fatma Naqvi

College of Teacher Education (Bhopal)
Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India

Corresponding author: naqvitalmeez@gmail.com

Received: 12-05-2025

Revised: 03-07-2025

Accepted: 25-07-2025

ABSTRACT

Urdu has historically been an influential instrument of learning, culture, and expression, particularly during the Mughal and British periods in India. Despite its continued popularity in certain domains, such as literature and romance, Urdu's prominence has faced challenges, especially in post-independence India. The socio-political forces that shaped the trajectory of Urdu encompass colonial policies, communal dynamics, and evolving language preferences. The British administration initially bolstered Urdu as a medium of administration and education to supplant Persian and connect with the populace. However, this support eventually paved the way for the communalized Hindi-Urdu divide. The rise of the Hindi movement in the late 19th century, coupled with British favouritism towards Hindi, relegated Urdu's status in various spheres, including governance and education. This paper examines the historical and political underpinnings that have influenced Urdu's position, highlighting its vibrant past, gradual decline, and its current status as a minority language in independent India.

Keywords: Colonial language policy, Language and identity politics, Hindi-Urdu controversy, Partition and language, Language policy in independent India, Urdu's legal status, Constitutional language provisions, Language in the state apparatus, Administrative regulations on language, Communalization of language

Among other things Urdu has been the instrument of learning and thinking, and vehicle of culture. Its continued popularity as the language of romance is an acceptable fact. But in many other areas of life it has suffered, as also continues to suffer, setbacks of sorts. Any appraisal of the vicissitudes the language has passed through in regards to its position, role and relevance in day to day life necessitates an understanding of the historical forces at work. The position of a language may be estimated with reference to its place in the overall administrative set up, its teaching as a language and as medium of teaching and learning. In this regard a wholesome view of its position in the state apparatus is an unavoidable imperative. This in turn entails an understanding of the written law, of the rulers' attitude towards the language,

and the circumstantial compulsions and political considerations which led to formulation of language policy. Legal aspects include the constitutional provisions, and law, cabinet decisions, government orders, and administrative regulations, as well as standing operational procedures. It is therefore, necessary to have an insight into the considerations and factors shaping the governments' attitude towards Urdu, the policies that resulted in bestowing it a given legal status as a language and as medium of education. In the following lines a modest attempt has been made in the direction.

How to cite this article: Naqvi, T.F. (2025). Urdu, the Beneficiary and Victim of Circumstances Struggle for Survival. *Educational Quest: An Int. J. Edu. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 16(02): 121-133.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



In independent India, Urdu is a non-state language. Why is it so? Urdu is a minority language in India as a whole as well as in each state of the country. Soon after independence Hindi was declared as official language of the central government and thus placed in the prime position. Constitutionally Hindi has not been designated 'National Language', mainly because it was not acceptable to the non-Hindi speaking states. Also, it cannot be called the dominant language of India. Out of 28 states Hindi is dominant in ten states which are not even half of the total states. In almost sixteen states the percentage of Hindi speakers is even less than ten per cent.

Even in Hindi states proportion of Hindi speaking population has been enhanced by giving the language extended meaning. Hindi has come to signify 'Hindi family or *parivar* as other identical languages, on linguistic consideration, are counted as Hindi. For example, 'although there are in all probability as many or more native speakers of Bhojpuri language on the Uttar Pradesh side as on the Bihar side of the Bhojpuri speaking region, only 1, 20,119 Bhojpuri speakers were recorded in Uttar Pradesh in 1961 compared to nearly eight million in Bihar'. In Punjab, 'in contrast to the rest of North India before Independence, promoters of Hindi failed to get official acknowledgment for the language in that province where English and Urdu remained the official languages until Independence. In this period, the most important political struggle over language recognition was between Hindus and Muslims over the status of Hindi and Urdu. In this competition, Hindus whose mother tongue was Punjabi declared Hindi as their mother tongue in the censuses in order to gain a numerical benefit over Muslims and Urdu. Most Muslims, for their part, in fact spoke the various Punjabi dialects, though their political leaders fought to preserve official standing for Urdu'. 'After Independence, which involved the partition of the Punjab, the emigration of the entire Muslim population to Pakistan, and the immigration of the entire Sikh population from west Punjab to the Indian Punjab, the struggle for recognition then became one between Hindi and Punjabi'. [Silvia Tiari 2024).

As per Language Data (Census of India, 2021) Urdu occupies the seventh position among the Scheduled Languages after Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi

and Tamil and Gujarati, but above Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi and Assamese. In terms of percentage of national population, Urdu forms 5.07 per cent of the total population, a decline since 1991. The Urdu speaking population is concentrated in the 10 States (namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal).

The Journey of Urdu

Although Persianized variant of Hindustani had begun to take shape during the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526 AD) and Mughal Empire (1526–1858 AD), Persian and then Urdu became language of the courts of Muslim rulers of native states, such as Hyderabad, Bhopal, Junagadh, Tonk, etc. Among them, instance of the native state of Hyderabad is reference worthy. In the state of Hyderabad, Urdu had become language of schooling since 1840s. Since 21 February 1884, Urdu was adopted for all types of work in the courts and it remained so up to 1948. Bhopal had adopted Urdu as language of court in 1862, 20 years before Hyderabad. But Hyderabad State enriched and adopted Urdu as means and medium of education. Leading textbooks were translated into Urdu. Professional education with Urdu as the medium of instruction was introduced. Urdu press also came up. Yet, Urdu spread its wings under the British. The developments and trends that emerged during the British days ultimately set the tone and tenor of what came up under independent India.

Having conquered the remnants of Mughal Empire, the English speaking East India Company set in the process of establishing its hold over the conquered regions and run the administration. The Company's government formulated a policy with the express purpose of uprooting the Mughal's residual cultural influence and connecting the alien administration with the people and coming closer to them. With this objectives in view, the Company decided to do away with Persian, which the new rulers perceived as the language of Mughal power, and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination. The Company had also realised that Persian was not the language of the masses. Therefore, they thought of replacing Persian by vernaculars, particularly Urdu in offices and courts as a bridge to connect

with the people, along with English as the first official language.

The government run by the company started the process of adopting Urdu as the language of administration by promulgating Bengal Regulations IV and IX of 1793 and IV of 1797. To begin with, the then government partly adopted language of preference of the people. By 1832, English was partially introduced along with local vernaculars, displacing Persian altogether from the Courts.

In the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent, the Company decided to adopt Urdu in Persian-Urdu script to replace Persian. In 1837, it replaced Persian with local vernacular in various provinces as the official and court language. Urdu acquired greater significance once the government replaced the Persian and local official languages with the Urdu and English languages in the North Indian regions of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, and Punjab in 1849. Urdu, along with English became the first official language of British India in 1850. Intellectuals in Hyderabad used Urdu not against Hindi but to rival English language and Western education.

Urdu in Education

Urdu's relevance increased once it became official language. Promotion of Urdu was now in the company's administrative and political interests. Consequently, Urdu came to be promoted as a language and as a medium of instruction, particularly in north western provinces.

In the first place, the Company's government promoted Urdu to marginalise and, ultimately, replace Persian. The government introduced Urdu in Persian schools (1851-52) and attracted Persian teachers for teaching Urdu by offering incentives to those who would teach Urdu as well. The state officials were to 'persuade the school-masters in Persian schools to teach Urdu, and in Hindi schools, to adopt the Nāgri. The district and sub-district (parganāh) officials of schools, were instructed to distribute funds at their command to increase the study of Urdu and Hindi rather than Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. The government offered rewards to students if they studied Urdu and Hindi. The objective was to wean them away from Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit.

Even the Christian missionaries taught Urdu but in 'the Roman Character. Number of Urdu teaching schools shot up. In 1852, there were five Urdu schools; and 55 Urdu and Hindi schools. In 1854 the number shot up to 155 schools teaching Urdu and Persian together (Reid, 1854). There were then the English-vernacular schools teaching Urdu and Hindi along with English. Likewise, the Tehsili schools which were directly under the government also provided teaching in Urdu. Urdu with other languages was taught in 244 schools (Reid, 1854). The Urdu language was likewise made the principal medium of instruction in Government schools in Punjab.

Urdu learning made considerable progress during third quarter of the nineteenth century. By the year 1871-72, the number of boys learning Urdu had exceeded 25000. After three years (1875-76) the strength rose and exceeded 33,000. The strength of students learning Hindi likewise rose from 18,997 to 30,115 during the same period. By the late nineteenth century, literacy in Urdu was seen necessary not only for men but also for women.

As medium of learning in schools: Urdu had come to be established as a language of formal schooling in the middle of the nineteenth century in north India. Even under the rule of the British Crown, there seems to be considerable acceptance of Urdu. As per an official Report the people sent their sons to the Persian schools to 'acquire a thorough knowledge of Urdu'.

Urdu also became the vehicle of modern learning and modernization. Modern subjects—such as Mathematics, Accounting, and History—were neglected in the traditional Persian schools but emphasized in the Urdu medium schools, says a Report of 1854. In the state of Hyderabad, Urdu had become language of schooling since 1840s. Since 1884, Urdu was adopted there for all types of work in the courts and it remained so up to 1948. With the purpose of making, Urdu-learning relevant the State of Hyderabad enriched and adopted it as means and medium of education.

Urdu in Higher educational institution

Urdu was introduced and taken up as a language and as medium of instruction in higher educational institutions of North India during the nineteenth century. Use of Urdu in education, administration

and the courts of law generated demand for Urdu knowing people. Need-based linkage with employment created demand for Urdu learning, in higher educational institutions. By the year 1877-78, the demand for Urdu knowing hand and Urdu teaching had greatly increased and somewhat exceeded the supply. The institutions to sense the employment based demand and respond to it were the Delhi College (1825); the Benares College (1792), the Agra College (1823); the Bareilly College (1837), and the Ajmer School (1851). Among these, Delhi College presents a worth citing example.

In the Delhi College, all 'the students read Urdu. The College also adopted Urdu as medium of instruction. It pioneered disseminating Western knowledge through the medium of Urdu. Both 'the Oriental and the English departments of the College deployed Urdu as the medium of instruction for all the scientific subjects.

Study material in Urdu for modern learning was also developed. The Delhi College's second principal, Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), took advantage of the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society and the learned staff of the College to get several books translated into Urdu. Muslim reformers reinforced the ideals of disseminating Western knowledge through the medium of Urdu and they produced literature in Urdu and promoted it through translation as well. Delhi Vernacular Translation Society, translated books from 1830 till 1857. Later Sir Saiyid founded his Scientific Society in Ghazipur Around 1847 there was an outburst of Urdu translations—128 from Arabic, Persian and English books—of both the classical and the modern type were rendered into Urdu. Munshi Mohammad Zakaullah (1832-1910) was one of those who tried to bring modern scientific knowledge through the medium of Urdu to Indians. He published 147 books ranging from subjects as diverse as mathematics to history. He also translated scientific books from English to Urdu. In a sense, he was a living Urdu encyclopaedia of nineteenth century Delhi.

In order to make the learning content available in Urdu, the state of Hyderabad established Dar-ul-Tarjuma (Translation Bureau). Maulavī Abdul-Haq who was also one of the pioneers of Osmania University, presided over the Dāruīl-Tarjuma and invited eminent people from North India. The Dar-ul-Tarjuma translated all the leading textbooks into

Urdu. The Dār-ul-Tarjuma produced 382 books and provided employment for 129 translators. It was burned down in 1955, though some of the books which had been translated earlier are to be found in the Nizam Trust Library in Hyderabad. The Dar-ul-Tarjuma, which later on functioned as a Department in Osmania University, also prepared a glossary of Administrative and Legal Terms. But it is all but lost.

Urdu was also used for technical education in the north. The Thomason Civil Engineering College at Roorkee, for instance, admitted the candidates who had a good knowledge of Urdu language, and could read and write it in the Persian character with ease and accuracy. Likewise, in Awadh Urdu was also used for medical studies. According to the reports 3,786 studied medicine in Urdu while 2,631 studied it in English from 1860 - 61 till 1903-04. Professional education with Urdu as the medium of instruction was also introduced in Hyderabad. The Faculty of Law started classes in 1899 by Legal Department in Hyderabad State. The "Law class" was opened to give instruction in law to students desirous of joining legal profession along with "Judicial Test" classes for Judicial Officers. Thus teaching of Law was in existence even before Osmania University came into existence in the year 1919. In the year 1923 the "law class" and "Judicial Test" classes were abolished and Law Department was constituted in the Osmania University. The University made a successful experiment of teaching Law, in a vernacular language namely Urdu. In the year of 1942, LL.M. course was introduced. After independence, the medium of instruction was changed from Urdu to English.

Urdu press also came up in Hyderabad. The first Urdu magazine on medicine entitled *Risala-i-Tababat* was published in 1857; *Khurshed-e-Deccan* was the first newspaper of Hyderabad which started its publication in 1883 under the editorship Sultan Mohd Dehlavi. There were 12 Urdu papers at that point of time, out of them seven were dailies.

With the British decision to adopt Urdu for use in the state apparatus, and in the education system the language scaled new heights. During British rule Urdu was not only being written, spoken but also translated to and from English in all courts, schools, official documents, and government institutes. British were also learnt Urdu to communicate.

Sumit Sarkar notes that in the 18th and the bulk of the 19th century, Urdu had been the language of polite culture over a big part of north India, for Hindus quite as much as Muslims. For the decade of 1881-90, Sarkar gives figures which showed that the circulation of Urdu newspapers was twice that of Hindi newspapers and there were 55 per cent more Urdu books than Hindi books.

But the scenario that favoured Urdu underwent a gradual change so much so that Hindi came to replace Urdu. For example, the authors like Premchand who wrote mainly in Urdu until 1915, when he found it difficult to publish in the language. With the Hindi movement gaining momentum after 1900, the number of Hindi publications increased and stripped publications in Urdu. In this, the consequences of the British language policy and the strategy adopted by them went a long way in deciding, among other things, the fate of Urdu in the days to come.

Negative Side of the British language policy and Hindi Movement

The British pursued the policy of dividing Indians on various pretexts such as religions and languages, which included Urdu-Hindi. The colonial government induced sentiments, ignited and exploited them for promoting the policy. The strategy found sustenance and support from the Indian who took up the same in the name of religion and culture.

The controversy initially related to the status of Hindi and Urdu as a single language, *Hindustani*, or as two dialects of a single language, and the establishment of a single standard language in certain areas of north and north western India. Having been started under the British, the controversy acquired wider dimensions and turned more and more intense.

It is noteworthy that intellectuals in Hyderabad had sensed the British objective of replacing Vernacular by English. Therefore, they used Urdu not against Hindi but to rival English language and Western education. There, the language was put above religion. But Hindi movement changed the scenario essentially because the real purpose of the Hindi movement, according to Christopher King, was to differentiate Hindi from Urdu and to make Hindi a symbol of culture and medium of education &

administration. The advocates of Hindi had the realisation that Language exerts hidden power and that arguments about Hindi-Urdu were arguments about politics, disguised and channelled through identity. Therefore they presented the languages not just as words, but as culture, tradition, as a factor to forge unity community. At the end of the day, Hindi movement came to fashion and sharpen linguistic and communal identities in pre-Independence India.

Although the need to have a language for Hindus developed post 1850, and finally birth of Hindi language took place in 1880 and this continued to overshadow Urdu. Gradually, it looked like: If a Hindu speaks Urdu, it becomes Hindi, and if a Muslim speaks Hindi, it becomes Urdu. The main cause of this divide is attributed to the aspirations of both communities, Hindu and Muslim, to spread their cultural views, which became open conflict during Indian independence. Languages were thus getting communalized.

In the late 19th century, India witnessed the intensification of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, particularly in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. Proponents of both languages campaigned for the official use of Hindustani, with the Hindi faction advocating for the Devanagari script and the Urdu faction supporting the Persian script. In 1867, prominent Hindus in Banaras, including figures like Babu Shiva Prasad and Madan Mohan Malaviya, initiated a movement demanding the replacement of Urdu with Hindi, and the adoption of Devanagari in place of the Persian script as the court language in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. This push for Hindi sparked counter-movements in support of Urdu, with Syed Ahmed Khan among its key defenders. The Hunter commission, appointed by the Government of India to review the progress of education, was used by the advocates of both Hindi and Urdu for their respective causes.

The British policy tilt in favour of Hindi flared up tensions. In the first place, British government followed a contradictory language policy in North India in the 1860s. It encouraged both Hindi and Urdu as a medium of education in schools, but discouraged Hindi or Nagari script for official purposes. This policy played a contentious role and gave rise to conflict between students educated in Hindi or Urdu for the competition of government jobs, which eventually took on a communal form.

The British encouraged the movement further (1881) by replacing Urdu in Persian script by Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language in Bihar. In 1881, Bihar accepted Hindi as its sole official language, replacing Urdu.

In April 1900, the Lt. Governor issued a directive which granted equal status to both Hindi (in Devnagri script) and Urdu (in Persian script) in government offices and courts in the North-Western Provinces. This decree evoked protests from Urdu supporters and joy from Hindi supporters. The Muslims and the Urdu-speaking elite made a token protest but they were silenced when the Governor threatened to cut off government aid to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO College), Aligarh. However, the order was more symbolic in that it did not provision exclusive use of Nagari script. Persian-Arabic script remained dominant in North-Western provinces and Oudh as the preferred writing system until independence. Yet the Order served the British objective in that it widened the existing gulf and embittered attitudes.

Hindi and Urdu began to diverge linguistically as well, with Hindi increasingly drawing from Sanskrit for its vocabulary, often with deliberate efforts to replace Persian-derived terms.

Hindustani to Hindi

The divide between Urdu and Hindi occurred under the colonial impact with the growing cultural consciousness as part of the processes of political modernization. A beginning, in fact, was affected at the Fort William College, Calcutta (established 1800), under Dr John Gilchrist (1789-1841). There is enough evidence to show that the 'British rulers tied down the question of the varieties of 'Hindavi', first to the cultural heritage and social hierarchy, and later to religion and political power play'. Raja Shiva Prasad in his book of grammar (1875) reiterated that Hindi and Urdu have no difference on the level of the vernacular. He wrote: "The absurdity began with the Maulvis and Pundits of Dr. Gilchrist's time, who being commissioned to make a grammar of the common speech of Upper India made two grammars...The evil consequence is that instead of having a school grammar of the vernacular as such... we have two diverse and discrepant class books, one for the Mohammedan and Kayastha boys and the other for the Brahmins and Banias." (cf. Srivastava

p.30). The conflict between the Anglicists and Orientalists led to the "polarization" of languages.

Mahatma Gandhi recognized that the language issue was becoming increasingly communalized. He feared that choosing Hindi with Sanskritized vocabulary would marginalize Urdu-speaking Muslims, potentially creating a significant divide and threatening national unity. To address this, Gandhi advocated for Hindustani as a middle ground, seeing it as a suitable national language for all of India. Hindustani represented a compromise between Hindi and Urdu, and Gandhi proposed using either Devanagari or Urdu script under the unified term Hindustani. In 1937, efforts were made in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to promote unity by making both Hindi and Urdu compulsory in schools, so children would learn both languages and their respective scripts. This approach aimed to bridge the gap between Hindu and Muslim communities through education.

With the rise of India's freedom struggle, the Indian language policy had taken a U-turn when the Indian National Congress started supporting and promoting Hindi language written in Devanagri. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had supported Devanagari script as the essential part of nationalist movement. The nationalists wanted to compete with the British by their own language that is Hindi. Hindi was identified with freedom struggle and Indian nationalism. Religious and political leaders, social reformers, writers and intellectuals too lent support to Hindi. Jinnah cemented the divide in 1940. He identified Urdu with the Muslims and the demand for Partition. (After Partition, Urdu became the official language of Pakistan). Gandhi tirelessly supported Hindustani. But the die had been cast. The linguistic divide had acquired sectarian dimensions, and it was there to stay. After the partition and the subsequent emigration of millions of Muslims, Hindu leaders in Congress saw little need for Gandhi's concessions to Hindustani or the Muslims. They accordingly focused on Hindi and left Urdu and Hindustani to meet an inconsequential end.

IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Central Legislations and positioning of Urdu

That Hindi in Devanagari script along with English

was to replace Urdu as the official language of India was a foregone conclusion. That was why “the drafting Constitution (1948) changed Hindustani to Hindi even without the official sanction of the assembly.” (Chaklader, 1990:63). While speaking on the question of the official language in the Constituent Assembly on 13th Sep. 1949, Mr. R. V. Dulekar proclaimed: “say, it is..... it means Hindi.....the official language and it is a national language. You may demure it; you may belong to another nation. But I belong to Indian nation, the Hindi nation, the Hindustani nation, the Hindu nation”. (CAD,1967: 3630). The very next day (September 14, 1949), the Constituent Assembly passed the Constitutional provision regarding the Official Languages. Hindi was made an official language. There is no national language as declared by the Constitution of India.

Urdu was included in the Eighth Schedule to the Indian Constitution containing 22 scheduled languages. It meant that the language was entitled to representation on the Official Languages Commission. The list has since, however, acquired further significance. The Government of India is now under an obligation to take measures for the development of these languages, such that “they grow rapidly in richness and become effective means of communicating modern knowledge.” In addition, a candidate appearing in an examination conducted for public service at a higher level is entitled to use any of these languages as the medium in which he or she answers the paper. [“The Official Languages (Use for Official Purpose of the Union) - Rules 1976 (As Amended, 1987)]

The Constitution also provides for the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, at least at the primary level, and recognizes the right of linguistic and cultural minorities to preserve their language (Article 29). Indeed, since the recent amendment to the Constitution, raising universal education from a “Directive Principle of State Policy” to a “Fundamental Right,” the State is obliged to provide free and compulsory elementary education to every child up to the age of 14.

Attempts have been made to accommodate scheduled languages, including Urdu. The University Education Commission (1948–49) accepted that Hindi was itself a minority language, and had no superiority over others such as Tamil, Marathi,

Bengali, Urdu and Braj. The commission found the requirement to study three languages to be feasible. This observation opened the door for three-language formula. In the meantime, the Education Commission (1965–66) recommended a modified or graduated three-language formula for language learning. The formula was formulated (1968) by the Ministry of Education of the Government of India. Indian Parliament adopted it in 1968. The formula as enunciated in the 1968 National Policy Resolution provided for the study of “Hindi, English and modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the Regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States”. The 1986 National Policy on Education reiterated the 1968 formula. Since there is no Urdu speaking state in India, the formula did not provide required succour to the language.

In 1972, the government formed a committee for the promotion of Urdu, chaired by I.K. Gujral. The Gujral Committee’s report (1975) recommended protections for Urdu-speaking minorities, constituting more than 10 percent of a population, including the use of Urdu for official purposes and as a medium of instruction. Among its proposals was the establishment of Urdu-medium primary schools in areas where Urdu speakers exceeded ten percent of the population in a village or urban ward. However, these measures faced opposition within the cabinet. After four years, a modified version of the report was approved by the cabinet in 1979 and passed to state governments in 1984.

In 1990, a new committee led by Ali Sardar Jafri was convened to review the implementation of the Gujral Committee’s recommendations. This committee suggested changes to the three-language formula. For Hindi-speaking states, it proposed: (a) Hindi (with Sanskrit included); (b) Urdu or another modern Indian language; and (c) English or another modern European language. For non-Hindi-speaking states, it recommended: (a) the regional language; (b) Hindi; (c) Urdu or another modern Indian language excluding the first two; and (d) English or another European language.

However, C. N. Annadurai, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, strongly opposed making Hindi compulsory in his state. He remarked, “What links us with the outside world can do the same within

India. To argue for two link languages is like creating a smaller hole for the kitten when a bigger one exists for the cat. What suits the cat will suit the kitten as well."

Political scientist Brian Weinstein of Howard University said that neither Hindi nor non-Hindi speaking states followed the 1968 directive. Academics have noted the failure even of the modified formula. Harold F. Schiffman, an expert on Dravidian culture, observed that the three-language formula "has been honoured in the breach more than in reality" and that due the lack of a symbolic national language, there is a tendency "for English to take over as the instrumental language" in India.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 "reaffirmed its commitment" to the implementation of the "three-language formula" across India as per the National Policy on Education. The intent of the policy is believed to be the "national integration". But those who disagree with the formula contended that the very wording of this statement is wrong. Hindi is being implicitly assumed as "non- regional" while languages like Kannada, Tamil and Marathi are being termed as "regional". 'In our democracy everyone is treated equally, but the speakers of Hindi are treated a little bit more equally'. The little bit is believed to be enough to 'wipe off speakers of Indian languages other than Hindi from the face of this planet'.

The Constitution grants the central government, acting through the President, the power to issue certain directives to the government of a state in relation to the use of minority languages for official purposes. The President may direct a State to officially recognise a language spoken in its territory for specified purposes and in specified regions, if its speakers demand it and satisfy him that a substantial proportion of the State's population desire its use. Not only the successive Central governments have hardly been proactive for ensuring implementation of the provision, but have hardly utilized the constitutional provision in favour of Urdu. On the contrary, even the efforts to convince the central government to adjudicate decisively on behalf of Urdu with the appropriate state governments also have had partial success. The long delayed legislation granting Urdu the status of second official language in the states like UP is glaring example of the governments' approach.

The Union Cabinet approved NEP 2020 on 29 July, which proposes drastic changes in the Indian education system. It has given birth to trepidations in the minds of Urdu lovers because Urdu has not been mentioned anywhere in the 66 pages. This conspicuous absence of Urdu drew widespread criticism across the country. The government tried to allay the apprehensions of Urdu-lovers and Secretary of Higher Education is reported to have said: "Para 4.12, 22.6 and 22.18 of NEP 2020 talk of all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which includes Urdu as well.

STATE LEVEL SCENARIO

Responsibility to implement the constitutional provisions, legal provisions, directives of the centre as well as their own acts, decisions and orders lies with the State government. That is to say the success of any language related plan depends on the intent and will power of the state government.

Although Urdu-Hindi debate was officially settled by a Government Order in 1950, declaring Hindi as the official language, but resistance remained and this found manifestation in the state legislations concerning Urdu and its overall positioning. Pro-Hindi movement had turned anti-Urdu. Urdu was equated with a language that divided up the country. After Independence-Partition, Urdu was assumed to have 'migrated' to Pakistan. Its use was steadily limited to the Muslim community. Thus, since Partition Urdu faces a hostile political environment, particularly in north India.

States given the right to adopt its own language

In regards to the official languages to be used by the states for the conduct of their official functions, the ideological-political and electoral considerations and communal divide overlapping the languages played a decisive role in framing state governments' perception of Urdu and thereby determining its *de jure* and *de facto* status.

The constitutional provisions in relation to use of the official language in legislation at the State level largely mirror those relating to the official language at the central level. Having been promulgated as the Official Language of the Union in 1950, Hindi came to occupy centre stage. Hindi movement had set

the tone and tenor and that Hindi would dominate was a foregone conclusion. The Constitution vests the States with the power to specify their own official language(s) through legislation. Under this provision, the northern states adopted Hindi as the official language. Policies adopted by the Centre and various Hindi-speaking states furthered Hindi's cause. Urdu was neglected.

Hindi is now the official language of nine states in North India. In the 12 states with large concentration of Urdu speaking population Urdu suffered mainly in the northern Hindi-speaking region comprising UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, MP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.

The linguistic reorganization of states precluded the possibilities of the development of Urdu. The States Reorganization Act 1956 reorganised and divided the states on language basis. Since Urdu speaking population is in minority in each language-based state, the linguistic basis of states rendered Urdu homeless within its home, and this weakened Urdu's cause all the more. The proportion of Urdu speaking people in India too is low: this is only about five per cent of the population in India. The number of speakers (45 per cent) of Hindi languages far exceeds the Urdu speaking people. Unlike Hindi, because Urdu is not the mother tongue of the majority of the people of any state, it is unlike the other minority languages like Bangla, Tamil, Telugu, etc. which have their own home states. Urdu is the only languages, which is 'homeless and, consequently powerless. Rajagopalachari, chief minister of Madras Presidency introduced Hindi as a compulsory language in secondary school education. But he had to later relent, so much so that during the Madras anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, he even opposed the introduction of Hindi. Assertion of a region in support of its regional language coerced the protagonists of Hindi to beat the retreat and install Tamil at state pedestal. Because of not being the language of any state, position of Urdu is quite vulnerable. Relevance for creation of Urdu state, even during the era of emergence of small states, has not been considered worth pursuing due to reasons which are more than obvious.

On the contrary, in the North, Urdu has, for a long time past, been facing the hostility and constant threat of assimilation by Hindi under the impact of Hindi-Hindu resurgence. Hindi movement had

fashioned and sharpened communal identities in pre-Independence India. The identification of Urdu with Islam, inadvertent or deliberate, further complicates the problems of Urdu. In the 1991 census, 61.2 per cent of the Muslim population of India declared their mother tongue to be Urdu, 'but there were probably no non-Muslims who declared their mother tongue to be Urdu'. 'Truly, Urdu has now become the language only of the Muslims, even though it is not the language of all the Muslims. Then the ideological-political and electoral considerations and communal divide overlapping the languages played a decisive role in defining state governments' attitude towards Urdu and thereby determining its status.

Despite the constitutional assurance of equality and justice to all, Hindi has been extended disproportionate favour. For instance, 'from 1963 to 1966, for Hindi alone, governments spent twenty times more than the amount spent for all the other languages put together.' (CAD April 7, 1967:3632-33). Recently, the present government announced plans to promote Hindi in government offices in Southern and Northeast India

Running for second language status

Urdu remains as one of the (22) scheduled languages in India. In the states, it has to run for seeking (second or additional) official language status. As of now, it is the co-official language of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the two official languages of Telangana and also has the status of "additional official language" in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and the National Capital, New Delhi. But it is worthwhile to see the process of granting Urdu the status of second official language of the State besides the regional (state) language has been long drawn.

In spite of the large number of declared Urdu speakers in the country as a whole and in north India in particular, the Muslim spokesmen had to run for seeking recognition of Urdu as the second official language of certain states. Position of Urdu in the Hindi speaking remains precarious. Having observed lack of state's initiative for more than a decade, various organisations had to step in to initiate movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Responding to the demand, the 1971 Jan Sangh manifesto provided to the opposite: the party

publicised its commitment not to granting Urdu the status of second official language in U.P. Bihar and M.P.

The proponents of Hindi opposed the move in the states of U. P. and Bihar, as well. It was more intensely opposed in UP. In contrast to Bihar, the struggle between Hindus, and Muslims over the status of Hindi and Urdu as the dominant regional language of U. P. was so prolonged that the overwhelming majority of the people of this state had declared their mother tongue as either Hindi or Urdu in the 1961 mother tongue census. Only in the 1980s could Urdu be granted the position of a second language by order rather than formal legislation, for official purposes in fifteen districts of Bihar and in the western districts of U.P. But the U.P. Failed to legislate within given duration of time, and, therefore, the Ordinance lapsed. In 1989, the U.P. Legislature introduced Urdu as the second official language of the State, besides Hindi. Yet, the Urdu baiters continued to oppose the move even after the legislative provision had been made. Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sahitya Sammelan approached the Allahabad High Court, but the court upheld the constitutionality of 1989 Law and declared Urdu as the State's "second official language. The order was then challenged before the Apex court in 1997. In 2003, the five-judge bench of the Apex Court upheld the validity of the Allahabad High Court Order. Even the Supreme Court's decision was not welcomed by all. Characterising the decision as unfortunate, a prominent Maratha leader asserted further that in Maharashtra, they would not tolerate any attempt to make other language the official language of the state other than Marathi.

Instance of Uttar Pradesh remains glaring. As per the provision States and local authorities are required to endeavour to provide primary education in the mother tongue for all linguistic minorities, regardless of whether their language is official in that State. 'In UP which is the largest state in India from the point of view of population and where the Urdu speaking population of is probably one of the highest, the number of UM schools is 3459 of which only 175 are government-run schools, and that too when Urdu has been declared the second official language by the Supreme Court of India. It may also be stated in this connection that in written replies to the questions posed by the Lok Sabha MP

Tariq Anwar, it is vaguely stated that government furnished the above information and nowhere name of the HRD minister or minister of state is given who normally furnish written replies in response to questions by MPs (The Milli Gazette 28 Apr 2015).

Introducing coercive options for language learning and thereby denying Urdu an appropriate position is yet another stratagem. State regulations provide and govern the options of studying Urdu as a compulsory or optional subject in the curriculum as well as its use as the medium of education. The marked feature is lack of space for Urdu in the operational curriculum. Lack of concern at the official level, to say the least, is at its root. By and large, today Urdu stands expelled from the school curriculum both by design and by default. For example, according to the decision of the Government of Delhi, English will become compulsory at the primary level, Hindi is already compulsory, and hence there will be no room at all for any minority language. In UP, both Hindi and Sanskrit are compulsory at the primary level. The regulations of the state prescribe the teaching of languages other than Urdu as compulsory subjects or bracket Urdu as an optional subject with a more "useful" subject or bar the schools from using any language other than the principal language of the state or English as the medium of instruction.

The availability of Urdu as an optional or additional subject in minority educational institutions run by the Urdu-speaking or Muslim community is influenced by several factors. These include the general educational landscape of the area, the inclusion of Urdu in the official curriculum mandated for both government and private schools, and the preferences of the parents. For Urdu-speaking children, the challenges they face are similar whether they attend Muslim educational institutions or government and private schools in the area.

Additionally, school examination boards have implemented discriminatory policies. At the secondary and higher secondary levels, many boards restrict students from taking exams in languages other than the state's official language, such as Hindi or English. This results in Urdu-medium students being unfairly disadvantaged. The very recently decision (September 2024) of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to

offer question papers to students only in English or Hindi has put students of Urdu medium specifically Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) schools in trouble.

Attempts are also made to throw Urdu out of use. Police prefer using Urdu terminology in FIRs and daily documentation. Delhi Police are taught 132 Urdu words at the training academy. Now, Advocate Amit Sahni filed the public interest litigation seeking Delhi High Court's direction to the city police to replace "archaic and difficult words and phrases of Persian and Urdu language" with simple words from Hindi and English, for recording statement of witnesses, submitting of challan, registration of FIRs and in courts documents, etc. But the Delhi Police opposed the move, saying the words have come to be "widely understood even by a layman in Delhi". "The words used are neither archaic nor difficult but on the other hand replacement of these words in 'Hindi' as suggested in the petition would create a lot of difficulties, both for litigants and lawyers". "Hindi substitute to these Urdu words, which are presently being used by the police, are much more difficult to understand for an average person." The police asserted: "No difficulty has ever been experienced by anybody including lawyers in understanding the words and phrases being used by the police... Working of police is going on very smoothly with the present words and phrases... Dropping these commonly-used words may be against the ideals of inclusiveness and national integration," the police added.

Way back in 2005 in Haryana the then DGP asked the policemen to discontinue the practice of using Urdu expressions and, instead use Hindi. Even judges in various Haryana districts have time and again asked the police to use simple Hindi. During a judgment on November 21, 2015, additional session judge, Bhiwani, M.M. Dhonchak had directed the superintendent of police, to ensure that the practice of using Urdu words was abandoned and instead Hindi or English was used. Haryana home secretary, Samir Mathur appreciated shift to Hindi.

Urdu is not receiving significant support, even from Muslim educational institutions. These institutions seem to focus primarily on promoting education rather than the Urdu language, unless there is a commercial interest involved. The inclusion of Urdu

as a compulsory or optional subject, as well as its use as a medium of instruction, is largely dictated by state regulations. In states like UP, where Urdu speakers are concentrated, not all mainstream Muslim educational institutions offer provisions for teaching Urdu, let alone using it as the medium of instruction. At present, making Urdu the medium of education at the secondary level is nearly impossible, except in rare circumstances.

Status in non-Hindi States

In South India, the principal language along with Hindi and English has been allotted the three slots. This renders the situation of the non-Hindi minorities even more precarious. Even in the South, Urdu finds itself in an uneven competition with Hindi, even numerically. Here too, Hindi has the advantage of being taught as the official language of the Union. Urdu has, therefore, to compete with Hindi. Yet, in comparison to the North India's Hindi states, the position of Urdu in the southern states such as Maharashtra, AP and Karnataka is a little better. For instance, in Maharashtra, the language has been given official status wherever Dakhni Urdu speakers are in significant majority. Malegaon is best example of this. Malegaon Municipal Corporation does all the official works in Dakhani Urdu. In Malegaon Urdu school students may get Urdu as the first language. Karnataka provides (26th June 1972): "if the population of linguistic minority in any *Taluk* is not less than 15 per cent, petitions shall continue to be accepted in the minority language.

In the southern states Urdu is widely understood & spoken and taught at the school level. In fact the average South Indian is more concerned with the spoken language, which comes alive on the electronic media and in the so-called 'Hindi' films. Many of them identify this spoken language as Urdu or Hindustani and do not have the same inclination as in the north to Sanskritise it.

Overall scenario

Urdu-Muslim community in Hindi-speaking States is under coercive pressure for cultural assimilation. It is also possible that by choice or by compulsion of circumstances, the Muslim community in Hindi-speaking States is slowly succumbing to social, economic and political pressure and distancing itself

from Urdu to the advantage of Hindi. In either case, the situation is a negation of linguistic freedom, cultural autonomy and equality of opportunity.

At the grassroots level, Urdu has recognized the change of circumstances and accepted the dominance and superior status of Hindi. Since 1950 the Urdu community has been demanding only that Urdu as a mother tongue be the medium of instruction at the primary for Urdu-speaking children and that at the secondary level it be taught as the first language under the Three Language Formula to those who declare Urdu as their Mother Tongue, with the provision that all such children also learn Hindi in the Hindi-speaking states as the compulsory Second Language and in other states, in the same manner, the Principal Languages of those states.

Most of the times, Urdu does not enjoy the status of being the medium of instruction and examinations. The fact also remains that most books are of indifferent quality and are limited in the choice of subjects. Far fewer books deal with the social sciences. Books on science and technology and on the professions are almost non-existent. Indeed, original, degree-level textbooks are yet to be written in Urdu. The demand for Urdu, and for curricular material and extra-curricular literature in Urdu, decreases.

The lack of demand, limited range of subjects, and the indifferent quality of Urdu books all have their roots in low proficiency in and erosion of demand of Urdu. Education in the present day world is a market commodity. There is an extremely marginalised market demand for Urdu. University-level education by itself will not help the long-term survival of Urdu language and literature. These trends have placed Urdu on a slippery slope. Falling demand for Urdu in the employment market coupled with the decreasing preference of Urdu-speaking parents for Urdu as an optional subject go to catalyse momentum. The nature of law and administrative provisions are conditioned by electoral considerations. At best, one may expect support or patronage at local level, and symbolic one at higher level.

Urdu faces the prospect of becoming an ethnic language as far as Hindi-speaking States are concerned. Urdu has become synonymous with

Muslims though it is not the mother tongue of all Muslims but almost all Indians who declare it as mother tongue are Muslims. Soon it will be limited to those whose parents take special pains to teach Urdu by sending them to local Maktabas and Madrasas or by arranging private tuition at home. The Urdu community is advised to make its own arrangements for teaching Urdu to its children or that it should take steps to establish special institutions for the purpose, outside the main-stream of education. In the northern region, a campaign has been going on to marginalize all minority languages and to only promote Hindi, the principal language of the Hindi-speaking state. Urdu community is under constant pressure to adopt the Devanagari script. To merge Urdu with Hindi argue that Urdu-speakers should accept the status of Urdu as a *shaily* ("style") of Hindi. Urdu may soon become extinct in the region of its birth, while it continues to expand horizontally, in all its glory beyond its borders and even across continents and oceans [2007-2016 Mainstream Weekly].

Over and above what has already gone and, has been going on, the Urdu lovers are under direct compulsion of taking effective steps for ensuring respectable survival of the language. Exerting political pressure may be one of the strategies. Dissociation of Urdu from its obvious association with a religious community may be another tested however futile way. Among other things it has to be managed by adding, sustaining and enhancing the language's utility in the social market of the day and thus make it, materially and educationally, more and more relevant. Ignoring predominantly market centred thinking of our times may be detrimental to the cause in view. Trying market based solutions is call of the hour.

REFERENCES

- Ashraf, T.M. 2016. Urdu press in the princely state of Hyderabad. *Anveshi* –Research Centre for Women Studies <https://www.anveshi.org.in/>
- Brass, P.R. 1974. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. London: Universe, Incorporated,
- Census of India, 2021. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.
- Chaklader, S. 1990. *Sociolinguistics: A Guide to Language Problems in India*. Delhi: South Asia Books 63.
- Christopher, R.K. 1994. *The Hindi-Nagari movement. One language, two scripts*. Oxford University Press, pp. 155.

- Fathima, K. 2014. Misconceptions about Hyderabad state and Nizam, *Two Circles*, February 19, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/op-ed/180920/the-curious-case-of-urdu-in-nep-2020.html>
- Hussain, M. 2003. Perspectives on Urdu Language and Education in India, *Social Scientist*, **31**(5/6): 1-4.
- India Today, 2014. *Supreme Court upholds Urdu as second official language in Uttar Pradesh, upheld Allahabad High Court's decision*.
- Jones, K.W. 1992. *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*. New York: State University of New York Press
- Khan, A.J. 2006. *Urdu/Hindi: an artificial divide*. New York: Algora Publishing, pp. 290.
- Khan, S.M. 2000. *The Begums of Bhopal: a history of the princely state of Bhopal*, pp. 120. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Maldonado, G.M.I. 2015. *Urdu Evolution and Reforms*. Lahore: Punjab University Department of Press and Publications, pp. 223.
- Matthews, D.J. 2003. Urdu Language and Education in India. *Social Scientist*, **31**(5/6): 57-72.
- McLane, J.R. 1970. *The political awakening in India*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, Englewood Cliffs, pp. 105.
- Ministry of Education, Government of India. 1962. *Report of the University Education Commission (December 1948 – August 1949), Volume I* (p. 280). Retrieved May 16, 2016. <https://www.educationforallindia.com/1949%20Report%20of%20the%20University%20Education%20Commission.pdf>
- Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (2021). *Scheduled languages in descending order of speaker's strength*
- Rahman, T. 2011. Urdu as the Language of Education in British India. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*. NIHCR. **32**(2): 1-42.
- Rahman, T. 2008. *Urdu in Hyderabad State*, Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia, UW-Madison.
- Reid, H.S. 1852. Report on Indigenous Education and Vernacular Schools in Agra, Aligarh, Bareilly, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Manipur, Mathura and Shahjahanpur 1850/51 Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, pp. 17.
- Reid, H.S. 1854. Report on Indigenous Education and Vernacular Schools in Agra, Aligarh, Bareilly, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Manipur, Mathura and Shahjahanpur 1853/54 Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, pp. 6.
- Sarkar, S. 1983. *Modern India, 1885-1947*. Macmillan, pp. 85-86.
- Schiffman, H. 1996. Indian Linguistic Culture and the Genesis of Language Policy in the Subcontinent. *Linguistic culture and Language Policy*. London: Routledge
- Shahabuddin, S. (nd). Urdu in India, Education and Muslims—A Trinity Without a Church, *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, www.urduStudies.com/pdf/18/55ShahabuddinUrdu.pdf
- The Hindu. 2010. *Hindi, not a national language: Court*.
- The Milli Gazette, 2011. Urdu in India: victim of Hindu nationalism & Muslim separatism Issue 1-15 April.
- The Milli Gazette, 2013. *Haryana cops to drop Persian, Urdu words*, 16-30 September 2013.
- The Milli Gazette, 2013. *Haryana cops to drop Persian, Urdu words from FIRs*, Print Issue: 16-30 September.
- Tieri, S. 2024. The Census amid Language Politics: The Production of Language Data and the Politics of Mother Tongue in the Census of India, Punjab, 1941-71. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, **47**(2): 434-454.
- Times of India, 2013. *Haryana cops to drop Persian, Urdu words*, New Delhi edition; Anita Singh, TNN.
- Times of India, 2012. *Use of Urdu in FIRs Baffles Courts, commoners*, Sukhbir Siwach & Hina Rohatki | TNN | Feb 5, 2012,
- Wasey, A. 2014. *50th Report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities in India (July 2012 to June 2013)* (PDF). Retrieved 20 October 2016.
- Weinstein, B. 1990. *Language Policy and Political Development*. California: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 95.

