

● ‘The tongue that belongs to us all’:

Some Reflections on Hindi/Urdu/

Hindustani via Anis Kidwai's *In*

*Freedom's Shade (Azaadi ki Chaaon Mein)*

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## Anis Kidwai's language of no name

- a 'simple' language
- a language with no 'difficult words',
- one that all ordinary women and men can understand.

## Chapter 1: Describing the first 15 August

*On that day, India took its first steps back into the past. Foreheads were being anointed with tilaks. Why were brahmins from Banaras being summoned? Why were there frenetic searches for karis to enunciate the Quran? Why was chandan being prepared? Why were those long beards being carefully groomed? What could Buddhist bhikshus possibly have to do in the Government House? Were we to grow accustomed to the sound of wooden khadaus slapping its smooth floors?*

## Chapter 1 (contd)

*...Quickly, the light in my heart was extinguished. The language being spoken around me was even more alien than English – in the words of Josh:*

*That which can be understood by no one but aliens  
Is the language, saqi, that is in usage these days*

*Seated all around on chowkis were Buddhist monks, Brahmin priests, Muslims clerics, and God knows who else. Many languages were spoken that day – English, Sanskrit, Arabic, difficult Hindi, but not the tongue that belongs to us all, in every expression of which a hundred flowers perfume the air. So much was said that day, but neither I nor all the women around me, gazing at this spectacle with choked throats and astonished eyes, could comprehend what was going on.*

## Chapter 11: A meeting in the Camp

*I recall the first such meeting in January. A large number of villagers came, among them, a gentleman in a fez cap, scurrying about to canvas against us. Three or four others were constantly heckling us, their discourses studded with the choicest of difficult words from Arabic and Persian, intent on impressing the audience with their superior intellect.*

## *Is this language Hindustani?*

Anis Kidwai's claim to a universal intelligibility of the tongue with no name may seem to suggest this:

*Hindustani is an affirmation of a distinct composite linguistic identity forming the substratum upon which the claims of Hindi and/or Urdu speakerhood can be overlaid.*

Abbi, Hasnain and Kidwai (2004)

*Hindustani is the locus in which linguistic identities are freed from the shackles that communalism has imposed on them, and as "the natural vehicle of popular democracy as well as of secularism"*

Rai (2005).

## The Continuum Description

*...The language of everyday life [is] synonymously referred to as Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani, not as three language categories defining the existence of three distinct linguistic entities, but constituting a single structure, verging on mutual intelligibility and sharing the social and inner space.*

*...The common language of the common man, which shows a remarkable resilience to rise above the manoeuvring of communal constructionists of both Hindi and Urdu. Yes, indeed, a defence of a social mind that enjoys Hindi-Urdu speech and literature in spite of a "pre-partition partition", and a narrative of intimate destabilization and dispossession.*

*Hasnain and Rajyashree (2003)*

# *The language of literary production*

- But what of the language of literary production?
  - If Hindustani is indeed pregnant with the possibility of popular democracy and secularism, why have so few amongst the ranks of secularists and democrats claimed the language as the one they compose or write in?
  - By self-ascription, Faiz and Kaifi were Urdu writers!

*Anis Kidwai not only writes like this:*

Ek bacca jiski paidayish me mahinoN dholak bajti, jiske baghair saltanat viraan, ghar beraunaq aur khaandaan ka chirag gul ho jaayaa kartaa thaa. Jiske liye mandir, masjidon aur dargaahon ki khaak chaanii jaati hE, daulat ke dher bekaar, aur ilaqon, zamindaariyon ki tikka-boti ho jaati hE, vahi baccaa is camp meN bin bulaye mehmaan ki taraah har roz aane lagaa. Na koi nars thii, na daii, baghair kisii daaktar madad ke ek-ek din meN pandrah-pandrah bacce aur ek-ek raat meN das-das bacce rote-chiikhhte duniya meN utarne lage. Ye ek aisa maslaa thaa jiska koi hal nahiiN suujhtaa thaa.

Well before more robust shelters and medicines could arrive, before doctors and nurses could begin their visits, infants started arriving. A newborn, to celebrate whose arrival drums would have beaten for months in an overjoyed home; a child, without whom a kingdom becomes a wilderness and the flame of a lineage sputters out; an offspring, in the longing for which the dust of temples, mosques and dargahs would be churned, mountains of riches squandered, land and property divided—that child was now an unwanted guest, arriving every day in the camp unbidden. Even when there were no nurses or midwives, bawling infants would find their way into the world, in every day fifteen, in every night ten.

## *She also writes like this:*

Zindagī kyā hai anāsir mẽ zahūr-e-tartīb

Maut kyā hai inhī ajzā kā pareshā honā

hayāt aur maut ka phalsafā kitne mukhtasar lafzō me Chakbast ne bayā kar dīyā. Lekin ye na sociye ki ye sher sirf ek insān ki fanā va baqā ki tashrīh hai. Qaumō ki zindagi aur mulkō ki hayāt bhi us-se mukhtalif nahī hai. Unkii tāmīr bhi mukhtalif aur muntashir ajzā ke ittehād se huā karti hai. Ye muttatarriq ajza bazāhir ek dusre se mukhtalif hote hain, lekin unko āpas me munsaliq karnewālā koi mazbut rishtā-e-itehād: ek qaum, ek mulk aur ek society ki shakal mẽ muttahid karke duniyā ke sāmne pesh karta hai. Yeh rishtā kabhī mazhab o tamaddun ka rābka-e-itehād hota hai, kabhī koi zabardast shakhsyat mazbūt tār bankar in ajza ko gūndh letī hai. kabhi koi zindā munsif nizām-e-hukumat aur kabhī koi ghair-mulki danḍa un aurāq-e-muntashir ki zahur-e-tartīb ke bāez bantā hai.

# *From the 1980 Hindi translation*

Zindagī kyā hai anāsir mẽ zahūr-e-tartīb

Maut kyā hai inhī ajzā kā pareshā honā

hayāt aur maut ka phalsafā kitne **thoṛe** lafzō mẽ Chakbast ne bayā kar dīyā. Lekin ye na sociye ki ye sher sirf ek insān ki **jīvan-maraṇ** ki **vyākhyā** hai. Qaumō ki zindagi aur mulkō ki hayāt bhi us-se **alag** nahī hai. Unkā **nirmaṇ** bhi **vibhinn aur bikhre hue khandō ke ek ho jaane se hua karta hai**. **Ye vividh prakār ke ansh dekhne se ek dusre se bhinn hote hain, lekin unko āpas me milānewālā koi mazbut ekta ka sambandh: ek quām, ek desh, aur ek samaj ke rūp mẽ ekta ke sutr mẽ pirokar duniyā ke sāmne pesh karta hai**. Ye **sambandh** kabhī **dharm aur sanskriti ka sampark-sutr** hota hai, kabhī koi zabardast **vyakti** mazbūt tār banakar un **khandō** ko gūndh letā hai. kabhi koi **jivit nayayakta praṇali** aur kabhī koi **videshi** danḍa un **bikhre hue pannō** ko **saīyojit karne ka kāraṇ** bantā hai.

*What is life but a manifest arrangement of the elements?*

*What is death but a scattering of these particles?*

*How pithily has Chakbast expressed the basic truths about life and death! But do not take this couplet to be solely a commentary on just the being and nothingness of Man, as the lives of communities and the perpetuation of nations are not distinct from this either. Both nation and community are constructed by the unification of different scattered constituents. And although these parts may appear to be quite distinct, there is always a unifying principle that connects each to the other to form a whole that the world perceives to be one community, one nation, and one society. At the some points, this unifying principle may be religious or civilisational; at others, it may be the charisma of some forceful personality that threads all the disparate elements together; and at yet others, a disciplined order of justice and administration or even a foreigner's truncheon can serve as the impetus for the collation of all these scattered leaves.*

## *And if she was asked...*

- Anis Kidwai would have identified herself as an Urdu writer
- And as an Urdu speaker.
  - Historically, claims of language identity have pooled around either Hindi or Urdu, and not Hindustani.
  - Between 1931 and 1951, the numbers of people claiming Hindustani as their mother tongue in U.P. declined by 86.4 percent, and by 98.5 percent in the period 1951-1961. ... By 1981, the language label has been eliminated altogether

## *Hindustani: An ineffectual solution*

- To deny these ascriptions as owing to claims of privilege or religious identity is to elide the subjectivity inherent to all self-identifications.
- If no one claims Hindustani, an insistence that it is the solution is an exercise in irrelevance, and it cannot even initiate, let alone accomplish, the task of cultural preservation and recovery that we entrust it with.

# *The Problem with Hindustani*

- Much of the so-called Hindustani canon is a construction of not the ‘producers’ of the code, but of its *receivers*, which makes *intelligibility* as the site and justification of a language label.
- But *linguistic identities are for the wholes of languages*, and not just their literary or quotidian or religious, etc., parts. Thus, Kaifi Azmi may write in ‘simple’ or ‘high-flown’ Urdu, but the Urdu-ness of his language not at issue.
- The real question: Is a Speech Act in Hindustani possible?

## *Hindustani: A problem of definition*

- The notion of Hindustani falls short of defining *a common core* (for speakers *and* linguists) that underlies both languages:
  - Not defined by the basic syntactic skeleton of Khari Boli, as it is the nominal domain that is most referred to by speakers
  - Not defined by stock-based notions like ‘if Perso-Arabic, then Urdu, if Sanskrit then Hindi’, because Khari Boli itself also uses both stocks.
  - The knowledge of what is an Urdu\Hindi word is preserved even after it has been incorporated into ‘Hindustani’.

## *The political values of stocks*

A special gift of the times was the word used for refugees from Pakistan – *sharanaarthi*, ‘he who had gained refuge’. For many days we could not even pronounce it properly – such a fat, unwieldy word that it would simply fill up one’s mouth – but just as we were getting used to it, Punjabi newspapers protested its use for Punjabi migrants on the grounds that they were not charity-seekers, living off those who gave them refuge.

## *Hindustani is not a depoliticised space*

They took up the cause for the use of the word *purusharthi* – ‘he who labours’ – in recognition of the fact that the refugee’s own labour rebuilt his life. Later, some also argued for the use of the word *muhajir* – ‘emigrant’. I do not know which to use: the word *panaahguziin* and *muhaajir* are Arabic and Farsi words, and the word *purusharthi* smells of manual labour, so *sharanaarthi* will have to do.

Anis Kidwai, IFS, Chapter 2

# *Rescuing the linguistic continuum*

- What is needed:
- One account for the production of the two languages Hindi and Urdu as two distinct languages, of speech acts
- Another for the reception of the language produced as occupying a place on the spectrum of Hindi \Urdu \Hindustani.
- All this putting the common core hypothesis aside.

## *Rescuing the linguistic continuum: Production*

- The language/space with no name is best characterised not as “core” but as a *register* (a mode of speech employed as appropriate for a particular context), most commonly the quotidian, but also extendable to encompass the literary and other formal discourses.
- Each language owns this register individually, but is also shared by the other; as a result this shared space may be continually enriched by both languages.

## *Rescuing the linguistic continuum: Reception*

**Hindustani Mining:** For any utterance EXP, EXP is a Hindustani utterance if and only if:

- EXP falls into the class of utterances/lexical items that is understood by a speaker who claims to be a Hindi speaker, and
- EXP falls into the class of utterances/lexical items that is understood by a speaker who claims to be a Urdu speaker
- *Example: xariid* ‘buy’ is an expression that is understood by both H & U claimants, but *farox* ‘sell’ will only be understood by an Urdu claimant and thus will not be considered Hindustani.

# Hindustani Construction

In this Hindustani extraction algorithm, everything that is claimed to be Hindi or Urdu has the potential to be subsumed into the linguistic code of Hindustani.

- *Example: If a Hindi claimant encounters the Urdu word faroxt, and learns it. In her next encounter with the word – now that she knows it, the algorithm will class it as an EXP that falls within Hindustani, although she ‘knows’ it is from Urdu. This procedure can iterate in this fashion infinitely, preserving both the knowledge of a ‘non-Hindi-ness’ or ‘non-Urdu-ness’ of an utterance, as well as its inclusion into one’s verbal repertoire, without making reference to notions like a common core, or a composite identity.*

# The Political Consequences of Hindustani Construction

- Hindustani is a product of multilingual reception via a register of the quotidian located in an intersected space.
- Thus far, attempts to liberate it into an autonomous language are viewed with suspicion by Hindi and Urdu-*wallahs*, with “each side seeing it as merely a Trojan horse of the other; or, occasionally, in moments of cultural confidence, greedy to annex it by infecting the middle domain with their kind of extremism” (Rai 2005).

## The Political Consequences of Hindustani Construction

- Identity claims to only *either* Hindi or Urdu by “ordinary people” are expected, as the “edge” of a language does not offer a peg to hang an identity on, particularly when this edge is included in more than one language.
- The increasing distance between the two languages is not the departure from a common core, but rather from an equality of opportunities and rights to cross-fertilise this shared register.

## The future via Tarachand 1944

Hindustani ...should be recognized as the common medium of interprovincial intercourse. *This dialect has certain fixed phonetical and morphological features, but it assumes two separate styles on account of the use of two different types of vocabularies. What is needed in order to bring them together is to evolve a common vocabulary in accord with the phonetic genius of the dialect.*

*... there is no reason why Hindustani should not develop the capacity to form words and derivatives from its original words, or from borrowed words.*

# The future via Tarachand 1944

If then our dream of one society and one nation for our one country is to be transformed into reality, and if we desire that this society should, as the expression and symbol of its unity, have one lingua franca, then ***it is inevitable that the lingua franca should be a composite speech, containing elements from the speech of the communities.*** It is impossible for this common speech to draw its sustenance exclusively from one culture source, as Urdu and Hindi are tending to do today.

# Multilingualism is the only way

- Allow Hindi and Urdu to exist as distinct languages, on the understanding that Hindustani can thus far exist only as an intersected space between the two languages.
- Plan both languages individually but also as cohabitants in the linguistic ecology of a region, both historically and in the present.
- Perhaps only then will we not want to ask the question- *What language is the following text written in?*

# Anis Kidwai Ghubaar-e-Kaarwan

...dimagh ke parde par phir ek taswiir ubhartii hai jo merii apnii hai. Subh kaa wakht hai, suuraj kii kirneN aaRii tirchhii bistar par paR rahiiN haiN. aaNkh khulne se paihle kaanoN main aawaaz aatii hai, 'bas ab kalma paRh kar uTh baiTho!' 'Laa ilaahaa illallaah' kaa bid kartii huii uThtii huuN to nazar apne pairoN kii siyaah khuran papRii jamii huii phunsiyoN par paR jaatii hai. Shabnam ke asar se badan dukh rahaa hE magar main ne tahaiyya kar liyaa hai ki ye saare khuran mitaa kar rahuuNgii. Tabiyat main haijaan saa paidaa hotaa hai.

baRii lagan va tandohii se un sabko udheRnaa shuruu kar detii huuN. Ye kaam koi bahut aasaan to na thaa; kafii mehnat-talab aur takliifdeh bhii. hoToN ko ek khaas andaaz-se sukeRkar mardaanawaaar is kaam main masruuf ho gayii. Sab israar kar rahe haiN, 'kisii taraah bistar choR! Waa ri laRkii, aaj uThne kaa naam hii nahiin letii!' lekin main ghunchaa dehen bani hui, badastuur phunsiyoN ki safai meN masruuf huuN. Aakhir maaN kii tez nazar taih tak pahaunch gai. Haath pakaRkar bistar se ghassiiT letiiN hain aur main roti ghasiTti khuunamkhuun taange liye dhulwaane aur dawaa lagwaane jaa rahii huuN.

## My translation

*Another image rises to the surface of the mind, and this time it is of me. Rays of sunlight are angling criss-cross on the bed which I lie. Even before my eyes open, a voice has reached my ears, "Come on now, read the kalma and get out of bed!" I rise, chanting 'Laa ilaaha illallaah', when my gaze falls upon the dried, rough, black scabs of blisters on my legs. My body is aching with the effect of the dew but now I cannot rest. A strange craving rises up in me, and I commit myself, body and soul, to undoing these knots. The task was no easy one; and quite labour-intensive and painful too.*

*But screwing my lips to one side in the masculine effort the task demands, I am all concentration. The sounds of exclamations grow more insistent: 'Leave that bed at once!' What is with this girl – she just refuses to rise today!' But I, my mouth in full bloom, cannot stop until every last trace of these coarse things is erased. In the end, it is a mother's all-knowing gaze that gets to the root of the matter. Grasped firmly by the hand and hoisted out of bed, I am being dragged, wailing and screaming, to have my bloodied legs washed and treated.*

Thank you

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