

Urdu-Hindi Controversy (1867)

The Urdu language was born in India. India was considered to be a golden sparrow in terms of its fertile land and man power. That's why lots of invaders came to occupy it for different purposes. It so happened that when these different people from different regions of the world came to India they brought with them, among other things, their language as well. People like Arabs, Persians and Turks etc. when mingled with the native people they exchanged many words of their languages and thus with this mingling, a new language emerged which was termed Urdu, meaning the "language of the troops." Since it was formed by the invaders of the Muslim world and emerged during the rule of the Mughals in India, it was termed as the language of the Muslims and that is why initially it was called Musalmani.

But there were not only Muslims that spoke or used Urdu but all the communities in India joined hands for the promulgation and development of that new language. It was not only used as an everyday language but a large number of literary works appeared in Urdu in all the regions of the sub-continent primarily Deccan, Lucknow, Maisur, Delhi etc. Thus, almost the whole of India contributed to the flourishing of Urdu. Due to these combined efforts when in 1837, Persian was replaced by Urdu as the court and state language, no one objected to that.

With the fall of the Mughal Empire, Hindus, however, started looking at Urdu as the language of the invaders. The British on the other hand, in their disregard for Muslims adopted the same attitude. Thus both intentionally started their efforts in order to get rid of the language of the Muslims. In this regard names of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Raja Shiv Parshad, Lakshman Singh, Haresh Chandra and Binkam Chatterji etc. among many others are well known. The first effort was made at the start of the nineteenth century when a new language was formed with the name Hindi in which words of pure Arabic, Persian and Turkish were removed and replaced by Sanskrit words. In that regard in 1809 a Hindu wrote a novel in that very Hindi with the title "Prem Sagar" but since it was not a full fledged effort, soon that language went into oblivion. However, after the War of Independence 1857 when the British Crown's wrath fell upon the Muslims, the Hindus considered it to be a ripe moment to get rid of Urdu and replace it with their own language – Hindi.

The combined organized effort started in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1867 the Hindus of Banaras presented a request to their government regarding the replacement of Urdu with Hindi and its Persian script with that of Devnagri script. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan at that

demand remarked that when even the language of a nation is not safe at the hands of other nations in a region, it would be unwise to continue living with them. So Sir Syed, who was in fact a great advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity prior to that incident, started focusing on the cause of Muslims alone. His Scientific Society Gazette presented articles on the importance of Urdu. Similarly, some Muslim newspapers like Noor-ul-Absar and Banaras Gazette also took the responsibility to safeguard their language.

The anti-Urdu process continued when in 1871 the Lt. Governor of Bengal G. Cambell banned Urdu in the province at all levels, courts, administration and even schools. This boosted up Hindus in other regions like NWFP, Punjab, Behar, U.P, Sindh, and Oudh etc. to counter Urdu there. Meetings were held of the Hindus in which thousands of them signed memorials supporting the cause of elimination of Urdu. In 1882 during the visit of Hunter Commission, a commission formed by the English government to analyze the spread of modern English education in India, Hindu organizations again tried to attack Urdu. They held meetings with its chairman, Dr. Hunter and tried to force him to admit Urdu as the foreign language and to promulgate Hindi, the native language, for educational purposes. But in this mission they remained unsuccessful due to the constant efforts of Sir Syed and his comrades.

The circumstances became even more hard for the Muslims and their language when Anthony MacDonnel became the governor of UP in 1900. He was a pro-Hindu and thus anti-Muslim. So after becoming the governor he dismissed Urdu as the official language of UP, which was in fact considered to be the home of Urdu language. He issued orders and declared Hindi the official language of the province. Sir Syed's successors at Aligarh, mainly Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the then Secretary of the Aligarh Trust, took action against MacDonnel's act. He called for a popular gathering of the supporters of Urdu at Aligarh and openly condemned governor's work. He also founded Urdu Defense Association and it was decided that the association would take actions against the doings of the governor. At that MacDonnel got angry and threatened Mohsin-ul-Mulk that if he'll continue his aggression against the doings of the government MacDonnel will see to it that Aligarh would cease to get government grants. As the grants were necessary for the institution and Mohsin-ul-Mulk could not part himself from the defense of Urdu, in order to save Aligarh College he resigned. But since he was dearly beloved to all of his colleagues and students he was forced to take back his resignation. But that did not stop him from defending Urdu and continued his efforts. The result of this Muslim response Urdu too along with Hindi was declared the official language of the province. But Mohsin-ul-Mulk was not satisfied with this outcome and continued his struggle. When UP got rid of MacDonnel, he founded another

association called Anjuman-e-Tarraqi-e-Urdu to counter all future attempts of the Hindus and the English against Urdu.

This love and passion for Urdu by the Muslims of India inclined the founders of Pakistan to adopt her as the national language of the new born country. They believed that it was a sign of the Muslim unity, the representation of Muslims as an independent nation, among millions of people of India.