GARCIN DE TASSY

Origin and Diffusion of Hindustani

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Presented here is the translation of a memorandum entitled "*Origine et Diffusion de l'Hindoustani Appelé Language Générale ou Nationale de l'Inde*" (Origin and Diffusion of Hindustani, Called the Common or National Language of India) by Garcin de Tassy (1871) published in the transactions of the *Royal Academy of Science, Arts, and Belles-Lettres* of Caen, France. Written in the last decade of his life, this brief memorandum contains some of his observations and conclusions based on over half a century of involvement with Indian languages—especially Urdu, which was generally called Hindustani during his time. Most of his peer academy members, to whom this communication was directed, probably did not know much about Urdu. Consequently, he includes some explanations and background information that would seem too elementary nowadays. Nevertheless, some of his remarks still seem fresh and surprising. Even his digressionary remarks, which are dispersed throughout the note and which often seem factitious, contain much information about the historical and cultural factors influencing the development of Urdu. The note also reveals de Tassy's passionate attachment to Urdu and his angst over the Urdu-Hindi controversy which, he thought, was going to lead to disastrous religious and political strife in India.]

WE CAN ONLY MAKE CONJECTURES about the exact dates of India's invasion by the Aryans and the diffusion of their language; the language was called Sanskrit (well-formed), in contrast to the language of the natives and its various dialects that were together given the name Prakrit (ill-formed) by the scornful victors. Sanskrit, just like its derivative language Greek, attained a singular perfection. Its oldest masterpieces, the *Vedas*, became the sacred books of the Hindus; and the splendid poems *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (recently translated into Hindustani verse by a Muslim) brought much fame to that language. Skillful grammarians painstakingly analyzed the language and established precise, ingenious rules for it; this research, which was admired in India then, is admired in Europe now as a model of scholarship.

However, the country's ancient languages, the ones of the common people, did not disappear altogether; like Italian, which was not annihilated by Latin, they did not cease to exist and reemerged with new vigor whenever they were not suppressed. The language that dominated in the north started being called Desi (language of the natives), Hindavi (language of Hindus), Hindi (language of India), and, in particular, Braj Bẖākẖā (language of Braj), after the region known for the purity of its language in which the poets had celebrated the miraculous, especially romantic, deeds of Krishna, the final incarnation of Vishnu.

In truth, this language never again returned to its earlier state; even its feel changed and it became burdened with such a huge number of Sanskrit words that it could be suspected of being derived from that hallowed language. Yet, while difficult to believe, the language went through remarkable subsequent development after having strayed so much from its original roots.

From the earliest days of Islam, the Muslim conquests bordered on India and caused the infiltration of some Arabic words into the Indian language. Then, Mahmud Ghaznavi's invasion enlarged that vocabulary and also added Persian expressions. Finally, the attack by Timur (Tamerlane) resulted in a wholesale change in the language due to the incorporation of many distinctly foreign idioms and words. Later on, the new version of the language received the special name *Zabān-e Urdū* (language of the camp), or, for short, Urdu. As this language had resulted from the Muslim conquests, Hindus also called it *Musalmānī Bāt*, (the discourse of Muslims). It also started to be called Hindustani (the language of Hindustan), chiefly by Europeans, because it was mainly spoken in the region of India referred to as Hindustan. The language's variant in the south took the special name Dakhani, that is, "of the Deccan (south)." Nevertheless, the old language remained in use in villages, and some poets composed verses in it; this language continued to be called Hindi, and the two variants [Urdu and Dakhani] took on the status of two dialects of the same language [Hindustani].

As the grammar of Sanskrit is very complex, the natural reaction to it was to make [the grammar of] Hindustani very simple; perhaps no other [grammatical] system is as simple and as easy. There are no irregular verbs [in Hindustani], since one cannot label [as irregular] any two verbs whose difference in the same tense is due to the application of euphonic conventions, or two other verbs for which the tenses are normally borrowed from different roots but could be conjugated regularly. The neutral verbs get transformed into active verbs, and the latter into transitive verbs, and all such verbs have but a single conjugation. There are two auxiliary verbs: *to be*, used with neutral and active verbs, and *to become*, used with passive

verbs. There is a tense of conjugation, specifically the indefinite tense termed *aorist*, which can be used for both the present and the future in the indicative mood and for the present in the subjunctive mood. Composite verbs fall into a number of categories, one of which, called *intensive*, occurs very frequently in the Urdu language; the verbs of this category have the effect of making narratives seem more energetic. Thus, Indians often employ the expressions "to succumb to falling" instead of "to fall," "to pass into the state of dying" instead of "to die,"[1] etc. The verbs, which are called "nominal" and are also used in Persian and Turkish, are very common in Urdu and are supposed to be more elegant than simple verbs. In that case [nominal verb], the preferred noun is almost always Arabic. Thus, the commonly used expression is "to give response," instead of "to respond," "to give order," instead of "order," etc.

Verbs come at the end of sentences, and adjectives precede their qualified nouns. Unfortunately, the genders of nouns are as indeterminate in Urdu as they are in French or German, except that often the words ending in *ā* and *āh* are masculine, and those ending in *ī*, *n, sh*, and *t* are feminine. To indicate the case of a noun, a particle is placed after the noun, and such particles are, therefore, called postpositions: the one [i.e., the postposition] for the genitive case is *kā*, which follows a noun, and requires declination, much like the [Latin] construction *liber Petri*, to agree with the noun in number, gender, and case, staying as *kā* for masculine singular, changing to *kē* for the oblique case and masculine plural, and to *kī* for feminine. However, I will stop here, for my reason for indulging in this grammatical sketch is to give a general idea.

Sanskrit ended up being neglected even by Hindus. But once the Asiatic Society of Calcutta was established, under the presidency of the illustrious Sir William Jones, this language slowly attracted the attention of learned Englishmen due to its philosophical and literary merits, and, especially, its similarities with the classical languages. Soon, [Charles] Wilkins published a very thorough grammar book for Sanskrit, then H. H. [Horace Hayman] Wilson compiled its dictionary, and, ultimately, European scholars became actively interested in studying this language. The descendant of our own king, Louis XVIII, created a chair for it at Paris; this chair was first occupied by [Antoine-Léonard de] Chézy, who was succeeded by the eminent indologist Eugène Burnouf. The latter's premature death put an end to this wonderful program. Afterwards, this language was studied

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[1]Probably the intended Urdu expressions are "*gir paṛnā*," "*girna*," "*mar jānā*," and "*marna*." De Tassy uses the first of these expressions in his *Rudimens* (1829, 69) to illustrate "Verbs of Intensity." —*Tr.*

most actively in Germany.

In their turn, Hindus, awakened from their stupor, developed a great enthusiasm for the language of their sacred scriptures and their ancient literature. They joined the Europeans in the new cultivation and dissemination of Sanskrit-related knowledge by participating in the publication of works that had thus far remained buried in manuscripts. They would have liked to revive Sanskrit fully and make it at once the language of everyday use, but that was not possible. So what actually happened instead was that they envisaged, as a kind of rightful compromise, resurrecting an exclusory Hindavi form of Hindustani, specifically, a language from which all Arabic and Persian words were to be expunged. The idea was to restore the language to its state before it was altered by the Muslim interaction, thus making it a *pure* language, as opposed to the *mixed* languages held in low regard by [the Hindu] scholars. But is this classification correct? Hukm Čand, who is a Hindu, not a Muslim, does not agree, and has this to say on the subject:

> I do not see much difference between the language that people call pure and the one they call mixed, nor do I understand why people consider the former much better than the latter. Is there in the world any language in which no foreign word was ever introduced? Is it possible to claim that one language is superior to another? What does it matter if one calls water (*pānī*) *āb*, as in Persian, or *water*, as in English; can one claim that one of these words is more suitable than the other?[2]

The idea of linguistic purification championed by some Hindus is particularly strange when applied to Hindi. As I have mentioned, this language has not withered away, but continues to be spoken in the rural areas, and for natural reasons has absorbed quite a large number of foreign words. Consequently, it is a growing language that needs consolidation rather than restoration to some ancient form. But is that [reversion to a previous state] even possible? Take France, for example. Can one, under the pretext that Corneille and Molière were our great writers, advocate rehabilitating the outdated expressions and phrasing styles that those authors employed? Can one purge French of the vocabulary that the language acquired in later centuries and revert to the language of the fabulists? [No,] such a thing would be impossible. While one may well think it is possible in principle, it is never going to happen in practice; if any writers would adapt themselves to this change, their works would not be read! The same is bound to happen in India. Some people have attempted

[2]Published source not available for this quote. —*Tr.*

to write a few classical books in this contrived style, but no student can understand them, so the enterprise has to be abandoned. Moreover, Muslims are never going to abandon their language in order to adopt another one that their conquests caused to change.

This reform movement that certain Hindus wish to pursue has given rise to very active and interesting literary and philological debates between the two parties [Hindus and Muslims]. It seems clear to me that Hindus are the reactionaries in this case, somewhat like the Europeans who wanted to revive all aspects of the Medieval Ages and bring back Latin to replace the more modern national languages. They [the Hindus advocating language reform] represent, in my opinion, ancient Hinduism, together with its crude aspects, such as: the suttee tradition; the religious suicides under the wheels of Jagannath's chariot; the *čarkh pūjā*, a ceremony in which the fanatics get themselves suspended by means of [ropes connected to] iron nails stuck into their bodies, and get their tongues pierced with needles; totally naked fakirs who keep one of their arms raised during the entirety of a year; etc., etc., etc. In any case, this movement is retrograde, and hence, it seems to me, doomed to fail. If I am permitted to express my personal opinion on a matter related to the studies that are to me the dearest, I disagree with it [the said movement] completely, and, in fact, I find it abhorrent. Adhering to the status quo in this problem seems to me the wisest course. Let us avoid in any case the revolution: granted this change would be a literary revolution, but it could lead to a renewed antagonism between Hindus and Muslims which seems to have vanished, because, in the great uprising of 1857, Hindus and Muslims united in the attempt to reestablish the Mughal monarchy under Bahadur Shah II, the legitimate heir of the kings of Delhi.

In keeping with the well-known maxim *divide et impera* (divide and rule), this antagonism serves well the English, the present-day masters of India; for, if against all odds, this reform succeeds, it will cause such a rift between Hindus and Muslims that they will never again be able to get along together. Indeed, nothing unites people more than their using the same language, and nothing disunites them more than their using different languages. There is no need to try to prove this truth with examples.

The fact is that the Hindus' sudden infatuation with Hindi, which they call their language, is peculiar, since they availed themselves of nothing but Urdu during the last several centuries, and even today their authors write their works of prose and poetry in the latter language. Of course, there is no denying that there are many superb works in Hindi: the eminent Indologist H. H. Wilson has studied them, and he assures us that the works are of great interest. Perhaps the most famous among them is the [Hindi] *Rama-*

yana of Tulsī Dās, which has attained such a high level of popularity in India that it has made the Hindu masses forget even Valmiki's *Ramayana*, the masterpiece of Sanskrit literature. The historical poem of Čand [Bardāʾī], which is of exceptional interest from the viewpoint of history, is another very famous work. The majority of other Hindi works have a religious character. What makes them especially interesting is that they have mostly been written by Vaishnavas, not by Sivas, that is, by the representatives of the relatively modern school in contrast to the old school adherents, and by the moderate reformers, such as Nānak, the Sikh lawmaker, Rām Ānand, Dādū, and a number of others among whom the most interesting is Kabīr. This last reformer wanted to combine Hinduism and Islam by way of their common philosophical and religious themes.

The Urdu literature perhaps does not exhibit as much originality, but its quantity is overwhelming. This literature is also very helpful in the efforts to understand the classic Indian authors because it offers their faithful translations. Like Sanskrit, its stock of works of history is meager; but this language is unmatched in its wealth of works of poetry. [In Urdu] there are a large number of stories in verse that we can call "epic poems," and several of them are quite engaging. There are also other kinds of poems that consist of verses, each divided into two hemistiches; in general, these are highly developed creations, and are especially noteworthy because of their exploitation of brilliant metaphors.

The Urdu poets have adopted the universal but still uncommon custom of using an assumed name, which can be considered a nom de guerre, or rather, nom de plume; but they use it only in their poems, never in their prose compositions. This alias is almost always a noun and borrowed, even for Hindu poets, from the classical languages of the Muslim Orient. We can understand the need easily when we realize that the alias has to be inserted in the last couplet of short poetical compositions or in the ending stanzas of long poems. Moreover, Indians have long, complicated names [not fit for use in poems]; these consist of forenames, surnames, and honorific titles preceding and following the names. For example: Bēqaid (Free) is the alias of a very well-known poet who lived during the reign of Muḥammad Shāh and had the name Saiyid Faẓāʾil ʿAlī (the Favors of ʿAlī) Khān; and Rind (Licentious) is the alias of an eminent poet who is Hindu (as his name indicates) and has the name Rāʾē Kẖem Narāyan. Including such names in a hemistich of a rhythmic, rhymed verse would clearly be impossible; so, instead, a poet uses an imaginative alias (as we are explaining), and is generally known and referred to by that alias. The best aliases are the ones with subtle plays on words and tasteful alliterations, and poets choose them for the best fit in poems so as to satisfy rhythm and rhyme

constraints. Some of the well- known aliases have such meanings as: sun, victory, fire, calm, trouble, misfortune, faith, life, sigh, cloud, light, star, lion, flag, inspiration, hope, eloquence, fairness, spring, without heart (that is, one who has lost his heart to a beloved), without justice (that is, one who has suffered injustice), butterfly, hymn of praise, solace, unfortunate, audacity, insanity, and a myriad of other words of the same flavor.

The titles of Urdu works are very sophisticated and metaphorical, as are the poetic aliases of their authors; but what is lamentable is that the titles are often totally unrelated to the contents. Thus, an extremely popular work of fiction, which has undergone numerous editions, is entitled *The Garden and the Spring* [*Bāgh-o-Bahār*], but it is really about four dervishes recounting stories to a king. [Here are some more works whose titles give no clue about their contents:] *The Relics of Ancestors* [*Āṡāru'ṣ-Ṣanādīd*] (description of monuments of Delhi); *The Adornment of Assembly* [*Ārā'ish-e Maḥfil*] (historical and statistical information about India); *Illumination of Intellect* [*Khirad Afrōz*] (tales by Bidpā'ī); *Magic of Eloquence* [*Seḥru'l-Bayān*] (the tale of Price Bēnaẕīr); *Garden of Urdu* [*Bāgh-e Urdū*] (Urdu translation of *Gulistān*); *The Spring without Autumn* [*Bahār-e Bēkhazāñ*] (manual of formal correspondence); *Garland of the Devoted* [*Bẖakta Māl*] (biography of Hindu saints); *Bounty of Knowledge* [*Faiẕu'l-ʿUlūm*] (translation of Rumi's *Maṡnavī*); *The Rose of Forgiveness* [*Gul-e Maghfirat*] (lamentation over the martyrs of Karbala); *Bouquet of Pleasure* [*Guldasta-e Nishāt*] (anthology of poetry); *The Thornless Garden* [*Gulshan-e Bēkhār*] (biography of Hindustani poets); *The Sturdy Cord* [*Ḥablu'l-Matīn*] (treatise on Islam); *The Uplifter of Hearts* [*Mufarriḥu'l-Qulūb*] (translation of *Hitopadesha,* [a collection of Sanskrit fables]); *The Attraction of Hearts* [*Jaẕbu'l-Qulūb*] (description of Mecca); *The Ocean of Love* [*Prem Sāgar*] (story of Krishna); *The Permitted Magic* [*Seḥr-e Ḥalāl*] (treatise on rhetoric); *Royal Pleasure* [*Surūr-e Sulṭānī*] (translation of *Shāhnāma*); *The Forgotten Remembrance* [*Farāmōsh Yād*] (tale of Shakuntala); *The Touchstone of Wisdom* [*ʿAyār-e Dānish*] (tale of Kalila and Dimna); etc.

There are new [Urdu] publications every year. Just a few months ago, the collected poetical works of the last king of Delhi, Bahadur Shah II, known under his poetical alias Ẓafar, were published from Lucknow in two enormous volumes; the King, lauded for his outstanding poetical talent, is also a tragic figure because of his unfortunate circumstances.

A unique feature of Urdu literature, which sets it apart from the literature of Persian and other languages of the Muslim Orient, is that it derives its marvelous themes not only from the Muslim legends and fairylands, such as the one in the charming stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*, but also from Hindu mythology. The two sources endow it with an extraordi-

nary variety in literary allusions and metaphors, enriching, especially, its fictional works. A striking example of this unique and pleasurable amalgamation is found in the work entitled *The Doctrine of Love, or The Rose of Bakāvalī*.

Three genres of poetical, or at least literary, compositions, which are specific to the Muslim Orient, have been developed much further by Urdu writers than the writers of Persian or Turkish. These are: *dīvān*, *inshā*, and *taẕkira*. Indians spend much of their talent on a kind of mystico-romantic poetry, called *ghazal*. When some *ghazals* are successful, their poet authors compose more, and after a sufficiently large number of these have been written, they are categorized and ordered with respect to the last letters of their rhyme words, then compiled into books called *dīvān*, that is, "collection." The number of *dīvāns* that have already been written runs into the hundreds, because no writer would be counted a poet without having produced at least one *dīvān*; indeed, quite a few poets have published several *dīvāns*. For example, Mīr Taqī, one of the most distinguished Hindustani poets, has seven of these to his credit. It goes without saying that writing *ghazals* does not inhibit a poet from writing other works of poetry or prose. There is no shortage of Hindu poets either, who, despite their preference for Hindi, have produced *dīvāns* in Urdu. Thus, even Bābū Sīva Prashād, one of the very active partisans [in the Hindi vs. Urdu controversy], has published an Urdu *dīvān* under his poetic alias Vahbī.

The second genre of composition, *inshā*, or "model letter" [essay], is relatively less common. Yet, many Urdu writers have chosen to write such articles and compile those into collections. In such articles, they [Urdu writers] employ all sorts of eloquent prose styles and intersperse verses in the body of the prose. A number of *inshā* collections have been highly acclaimed. Some have been translated into Persian and some have been adapted to Hindi.

Finally, *taẕkira*, or "memorial," a very popular type of composition in India, refers to an anthology of selected verses, which are usually arranged in the alphabetical order of the poetic alias of their authors, and are preceded by short notes about the authors. The anthology author makes sure to include himself in the book; this is usually a clever way of publishing one's own poetry, with the insertion [of one's own work] having the appearance of something incidental [even though it is quite deliberate]. By studying, specially, these writings [the *taẕkiras*], I acquired much unique information, and I have presented this information in my *Histoire de la Littérature Hindouie et Hindoustanie*. Very recently I have received a new *taẕkira* entitled "Book That Relaxes the Heart," which, even though incomplete (as only its first part has appeared so far), contains biographical notes on five

hundred eight-seven poets; most of these are contemporary poets, and some of them are even novices, just starting out in their poetical careers.

A new kind of literature has emerged in India during the past few years: it can be called Eurasian, that is Euro-Asian, as it is mainly patterned after English compositions, or is sometimes comprised of their actual translations, but with modifications to reflect the essential differences between the ideas of these two parts of the world. Another kind of literature is due to the Indian deists, in other words, the reformers of *Brahma Sabẖā* (Church of God). Finally, there is the literature of indigenous Christians, consisting mainly of polemical writings; some of these are actually quite noteworthy, for example, those of Imāmu'd-Dīn, one of the most important contemporary authors of India. Among the indigenous Christians, about a hundred thousand belong to the Anglican Church, and a large number of remaining Christians belong to the Roman Church. The former make use of Urdu for their liturgical services; the liturgical texts have been translated from English, and the [Urdu] hymns have been set to English musical notes and rhythms.

While on the subject of Indian Christians, I think it is useful to observe that Hindus seem to favor the Roman Church because they like its dogma and the external appearance of its rites. Muslims, on the other hand, appreciate the austerity of the Anglican branch of the Christian Church, and it is quite rare for a Muslim to convert to Catholicism. Indeed, they dislike the sound of church bells that the Catholics ring somewhat too frequently. In his narration of the capture of Constantinople by Muhammad II, the famous Turkish historian Saʿdu'd-Dīn remarks, among other things, that since that event, "the *detestable* sounds of bells were superseded by the melodious voices of muezzins calling the faithful to prayer."[3] I need also to add at this point that the conversion of Hindus to Islam is quite frequent, and several very distinguished Hindu authors have thus been led to the biblical doctrines reproduced in the Qurʾān.

Finally, journals have an important role in Urdu literature. The styles of prose found in several of them have become [popular] models of composition. At the same time, these journals are important sources of educational and recreational material. Examples are: *Akhbār-e Avadẖ* (Oudh News); *Akhbār-e ʿĀlam* (World News) from Meerut; and many others. Some journals have rather pompous, and sometimes outlandish, titles. For example: "The Water of Life [Elixir] of India," "The Sun that Illuminates the World," "The Lion of News," "The Springtime of Wisdom," "The Garden of Information," "The Dawn," "The Brilliant Light," "The Abundant Source," "The Ocean of Light," "The Fresh Rose," "The Best Advice," "The Manifest Truth,"

[3]Published source not available for this quote. —*Tr.*

"The Sunrise," "The Key to News," "The Manifestation of Marvels," "The Light of Light," "Frank Talk," "The Torch of News," "The Talisman of Wisdom," etc.

These journals provide not only the news of interest to their readers, but also, quite frequently, some in-depth articles of a kind that cannot be seen in our [French or European] periodicals. Some cover fairly detailed proceedings of academic sessions of the literary societies, which the natives have established in large towns all over India, and in which the lectures and the ensuing discussions take place in Urdu.

Taking advantage of the freedom of press in India, the Hindu reform organization *Brahma Sabḫā* periodically publishes the speeches of Bābū Kēshab Čandra Sen. Sometimes these produce considerable excitement, as happened as a result of the publication of the speech he gave during his visit to England. To conclude this communication, perhaps I will be permitted to append from his discourses some passages that, I think, are not devoid of interest even for us [the French].

Extract from a discourse on *Jesus Christ, Europe, and Asia*. [Omitted.]

Extract from a discourse on *Great Men*. [Omitted.]

Extract from a discourse on *The Religion of the Future*. [Omitted.]

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—Translated from French by S. Kamal Abdali

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