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Hindustani As Our 'Lingua Franca': The Snags

By
Dr. Raghu Vira,
 Member of the Constituent Assembly of India.

MY South Indian friends often ask me what the exact relationship of Hindi, Hindustani and South Indian languages is. Indeed, the word Hindustani has eluded a detailed interpretation. Hindustani to the Indian Army Officer means Urdu. The definition given by some of our leaders would make it a blend of Hindi and Urdu. As yet, however, there is no literature to conform to this blend.

Before we understand the blend, let us state clearly the difference between Hindi and Urdu. Basically it is one language; the grammar and idiom are almost the same. It is a derivative of the ancient Shauraseni Prakrit and Apabhramsha. The difference begins, however, as soon as you write the two languages.

Hindi is written in Devanagari script, which is the major script of India. Urdu is written in Persian script, slightly extended to include a few consonants not found in Persian, Turkish and Arabic. Hindi derives its learned and technical phraseology from Sanskrit. Urdu derives the same from Persian and Arabic. Hindi preserves the literary tradition of Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa. Urdu looks for inspiration to Persia and Arabia. It scrupulously shuns the Indian tradition. Hindi represents the Indian philosophy of life and represents the Hindu mind in all its aspects. Urdu represents the Persian mind. It sticks to Islam for its background. In short, Hindi faces inwards while Urdu faces outwards.

Search For A Blend

I HAVE experimented for many years in trying to find out how a blend of the two languages could be achieved. Could we make the Urdu people face inwards or should we force Hindi people to face outwards? In German parlance, it would be impossible, in French parlance it would be preposterous. I have pursued with interest the efforts made by All-India Radio committees. They have not succeeded. In the sphere of education the blends that have been proposed by the Government of Bihar and by Kashmir State tend towards Urdu. The speeches of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad are perfect examples of pure literary Urdu. A sprinkling of half a dozen Hindi words is considered sufficient to designate them as Hindustani.

Mahatma Gandhi, the originator of the idea of Hindustani, was far from satisfied with the Hindustani of the radio or of the educational text-books of Bihar and Kashmir.

Let us distinguish clearly between the everyday spoken language of scholars administrators and legislators. The language of the masses may be contained in one thousand words, the language of higher thought in a few lacs of words.

Language cannot be built in a day. Let us admit freely and frankly that Hindustani is a thing yet unborn as far as literary form is concerned. Those who are anxious for its birth should cultivate it for a century or two. If it flourishes and comes out to be a powerful instrument of thought, then it might be taken up seriously. As long as its existence is only in vague imagination, however, it would be best to leave it alone.

Purpose Defeated

WITH the establishment of Pakistan the purpose that was meant to be served by Hindustani has been defeated.

If Hindustani be interpreted as Hindi and Urdu both, then also it defeats its purpose. In their literary forms, the two are mutually unintelligible. With the exception of simple words nothing is common. Every

important word in a sentence is different in the two vocabularies.

To the South Indian, Urdu or Hindustani dominated by Urdu, say even half Urdu, would mean so much unintelligible material. The tendency of Hindustani so far has been the shunning of Sanskrit words, which are the only link between the North and South Indian languages. Hence little remains common between Hindustani and the South Indian languages.

What about the script? The Hindi script is a good deal different from the South Indian scripts of Telugu, Tamil, Kanarese and Malayalam, though a close examination reveals few interesting points of similarity. Historically the Devanagari script and the South Indian scripts are all derived from the Brahmi of Ashokan days. That was the time when from Nepal to Mysore and Gujarat to Bengal India had one alphabet, known as Brahmi. From this alphabet have been derived the scripts of Tibet, Burma, Siam, Java, Ceylon and the whole of India.

Brahmi Script

IN the course of centuries the Brahmi script developed differently in every province. Hence the variant forms of South Indian scripts among themselves as well as from Devanagari. In spite of the difference in form, however, the sound system is the same. The Hindi alphabet reads a. ka, kh, g, gh, ng, il, e, ai, o, au, am, al. These are the vowels. The consonants have the following seven series:

- 1st series—k kh g gh ng
- 2nd series—ch chh j jh n
- 3rd series—t th d dh n (cerebrals)
- 4th series—t th d dh n (dentals)
- 5th series—p ph b bh m
- 6th series—y r l v
- 7th series—sh (palatal), sh (cerebral)

This sequence of sounds is familiar to South Indians. According to their own needs they have added some vowels and consonants, for example, the short variety of e and o and the peculiarly South Indian varieties of r and l. Every North Indian word can be written with clarity and precision by South Indian scripts. Only the Tamil alphabet is incomplete. In the first five groups of consonants it provides only 'or the first and fifth letter in every series. The first letter of every series is to serve the purpose of the second, third and fourth letters of that series. For example, k serves the purpose of kh, g and gh and ch serves the purpose of sh (palatal).

In Telugu, Kanarese and Malayalam, however, the alphabet is as perfect as in Devanagari. All the combinations of consonants which are required for the north and the south are equally represented by these scripts. The South Indian has no difficulty in shifting from his script to the Devanagari script, because the only new thing which he has to learn is the form of letters. He becomes at home with it in a week's time. To South Indians who read Sanskrit in their schools, it is already known. Those who did not take up Sanskrit, only it has to be learned anew. It is not something distant from them; it is already in their midst. Hundreds of Sanskrit books in Devanagari are published every year in Madras, Mysore, Trivandrum and Kumbakonam.

Urdu Script

TAKE the Urdu script. It takes months to master it. To read a letter is always a problem. Written Urdu has varieties, vagaries and riddles all its own. Here the vowels are badly represented. The vowel signs are insufficient and indistinct. The vowel 'i' gets confused with the consonant 'y', the vowel 'u' gets confused with the consonant 'v'. Those who have any doubt about this confusion should write a passage in a South Indian language into the Urdu script and present it to an Urdu reader. See how he reads it. The distortions would be numerous and funny.

In reading Urdu script there is always the probability of going wrong. Consonant groups are always difficult to represent. A word like 'pratyaksha' or 'indriya' cannot be written accurately. When written, it cannot be read accurately. Medical short vowels are omitted, consonant groups may be read with vowels or without vowels and aspirated consonants are absent. They have to be made up by the addition of 'h' and, in actual reading, a vowel can be inserted between 'th' and the preceding consonant. I knew a friend who misread the Gayatri because he had originally seen it in the Urdu script. He read dahi-mahi for dhi-mahi. In Hindi dahi means curd. So from contemplation he jumped to curds!

In grammar there is not much common between South Indian languages and Hindi, but in vocabulary the learned part of the Hindi dictionary contains a wealth of words common to South Indian languages. This common material is taken from the Sanskrit element in both.

Technical Words

IN technical subjects a start can be made with the primary schools. Words like *ganita* (mathematics), *bhugola* (Geography), *kala* (art), *sangita* (music) and numerous others pertaining to these subjects are common to Hindi and the South. They are also common to every North Indian language. *Vyakarana* is grammar from the Punjab down to Ceylon. Passing beyond the school subject and coming to domains of *Ayurveda*, *Jyotishsha* (astronomy and astrology), *Vastuvidya* (architecture), *dharma* (religion) and *darsana* (philosophy) there are thousands of words of Sanskrit origin which are common. But when we come to non-Sanskrit words which are to form the overwhelming part of the proposed Hindustani, a sharp line of cleavage will separate the South Indian language

ages. There will be nothing common left in the two vocabularies. The community of vocabulary established between North and South Indian languages during the last 2,000 years would be left unutilised when Hindustani comes into force. It is Hindi and Hindi alone which will preserve intact the linguistic bond. The South Indians will find themselves much more at home with it.

Taking at random a *stoka* from say Malayalam, one will know that most of the important words can be understood by any North Indian without having any previous knowledge of the language. He can also make out the general trend of the lines.

Now take a line from modern Hindi:—*Madhya nisha nirmada nirabha nabha disa viraza vishina*. This line is taken from a text-book for children having the title 'Kanyasulkavya' by Ram. Narayana Tripathi, one of the modern progressive poets. Here every word is a common Indian word. These words can be understood not only by people who speak Hindi but by those who speak Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati and even remote Nepalese. These lines can equally be Malayalam, of the extreme south.

Sanskrit Base

THESE are not a few isolated words which are common in the North and South Indian languages. I hope my readers do not get the impression that I am selecting particular words to illustrate my theme. In a general way it can be said with confidence that almost any Sanskrit word can be used in almost any language of India (my apologies to the 'Tamil Puritans'). It is with individual authors as to what Sanskrit words they would use.

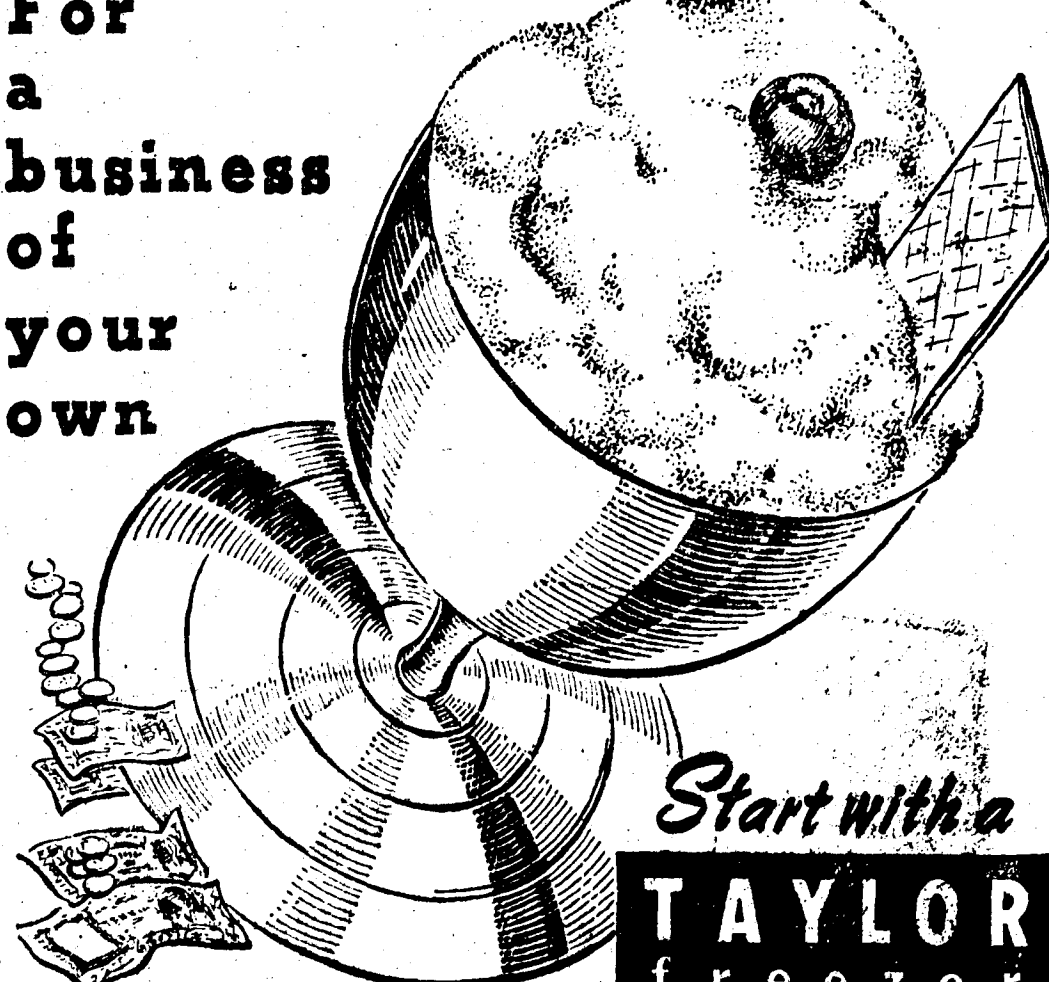
It has been said by philologists in the West that any Greek and Latin terms can be used in any European language. Only there is an art in accommodation. If, taking up a dictionary in Telugu, one notes down running words from a single letter, one finds that these words are not particularly Telugu. They are ubiquitous. Making a list of such common words is a long and interesting task. Once I made a few calculations with Kannada (Kanarese language) and I found that three-fourths of Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary was incorporated into it. The remaining one-fourth when required could also be used—only so far people do not seem to have had occasion or necessity to use it.

While talking of Hindustani, Sanskrit words are replaced by their corresponding *tadbhava* forms. For example, instead of *andhakara* it appears as *andhara*. For those knowing Hindi, Punjabi and other Indian languages it would be impossible to follow the word. The Punjabi form is *andhera*, Nepali *andhero*, Bengali *andhar*, Sindhi *andhar*, Gujarati *andheron*, Marathi *andhar*. These are slight variations from Hindi. They are all derived from Sanskrit *andhakara*, the languages in the north mentioned above as well as to South Indian languages. Such examples can be multiplied; their number will be thousands.

While seeking to have common ground between Hindi and Urdu, one replaces Sanskrit words by *tadbhava* words because Urdu does not accept Sanskrit. But while trying to find a common means of communication and intelligibility between all North Indian and South Indian languages, Sanskrit words are a necessity. The Urdu taboo against Sanskrit cannot be helpful to us in evolving an all-India medium.

The framers of Hindustani unfortunately are not philologists but only politicians. To them Hindustani was one of the means of showing to the Muslims that they would like to accommodate them even in the matter of language; for that they were prepared to incorporate words of Persian and Arabic origin into their own languages.

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