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Source: *Indian Literature*, July-Aug., 2000, Vol. 44, No. 4 (198) (July-Aug., 2000), pp. 117-121

Published by: Sahitya Akademi

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23343288>

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## Dogri Literature : Prospects and Possibilities in the New Century

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Shivanath

**A**t the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, Dogri Literature scene presents a paradoxical picture—a situation that evokes mixed feelings of dismay and hope. Dismay arises at the erosion of the geographical area of Literary activity in Dogri at its eastern and western wings, at the disarray in literary organisations that have played an important role in the revival and resurgence of Dogri Literature, at the deficiencies in the infrastructure and support back up necessary for the development of Dogri and its literature, at the not so helpful attitude of the authorities and at a general disinterest and apathy towards Dogri Literature among Dogri educated classes. But in spite of handicaps and deficiencies, Dogri Literature is growing apace, slowly and steadily. This fact gives hope for its future in the new century.

There is no literary activity in Dogri-speaking areas which have gone to Pakistan or fall in the Pakistan occupied areas of the J&K State and the Punjab and Dogri language there, will disappear in a couple of generations. The state of Himachal Pradesh has banished Dogri from its jurisdiction in a bid to establish and promote a separate identity for the dialects spoken there under the name of 'Pahari'. Another kind of 'Pahari', a dialect spoken predominantly by Muslims in the border areas of J&K State on the other side of the Chenab within the borders of the Jammu and Kashmir State has been recognised as a separate language within the State. These are fallouts of geopolitical developments. Nothing can be done about these. Due to lack of political support Dogri has not yet been included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution when some other languages recognised by the Sahitya Akademi later have been included.

Dogri Samstha, Jammu which spearheaded the Dogri Literary

movement in the mid-forties, and built up, brick by brick, genre by genre, the initial corpus of Dogri Literature has weak-ened due to some sort of factionalism and withdrawal from it, of important individuals like Padmashri Ram Nath Shastri, its main architect, Narsingh Dev Jamwal, Mohan Singh and some others. Dogra Mandal Jammu, Dogra Mandal Delhi and Dogra Himachal Sanskriti Sangam Delhi which made useful contributions to the development of Dogri Literature at one time have packed up and become defunct.

Infrastructure and support back-up for the development of Dogri Language and literature are deficient in many ways. There are no dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies and even literary monthlies in Dogri where Dogri writings could be published introduced and discussed. Just one bimonthly magazine, three quarterlies and a literary annual digest and a page in Hindi *Kashmir Times* Daily do not provide adequate space for publication and journalistic backup to the development of Dogri literature. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Dogri has not been introduced as a medium of instruction and at nursery and primary school stage in the Dogri speaking areas even fifty two years after Independence. The State Government has been tardy and dithering in introduction of Dogri in the educational institutions and introduction has come about after several years of sustained demands, from the top and not from the grassroot bottom; first it was introduced in the Jammu University at the post graduate level in 1983 and then as an optional subject in the higher secondary and graduate level in 1986. There have been delays in appointment of teachers and presentation of text books. Dogri like Kashmiri is not the official language in the State with the result that these languages do not count for jobs. Reading habit in general is on the decline and those who start their education in a non-Dogri medium would rather read books and journals and papers in that medium, be it Urdu, Hindi or English. Readership in Dogri is therefore negligible. Buyers of Dogri books are few.

Another negative factor for the development of Dogri Literature is a tendency among some of the most creative writers to stop writing after getting the Sahitya Akademi Award or to turn away from Dogri to other languages for their writing. Among these who have turned to other languages are Dr. Karan Singh, the latest Dogra, O.P. Sharma Sarathi, an outstanding Dogri poet and fiction writer with more than half a dozen Dogri books and a Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Sachdev and Desh Bandhu Dogra Nutan. Dr. Karan Singh wrote a few *bhajans* in Dogri and then turned to English for his poetry and autobiography. If he had written his autobiography in his mother tongue Dogri and then translated it into English, he would have perhaps

got the Sahitya Akademi Award like Sheikh Abdulla and also enriched both Dogri and English. Sarathi turned to Punjabi and Urdu. Padma Sachdev who writes beautiful Dogri prose chose Hindi for her creative work in prose fiction. Her autobiography in Hindi, called *Boond-Bawadi* has come out but her autobiography in Dogri which has been appearing in serials in *Dogri Times*, has yet to be published. Desh Bandhu Dogra Nutan was in Delhi the other day. He gave me a copy of his latest novel, entitled *Bhooley Bhatakey Log*.

"A Hindi Novel?" I asked

"Yes".

"Any Dogri novel after *Jangli Lok*"?

"Yes. I wrote one *Bheemu* in five parts, each part an independent novel & all the five, parts of a larger whole."

"When was it published? I haven't seen it."

"It couldn't be published. Where are the readers? I've stopped writing in Dogri. I've a number of manuscripts lying unpublished."

In spite of the negative factors inhibiting the desired growth and Development of Dogri Literature there are several positive streams which give hope and inspire confidence. In divisional and further growth and development of Dogri literature in the 21st century. Dogri Samstha Jammu, though weakened somewhat, continues to be active; it continues to organise programmes for writers and bring out its quarterly literary magazine, *Nami Chetan* albeit irregularly and belatedly. Those who have broken away from it, are also active. Prof. Ram Nath Shastri has distanced himself from the activities of the Samstha but continues to write in Dogri occasionally for *Shiraza*, a Dogri bi-monthly published by the J&K Academy. Narsingh Dev Jamwal is creatively active; last year saw the publication of his new collection of Dogri *ghazals* and a selection of his Dogri poems in an excellent English translation by Prof. Lakshmi Narain who teaches English in Canada. Mohan Singh has made a name for himself in the field of Dogri. Dogri drama, particularly *nukkad-natak* and has recently published a collection of fourteen street plays in Dogri. The splinter organisation, Duggar Manch led by him is also active and organises regular programmes. Another group, *Nami Dogri Samstha* patronised by O.P. Sharma Sarathi also organises regular programmes for Dogri artists and writers, "Kavi goshties" and short story reading sessions; it has recently brought out an enchanting cassette of Dogri songs on the need for preservation of trees and forests. About a dozen Dogri cultural and literary organisations in the mofussil small towns of Duggar are also doing their bit. At a seminar on Dogri Drama organised by Bhaddu Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with the Sahitya Akademi in the interior of Jammu Hills in March 1999, I received half a dozen

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collections of Dogri poetry—including me by the seventy seven-year-old Romal Singh Bhadwal, one by Pavittar Singh Salathia of Gurha Salathian and another by the Sahitya Akademi Award winner Abhishaap of Ramnagar. There is a growing awareness of the need for presentation and Development of Dogri Language and Literature as a symbol of Dogra ethnic identity.

The Sahitya Akademi and the J&K Academy continue to support Dogri Literature through their programmes. One page of *Dogri Times* in Hindi *Kashmir Times* has been brought out for the last four or five years and is reported to be popular with the readers of the paper. A quarterly magazine of children, *Jot*, is equally popular and its publishers have ensured its sale and readership in Dogri speaking areas.

Foundations for further development of Dogri Literature have been laid and during the past three decades it has come of age. Books in all genres are being produced, in trickles, spasmodically. There are levels of quality and literary merit from poor, mediocre to excellent in the majority of books of Dogri verse compositions—particularly ghazals. Very good short stories of literary excellence from veterans like Ved Rahi and Bandhu Sharma (*Meel Patthar*, 1998) and newcomers like Lalit Mangotra (*Zameen*, 1997) have appeared recently. About two dozen novels in Dogri have been published so far and two of them—Ved Rahi's *Garbhajoon* and Om Goswami's *Palkhin* published in the nineties have been received very well. While Om Goswami's novel has won the J&K Academy Award, *Garbhajoon* marks a new milestone in the development of Dogri novel, inspiring a Canada based critic to write a fourteen page review on it in English describing the novel as a provocative, captivating, soul-stirring saga and a scathing indictment of the democratic J&K State which disguises authoritarian rule of one man—imperious and insensitive. The novel focusses on problems like prostitution, vitiation of the democratic process, influence and paddling unscrupulous expediency and self-serving insensitivity. In Dogri Drama, the well-known stage director Balwant Thakur of *Nata-Rang*, Jammu, has taken two Dogri plays—*Bawa Jitoo* written by Ram Nath Shastri and *Mahabhoj*, Dogri adaptation from Mannu Bhandari's Hindi novel of the same name, to the national stage with successful performances at different places in India; Mohan Singh and his troupe have taken *nukkad-natak* to the rural areas of Duggar with remarkable results. In Dogri prose, the latest book of essays to come out, Om Vidyarthi's *Trip Trip Chetay* and Padma Sachdev's *Chit-Chetay*, an autobiographical narrative appearing serially in *Dogri Times* show the creative use of Dogri language at its best. *Jot* quarterly is enriching Children's literature.

Still, Dogri Literature today is a comparatively under-developed entity in the family of fast-developing and fully-developed literatures of other Indian languages. It has emerged out of the mists of folk literature and yet has its feet firmly planted in the native soil and some of the works coming out of the mofussil areas bear ample traces of it. It has moved from romantic treatment of rural and semi-urban life to urban life is grappling realistically with life around and its existential problems and showing greater awareness of social tensions and modern temper but Dogri writing which can be called really modern in tone and temper is too little. What is being published is too meagre and that too looks rather lopsided—too much verse with quite a good portion of it puerile and mediocre, and too little prose fiction and very little literary criticism. Dogri has yet to develop a literary tradition and it has yet to make its place among the reading public.

It is hoped that in the 21st century, the deficiencies and handicaps inhibiting a faster growth and development of Dogri literature will be redressed soon; that Dogri, like Kashmiri with which it has always enjoyed parity in the State of Jammu & Kashmir, will soon find its place in the 8th schedule of the Constitution, that Dogri along with Kashmiri will be introduced in educational institutions at all levels, that the State Government will extend greater support by way of purchase of books for libraries in the State, that more vigorous, sustained and wide-spread efforts will be made by literary and cultural organisation in the Dogri-speaking areas to build up a network of a distribution of published Dogri books and to encourage reading habit among the people, so that Dogri literature develops and grows at a faster pace to catch up with more developed literatures in other Indian languages.

