

# Dakhni—People's Language

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When Wali Dakhni (also known as Wali Aurangabadi and Wali Gujarati), a famous poet of Dakhni visited Delhi in 1700, he astonished the poets of Delhi with his ghazals. He drew wide applause from the Persian-speaking poets, some of who, after listening to Wali, also adopted the language of the people, 'Urdu', as the medium of their poetic expressions. Prominent poets—Shah Hatem, Shah Abro and Mir Taqi Mir — were among his admirers.

At that time in Delhi, the court poets were composing in Persian and Arabic. For others, *Braj* and *Awadhi* were the languages of literary and religious expressions. The spoken language of all was *Khari Boli*. When the poets listened to Wali in Dakhni language (which is also a variant of *Khari Boli*) they were struck by the fact that the spoken language of the people was capable of such-rich literary expression.

Wali Dakhni, born as Wali Muhammad (1667-1731 or 1743) was born in Aurangabad and went to Gujarat in search of a Guru. He became a disciple of Wajihuddin Gujarati and soon became famous. He came back and settled in Aurangabad but travelled twice to Delhi. His first trip produced the dramatic results and made him known as father of Urdu poetry. He died in Ahmedabad and Hindu fascists recently razed to ground his tomb in the aftermath of Godhra riots. Wali Dakhni composed 473 ghazals besides masnawis and qasidas. His ghazals are still sung by several singers including Abida Parveen.

Thus in the early eighteenth century, after Wali's visit, Urdu as a literary language took birth. Both modern Hindi (written in Devnagari script) and Urdu (written in Perso-Arabic or Urdu script) are variants of Khari Boli spoken in Delhi and Meerut region. Court circles, Persian and Arabic scholars and especially the Muslims of Delhi adapted this language with much eagerness, and from the end of the 18th century the Mughal house turned only to Urdu. For the first 60 years or so the influence of the Dakhni poets, Sufi thinking and an Indianness of diction prevailed over Urdu. The term Four Pillars of Urdu is attributed to the four early poets: Mirza Jan-i-Janan Mazhar (1699-1781) of Delhi, Mir Taqi (1720-1808) of Agra, Muhammad Rafi Sauda (1713-1780) and Mir Dard (1719-1785).

Although Amir Khusro (1253-1325) and Kabir (1398-1448) used *Khari Boli* in the 14th and the 15th century, 'Hindi' became a literary language only in the latter half of the 19th century. Till then the authors were mainly writing in *Braj* and *Awadhi*. It was Raja Shiva Prasad 'Sitare Hind' (1824-1895) and Bharatendu Harishchandra (1849-1882) who first started writing in *Khari Boli* in Devnagari script. They were obviously influenced by the popularity of Urdu, which was written in Perso-Arabic or Urdu script. In the beginning the difference was mainly in the script and the authors knew both the scripts. In fact the famous Hindi author, Premchand (1880-1936) first wrote in Urdu under the name Nawabrai. Thus modern Hindi is only about 150 years old and like Urdu, has also been inspired by Dakhni.

A twentieth-century Kerala Hindi scholar, Dr Muhammad Kunj Mettar, established Dakhni as source for modern Hindi. Dr Suniti Kumar Chatteropadhyay also maintained that it was Deccan that established the use of *Khari Boli* replacing *Braj* in the North. In fact, even the name Hindi for the language originated in the South. A Tamilian, Kazi Mahamud Bahari in 17th century used the word Hindi for Dakhni in his Sufi poetry called Man Lagan.

## **What is Dakhni?**

Dakhni is the lingua franca of the Deccan. The Deccan is roughly the area between the Narmada and Tungabhadra or Krishna. On the east it is bounded by the Mahanadi and on the west by the Western Ghats. It is the great South Indian plateau. Politically it is composed of Berar (present-day Vidarbha with Nagpur as its important city), ten Telangana districts of

Andhra Pradesh, the Maharashtra districts of Latur, Nanded, Ahmednagar, Beed and Aurngabad, and the Karnataka districts of Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur and Bellary.

However as a spoken language Dakhni is widely used even outside this region. It is the lingua franca of all the Muslims in South India and is understood by all those who have access to Hindi. In many Hindi films, Dakhni words and dialogues are used and in films like 'Hero Hiralal' and 'Sushman', Dakhni was the main language. Recent films like 'Angrez' and 'Hyderabadi Nawab' also use Dakhni profusely. There are no current census figures for speakers of Dakhni because no one reports Dakhni as a mother tongue. Still the estimates of Dakhni speakers will run into crores, because its variants are spoken in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamilnadu. As folk tradition, in the urs of Sufi saints, in the songs used by beggars and fakirs, Dakhni is still widely used.

Linguistically it is a variant of *Khari Boli* as spoken in the Meerat region in UP. However it has some specific differences. For 'no' it uses *nako* instead of *nahin*, for the word 'only' as used in Indian English it uses *cha* instead of *hee* and for *OK* it uses *hau* instead of *han*. In terms of vocabulary, up to 30% is constituted of local words so that in Telangana it has Telugu words, in Karnataka Kannada words and in Maharashtra Marathi and so on. As a rule, it is the first language of the Muslims in the region but most people exhibit bilingualism.

### **The Origin of Dakhni**

The standard understanding of the origin is as follows. Medieval Deccan, known as Al Hind in the Arab world, was extremely rich. It attracted adventurers, traders, scholars and saints from all over the world. Turks and later Mughals came from the north. But the sea route through Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala was equally flourishing. Egyptians, Abyssinians and Arabs came through this route. Afsani Nikitin, a Russian traveller, who spent several months in Bidar, thought that it was the capital of India!

Allauddin Khilji after conquering northern India moved to the Deccan to attack Devagiri in February 1295. He again attacked the city during 1306 and 1307. Malik Kafur carried the third attack to defeat the last of the Yadav kings of Deccan. Muha-mmud Tugluq transferred the capital from Delhi to Devagiri in 1326. In its wake thousands of families shifted from Delhi to the Deccan. Thus in the 14th century, soldiers and traders with their own dialects moved to the Deccan and settled among the Marathas, Kannadigas and Telugus. There were also many Hindus among them, such as Rajputs, Jats, Baniyas and Kayasthas. They brought dialects spoken in the Delhi region and these formed the basis of a literary speech, known as Dakhni.

In 1347 Hasan Bahamani became the ruler at Gulbarga. Soon the Bahamanis (1350-1525) became very powerful. Around 1489 the Bahamani state broke into four new states at Ahmednagar (1460-1633), Bijapur (1460-1686), Bidar (1487-1619) and Golconda (1512-1687). Aurangzeb defeated all of them one by one in the late 17th century. One of Aurangzeb's Subedar, Asifjah, established an independent state around Hyderabad in 1723, which comprised areas in present-day Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Nizam's rule lasted till it was overthrown by independent India's 'Police Action'. Dakhni flourished in all these courts. With the Bahamanis it was the official language.

Dakhni historians divide the history of the literature in four periods. The key figures of the period and their main works are also given below.

1. 1300-1500: Khwaza Bande Nawaz Gesu Daraj (1332-1437): Mairajul Ashkin, Hidayatnama, Shikarnama etc; Nizam Bidri (1462-92): Kadamrao va Padamrao
2. 1500-1700: Muhammad Kuli Kutub Shah (1571-1611): Kulyate Muhammad Kulukutubshah; Mulla Vajahi: Sabrag; Mulla Gawasi: Maina Satwanti; Kazi Mahamud Bahari: Manlagan.
3. 1700-1850: Wali Dakhni (1668-1741); Shah Turab: Jahur Kulli, Ganjul Asrar.
4. 1850- Present: Purushottam (32 Plays inspired by Parsi Theatre).

Wali Dakhni signifies the beginning of the end of the great period of Dakhni. After him Urdu began to gain prestige, and in the Deccan, too, Urdu became popular as a literary

language. Thus Dakhni had a rich cultural and literary history for four hundred years (1350-1850).

Today Dakhni is no longer a significant literary language in the South. First, Urdu and, then, Hindi replaced it. Later with the formation of linguistic states, the major Dakhni area, namely Hyderabad—Nizam's state, was split up, with portions going to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Later the status of Urdu, Persian and Arabic declined rapidly. Since most of Dakhni was written in Perso-Arabic script, access to it also declined for the new generations in the linguistic states.

### **The Nirgunia-Sufi Link**

There are some lacunae in the standard account of the origin of Dakhni. For example, if the language was born with the Muslim invasion in the 14th century, how did such sophisticated poetry as that of Bande Nawaz emerge in so short a period? And why has Dakhni remained so popular?

Deccan, is an area that can be defined as lying between the Narmada and Tungabhadra. The area south of the Deccan is called Dravid. The Deccan has been a meeting point of southern and northern cultures. This has given its culture a special quality. It does not keep its independent existence but spreads and accepts influences from north and south. It is a home for Kannada, Telugu and Marathi, and also has contributed to Hindi and Urdu.

So the contact with the north is far older than the Muslim invasion. Both Buddhists and Jain religions that were born in Bihar had significant presence in the South. The Jains even today have an important presence. After the decline of the Buddhists, it was the Shaivaite and Nathpanthis who inherited the Buddhist tradition. There was a lot of movement of Nathpanthis, Nirgunias, Sikhs and Sufis from Punjab to Gulbarga, through Gujarat and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, Gyaneshwar and his elder brother Nivrutinath are in direct tradition of Gorakhnath. Hence one finds Namdev (1270-1351), a saint from Maharashtra and a tailor by caste, writing in Dakhni. His son Gonda also composed in Dakhni. Some 50 of Namdev's poems are included in the *Grantha Sahib*. Eknath and Tukaram are the two other Marathi saints who wrote extensively in Dakhni.

However the bulk of Dakhni literature is in the Sufi tradition. Sufis too travelled from the North to the South, as did Nanak. Nanak reached up to Nanded and Bidar. Sufis spread all over the Deccan and every district has at least one important Sufi dargah. One should remember that all Muslim poets were not Sufis nor all Sufis were Muslim. For example Nizam Bidri's *Masanavi Kadam Rao va Padam Rao* is actually a *Jain Charit Kavya*. Countless number of Hindus goes to the Sufi dargahs and many sing Sufi songs.

### **Nirgunia Sadhana**

Indian medieval *sadhana* is generally referred to as bhakti in English. This is a bit confusing because in Indian tradition, bhakti tends to mean the *sagun sadhana* or revering God with guna or qualities. Nirgunias, on the other hand, revere a formless God without qualities. This distinction has important social implications. Sagun sadhana means God with a form, which in turn means images of God and temples. It means a priest, a mediator between man and God, offerings and so on. Its manifestations in literary tradition have been *Krishna Kavya* and *Ram Katha*. Nirguna, on the other, hand implies no temples, offerings and so on. Nirgunias used simpler spoken language, which was akin to *Khari Boli*. Thus Kabir used some *Khari Boli* and later it generally became the language of *nirguna sadhana*. It thus travelled with the Nathpanthis, Sikhs (Nanak visited Bidar and Nanded) to the South. In fact the Indian tradition maintains that Bhakti (saguna sadhana) travelled from South to North whereas the nirguna sadhana traveled from north to south! There is a tradition that Allamprabhu, the guru of Lingayats, had a meeting with Gorakhnath at Srisailam! They certainly had much in common and it was probably a historic turning point for the Lingayats.

### **The Sufi Context**

The Sufis were quite close to the Nirgunias in terms of world view, language and geography (western India and the Deccan). They were also simple people wandering around. They used to meet each other very often since the places of rest and worship tended to be common. In Nanak's travels known as *udasian*, there is constant reference to the Sufis many of whom became his disciples. The Sufi tombs known as dargah are places of worship for all communities. The famous ones in the north are those of Muiuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Salim Chishti in Agra and Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi. In the Deccan the most famous is that of Khwaza Bande Nawaz Gesu Daraz at Gulbarga. All over the Deccan, at the annual urs or anniversary at the local Sufi dargah they hold a festival where good Dakhni Sufi singing can be heard.

### **The Social Basis**

By and large saguna had a peasant base, people who had a stable base and some wealth. The priests tended to be Brahmins. Many of the major saints, like Surdas, Tulsidas and Chaitanya etc. have been Brahmins. On the other hand, Nirgunias were wanderers and their followers were poorer people because it did not cost anything to be a Nirgunia or nirguna follower. Most of the nirguna saints came from artisan castes: weavers, potters, carpenters and cobblers. As a rule they had a greater social mobility as against the peasants who were tied to their lands or agricultural labourers who were generally bonded. The conversion to Islam, mainly due to the Sufis, also occurred among the artisans because of their mobility. To this day, a majority of the Muslims in India are workers, artisans and petty traders. Finally in the South there were Lingayats who had a very similar religious and social basis. Geographically, saguna sadhana centres/temples are located in relatively prosperous river valleys whereas the nirgunias move around the relatively dry Deccan plateau.

There is another 'small' tradition. It is the Lambada and Pardhi migration to the Deccan. Lambadas are the great Roma gypsies of the world who spread from north Rajasthan to most of western India and through Central Asia to Russia and Europe. They have retained their language to this day all over the world and thus also contributed to Dakhni. Pardhis are a bird-trapper community, also from Rajasthan, and are thinly spread all over the Deccan. They too retain their language.

So that in the medieval India there was a great social and religious mobility among the artisans and traders comprising the Nathpanthis, Nirgunias, Nanakpanthis and Sufis. It is these people who also carried a common language from the north to the south, which went back to the north in the eighteenth century with Wali Dakhni!

### **The 'Ugly' North Indian**

Visitors from north India's Hindi belt are often puzzled by the contradictory signals they get about Hindi in south India. On the one hand, they feel that everyone understands them in the street—rikshawalas, shopkeepers, bus conductors and so on. Some of these visitors, like the Ugly American, patronizingly approve that the natives are speaking a tolerably understandable Hindi!

On the other hand, they find strong anti-Hindi feelings among the middle-class educated people. They conclude that actually Hindi is understood and 'accepted' by the common man in the south but it is being opposed by the 'vested' interests who want to keep English alive for a better edge in the job market. So English, and for the leftists among them 'imperialism', is the enemy and they try the 'Angrezi Hatao' movement. Of course none of these 'movements' make a dent in the non-Hindi regions.

The problem with these people is that they think that Hindi is 'their' language, which is inherently so good that the rest of India has accepted it as the national language. They

endlessly quote Rajgopalachari or Acharya Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay for this purpose. In fact they are again puzzled that these stalwarts of Hindi later denounced Hindi.

They fail to understand that the 'Hindi' that they hear in the South is actually Dakhni and that it has a much older literary history and in fact was the source of inspiration for modern Hindi to emerge as a literary language. The 'lingua franca' of India is not 'their' Hindi but the street Hindi that evolved from Dakhni and reached the Indian masses, through the Parsi theatre and the Bombay film industry. It is 'their' highly Sanskritized Hindi that is opposed all over the non-Hindi region. In fact, Acharya Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, in his article '*Bharater Rashtra Bhasha Chalti Hindi*' even proposed Bombay Hindi as a national language whose 'grammar can be written on a post card'!

In the final analysis, it is not the modern Urdu and Hindi that have inherited the tradition of Dakhni. As Dr Veer Bharat Talwar has shown in his book '*Rassakashi*', Muslim and Hindu upper-class people fought with each other for getting jobs in colonial India in western UP. For this they used the struggle for use of Hindi (written in Devanagari script) in government work replacing Persian (written in Persian script). This resulted in the Hindu-Muslim divide with its tragic consequences. It also led to Urdu becoming a language of the Muslims with Persian and Arabic words, and Hindi as a language of Hindus with Sanskrit words replacing the commonly spoken words. Hindi and Urdu have become the standard language, and therefore the language of power or as some linguists call the standard language, the language with a gun! These standardized languages have carried power, sectarianism, hate and violence! This Hindi has grown at the cost of more than a dozen languages in the "Hindi Commonwealth" (a term used by Acharya Kishoridas Bajpai) making their speakers second-class citizens in their own land. How can such a language serve as a national language to unite Indians?

The true inheritor of Dakhni is the language of the common people, often called Hindustani, which the vast majority of the working people, particularly in urban India, understand. Its literary tradition continued in modern India through Parsi theatre, Hindi theatre in general, and the Bombay cinema and Hindi film lyrics. Some authors in Hindi still write in people's language and the 'chap' literature (religious tracts like *Kabir Ke Dohe*) sold on the pavement and rural weekly markets and popular magazines still use this language. This language carries the common composite cultural tradition of India, a culture of love, assimilation and tolerance.

Although Dakhni has been eclipsed by Urdu and Hindi in the 'big' tradition, it still has a lively presence in the 'small' tradition. Now that the protagonists of the small tradition are becoming vocal, they can tap the vast potential of Dakhni in their activities in the people's movement. Dakhni songs and theatre have immense potential. A Dakhni theatre group may be as viable as the *Jatras* and *Tamashas* have been. Of course there are newer issues, particularly those of communalism and environment. Theatre activists have an interesting challenge before them. And if theatre succeeds, can video and cinema be left behind?

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