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## UNIT 19 THE LANGUAGES OF MODERN INDIA

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### 19.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will get to know about:

- the changes in the languages of India which came in the transition from the Mughal empire to the days of British paramourncy,
- how the developments in languages accompanied new polarizations which were occurring in the Indian society,
- the ways in which the developments in the languages were affected by the coming of the Western influence, and
- some consequences the developments in the modern Indian languages had on modern Indian history.

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### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

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The languages of India went through important developments in the 18th and 19th centuries. This had a significant impact on modern Indian history. Of these developments, the most important was the growth of the vernacular languages, as distinct from the classical languages. The vernacular languages acquired a standard form and a new prose literature. As we shall see, these developments had a close bearing upon the course of the social and cultural history of modern India, and even upon its political history.

## 19.2 IMPACT OF THE TRANSITION FROM MUGHALS TO BRITISH PARAMOUNTCY

The language of the Mughal ruling class in eighteenth century India was Persian. It was therefore the official language. As for the learned communities of the eighteenth century, they expressed their scholarly thought in the classical languages—the Hindus in Sanskrit, the Muslims in Arabic, and both Hindus and Muslims in Persian. The non-classical languages of the people of India, often called the 'vernacular languages' fell into two groups—Dravidian and Indo-Aryan. Some of these vernacular languages—Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in the Dravidian group and the Sanskrit-based vernaculars of Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Hindustan, Punjab, Kashmir, Sind, Gujarat and Maharashtra—had well-developed poetical tradition. But prose literature in these languages was in an embryonic state. The vernacular languages were unharnessed as yet to the expression of complex and scientific thought. The replacement of the Mughal tradition by the British paramountcy in the time of Lord Wellesley and the policy in favour of English education in 1835, fostered important changes in all these languages, in some earlier than in others: Bengali in the early nineteenth century, Marathi in the mid-nineteenth century, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, Assamese, Oriya, Sindhi, Telugu and Tamil in the late nineteenth century, and Kannada, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Dogri in the twentieth century. In each of these languages vital changes were working at different paces.

### 19.2.1 The Adoption of Uniform Printed Script and a Standardized Language

Many dialects were intermixed in each of the linguistic regions of India and there was at first no standard language. Scripts were not uniform either. In Sindhi, for instance, in which very few books were written down in any case in earlier times, Lahnda, Gurumukhi, Nagari and Persian alphabets had been employed indiscriminately, until the British administrators of Sind devised in 1851 an Arabic-Sindhi script (Arabic plus some letters to denote sounds not known in Arabic) which both Muslims and Hindus adopted for printing their books. Language was even more diverse than script. To take an example, the vernacular language of Hindustan in the broad belt of territory stretching from Rajputana to Bihar was a diverse category, incorporating Marwari, Braja Bakha, Khari Boli, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, etc. Out of this there gradually emerged a standard Hindi. In course of the nineteenth century, Khari Boli, the dialect spoken around Delhi and Meerut, came to provide the basis of a standard language. The emergence of these standard blocs of language which did not exist before, has made possible the linguistic reorganization of the states in independent India. It is important to note that the standard vernacular languages covering entire regions arose no earlier than the nineteenth century.

### 19.2.2 The Growth of Prose Literature

The standardization of script and language was closely connected with the growth of a printed prose literature from around 1800. This gathered momentum as the spread of English education deepened the impact of the West on the vernacular literatures of India. More will be said of this later.

### 19.2.3 The Adoption of New Literary Forms

The deepening impact of the West in turn brought to bear upon the vernacular literature the strong influence of English literature. The literary forms prevailing in Victorian England, such as the novel or the sonnet, had no exact equivalents in the vernacular literatures of India, which adopted them with great enthusiasm. A historian of Malayalam literature states that in any assessment of contemporary Malayalam literature one conclusion is inescapable: all the present forms and movements owe their origin to English literature. In his opinion the whole range of it—novel, short story, drama, essay, literary criticism, biography, history, travelogue—is 'conceived after the English pattern, and poetic forms also—the short

source. This is as true of the other Indian languages as of Malayalam. Since the break from the old to the new, the history of these literatures is the history of these new forms and movements, though it must be added that folk literature continues in its own channels unaffected by the imported forms.

कंथी लिपि (U.P.)

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए	ऐ	ओ
अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए	ऐ	ओ

मौड़ी लिपि - सत्तरहवीं श० (Maharashtra)

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए	ऐ
अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए	ऐ

अहोम लिपि (Assam)

अ	आ	आ	इ	ई	उ
अ	आ	आ	इ	ई	उ

गुरमुखी लिपि (Punjab)

उ	अ	इ	स	ह	क	ख	ग
उ	अ	इ	स	ह	क	ख	ग

भोजपुरी लिपि (Bihar)

अ	आ	इ	उ	ऊ	ए
अ	आ	इ	उ	ऊ	ए

उर्दू लिपि (Mainly U.P. and A.P.)

स	ट	त	प	ब	अ
س	ط	ت	پ	ب	ا

अरबी - सिन्धी लिपि

फ	थ	स	ट	ठ	त	भ	प	ब	ब	अ
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अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए
अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए

संथल लिपि (Bihar)

अ	आ	इ	उ	ऊ	ए
अ	आ	इ	उ	ऊ	ए

मगधी (मगही) लिपि (Bihar)

## 19.3 LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND CLASS CLEAVAGES

The moulding of the standard languages fostered the cultural leadership of the educated middle class and promoted political and social solidarity of a dynamic nature under their direction. Paradoxically, however, it also produced some social polarizations that increased the distance between the new middle class and the lower sections of the population.

### 19.3.1 Bengali

This was so right from the time when the new prose was created and in which the intellectual activity of the modern Indian Renaissance was carried on. The first such intellectual prose literature—the Bengali writings of Raja Rammohan Roy (from 1815 onwards)—had as its medium a cumbrous, artificial language far removed from the common speech of the people, and totally inaccessible to them. Though capable of expressing the most complex rational and scientific thought in his hands, and though later on beautified and naturalized by such creative writers as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Akshoy Kumar Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (a process completed by the appearance of Bankim's first novel **Durgesh Nandini** in 1865), this rich literature remained outside the reach of the common people of Bengal. Even while Rabindranath Tagore had begun writing the most original poetry of modern India, the weavers, artisans and peasants of Bengal, impervious to the new literature, continued to thrill to the songs of the folk singers. There was a growing distance between the folk dialects and the language of the middle class. The Bengali language was split, in the nineteenth century, between the formal, written literary language (called **sadhu bhasha**) and the spoken tongue, and though Rabindranath adopted a **Chalit Bhasha** (a language both spoken and written) in the 1920s, this too was the language of the middle class.

### 19.3.2 Gujarati

The phenomenon was not confined to Bengal. In his foreword to K.M. Munshi's history of **Gujarati literature** (1935), Mahatma Gandhi, to whom the book was dedicated, noted the distinction, in Gujarati as well as other languages, between the language understood and spoken by the middle class and the language of the folk songs which constituted the literature of the people. He characterized the written literature of Gujarat as the literature of the commercially minded and self-satisfied middle class, and delivered the judgement that it was 'effeminate and sensuous' in its tone. He also observed in this connection that the written Gujarati literature was untouched by the language of the masses of Gujarat: 'Of the language of the people we know next to nothing. We hardly understand their speech. The gulf between them and us the middle class, is so great that we do not know them and they know still less of what we think and speak.'

### 19.3.3 Tamil

To take another example of what Mahatma Gandhi meant, in modern Tamil prose, too, the informal, spoken, colloquial language did not become the language of literature. Conversely, the formal literary language was not spoken as day-to-day informal speech by the Tamil speaker, not even by the educated intellectual Tamil (though his Bengali counterpart did so in part). In Tamil literature there was no analogy to the Bengali **Chalit Bhasha**, a language that was spoken and written simultaneously by at least one section of the population, i.e. the middle class. Instead, as Kamil Zvelebil has noted, there was the Tamil equivalent to the Bengali **Sadhu Bhasha**, i.e. the formal, written, literary language, spoken by no one; and then there were the various local and social dialects, the language of the Brahmins being distinct from the language of the rest.

मुख्य भारतीय लिपियों के कुछ शब्द

तमिल	உங்களுக்கு என்ன उङ्गळ् पेयर् एन्न - आपका नाम क्या है
मलयालम	നി കളുടേ പേര് എന്താണു निकलुडे पेरं एन्नाणं - तुम्हारा नाम क्या है
कन्नड़	ನಿಮ್ಮ ಹೆಸರು ಏನು निम्म हेसर एनु - आपका नाम क्या है
तेलुगु	నీ పేరు ఏమి नि पेरु एमि - आपका नाम क्या है
बंगला	আপনার নাম কি आपनार नाम कि = आपका नाम क्या है
उड़िया	ସତ୍ୟ ମେଵ ଜୟତେ सत्य मेव जयते
गुजराती	સત્ય મેવ જયતે सत्य मेव जयते
पंजाबी	ਮਕਾਨ ਦੀ ਕਚੀਆਂ ਕੰਧਾਂ मकान दिया कच्चियां कंधां
	मकान की कच्ची दीवार

2. Some Words of Major Indian Scripts

## 19.4 COMMUNAL POLARIZATION IN LANGUAGE

These class differences in language were accompanied by communal differences as well, and here, the emergence of the standard language of literature widened the gulf between the different sections of the population. Take Bengal, for instance.

Curiously, even before the standard Bengali written language was fashioned in the early part of the nineteenth century, there had sprung up, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a popular literature in what is called Dobhashi (Bengali heavily mixed with Arabic and Persian words) or Musalmani Bangla. The common Muslim people of small means patronized this literature. It was entirely in verse and there was no prose in it. The subject matter was muslim theology and popular takes of the old and marvellous sort. The Dobhashi (otherwise known as Puthi) literature grew rapidly in the nineteenth century with the aid of the printing press, but it cut a channel entirely separate from the literature of the predominantly Hindu middle class. It was curiously untouched by modernity of any sort

### Cultural Contours

The new Muslim middle class writers, such as Mir Musharraf Hussain, who started writing in Bengali in the latter nineteenth century, adopted the standard Bengali language and not Musalmani Bangla.

There was another twist to the situation in Gujarat. The standard Gujarati language of the nineteenth century was the product mainly of Hindu writers like Narmadashankar. The Parsis and Muslims of the region took no conspicuous part in fashioning it. Instead the literary energies of the minority communities flowed into the new 'Parsi-Gujarati', confined to novels and stories of the 'shilling shocker' type, and the even humbler 'Muslim-Gujarati'. Mahatma Gandhi regretfully noted the emergence of these separate literary streams, and the manner in which they had tortured the language out of shape. Yet he was constrained to say that it was impossible to ignore these two streams: 'They are not wells of Gujarat undefiled. But no reviewer of Gujarati literature can afford to ignore the existence of works which hundreds, if not thousands of Parsis and Muslims read and by which, may be, even shape part of their conduct.'

Around the same time, Rabindranath Tagore, too, expressed his misgivings at the assertive attempts of some Muslim writers in the new Bengali prose to Islamize the language by adopting Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. This attempt to distort the language (which must be distinguished from the old poetical Musalmani Bangla of 1750-1900) was not ultimately successful. (It is interesting to note that the Bengali language adopted in Bangla Desh today is closer to the language of Rabindranath than to that favoured by the Muslim ulama of his own day.) But the distance of the poor Muslim community of Bengal from the Hindu middle class who created standard Bengali made it vulnerable to such attacks.

The same problem appeared in the deep south and in Hindustan. There was a polarization between the Sanskritized Tamil of the Brahman and the Dravidian Tamil of the Non-Brahman. And there was the more catastrophic polarization of the vernacular language of Hindustan between high Urdu and high Hindi.

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## 19.5 THE POLARIZATION OF URDU AND HINDI

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The vernacular language of Hindustan, which the ruling Muslim elite of the medieval period variously referred to as Hindavi, Hindustani or Hindi, and in which some of them even composed poems at times (e.g. Akbar's courtier Faizi was the author of many Hindi couplets), was a composite language prevailing over the whole of north India between Punjab and Sind on the west and Bengal in the east. It was classified by Grierson into four distinct language groups of different origin, each with several dialects:

- 1) Rajasthani—Mewati, Marwari, Jaipuri, Malvi, etc.
- 2) Western Hindi—Bangru (Haryana), Braj Bhakha (Mathura), Khari Boli (Delhi and Meerut), Kanauji (lower part of central Doubs), Bundeli (Bundelkhand and a good part of the Narmada valley), etc.
- 3) Eastern Hindi—Baiswari or Awadhi, Bagheli, Chhattisgarhi, etc.
- 4) Bihari—Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, etc.

### 19.5.1 Emergence and Growth of Urdu

As Delhi was the headquarters of the Muslim soldiers from the days of the Delhi Sultans, it was from the dialect of this district and Meerut, known as Khari Boli (literally meaning 'the rough speech') from which the lingua franca of the camp developed.

The Turki word Urdu literally meant the camp, and the camp language spread into the Deccan as the Muslim soldiers moved in there. Eventually, a literary version of the lingua franca of the Hindustani camp, known as Rekhta or Dakkani, emerged in the Muslim kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkonda. In the Mughal Empire, however, the ruling elite, who were wedded intellectually to Persian, did not compose any works in the language of the camp. It thus remained a spoken tongue in the north, there being no literature in it there. The dialects of Hindustan in which poetry was most actively composed by both Hindus and Muslims were Awadhi and Braj Bhasha, and the dialect of Delhi and the

lingua franca of the camp were not regarded as natural vehicles of written literature and poetry.

The situation changed when the Mughal Empire, which admitted only Persian as the language of learned discourse began to decline. Wali Dakkani of Aurangabad who was well known for his poems in Dakkani visited Delhi in 1700; about this time there was a trend in favour of their own vernacular language among the learned Muslim poets of Delhi who had hitherto only composed in Persian. They set about enriching and purifying it with the help of Persian. The 'rough speech' in Delhi especially that in use among the royal family courtiers, attendants and soldiers increasingly became the language for literary composition. The poets and scholars weeded out from this still undeveloped dialect a large number of plebeian Hindi words and enriched it by a ceaseless process of importation from Persian.

Paradoxically the revolt against Persian in favour of the mother tongue thus resulted, not in bringing Urdu closer to the indigenous element, but in widening the gulf between it and the popular speech.

The early Urdu poets of the first half of the eighteenth century sometimes called their language Hindi, and sometimes Urdu. The distinction between the two was still not entirely clear. Insha Allah Khan composed the tale **Rani Ketki Ki Kahani** (1801) in a simple, common Hindustani prose. When the Fort William College of the English opened a department for teaching the language in April 1801, it was named the department of Hindustani, by which they meant Urdu. The department also provided for the teaching of Braj Bhasha for the sake of contact with the Hindu population, and its head Gilchrist made a clear distinction between Hindustani (i.e. Urdu) as a Muslim and Hindwi (i.e. Hindi) as a Hindu language: 'Hindoos will naturally lean most to the Hinduwee, while the Mussulmans will of course be partial to Arabic and Persian, whence two styles arise, namely the court or high style and the country or pristine style...' Gilchrist's identification of Hindustani with Urdu was somewhat off the mark, and as Grierson later pointed out in the **Linguistic Survey of India**, Hindustani was a narrow sense the language of the upper Gangetic Doab (i.e. Khari Boli) and in a broader sense the lingua franca of India. As it was capable of being written both in the Persian and the Devnagari characters, Urdu came to denote the special variety of Hindustani in which Persian words occurred frequently, while Hindi gradually became confined to the form of Hindustani in which Sanskrit words abounded.

### 19.5.2 Growth of Standard Hindi

Gilchrist gave an impetus to the standardization of Hindi by directing two Bhaksha munshis in his department, Lallu Lal and Sadal Mishra, to write prose works in Hindi. Khari Boli, from which Urdu had also sprung, provided the basis on which the Bhakha munshis (as the Hindi pandits were then known) were advised to develop the new prose. What the Fort William pandits created, however, was not really the purified Delhi and Meerut dialect, but a new literary dialect, by taking Urdu, purging it of words of Persian and Arabic origin, and substituting for them words of Sanskrit origin. Gilchrist had a preference for Arabic and Persian words, but Price who later became head of the Hindustani department emphasized in 1824 that 'Hindee' words were almost all Sanskrit while 'Hindoostanee' or Oordoo' words were for the greater part Arabic and Persian. Under English direction, the Hindi pandits of Fort William created a synthetic new product, an artificial language for quite some time to come.

Thus Grierson noted with regard to standard or high Hindi in 1889: 'It has become the recognized medium of literary prose throughout Northern India, but as it was nowhere a vernacular it has never been successfully used for poetry. The greatest geniuses have tried, and it has been found wanting at their hands. Northern India therefore at the present day presents the following unique state of literature—its poetry everywhere written in local vernacular dialects, especially in Braj, in Baiswari, and in Bihari, and its prose in one uniform artificial dialect, the mother tongue of no native-born Indian, forced into acceptance by the prestige of its inventors, by the fact that the first books written in it were of a highly popular character, and because it found a sphere in which it was eminently useful.' Standard Hindi did become a more living language with its own poetry later on, but it took time.

The increasing 'standardization' of Hindi and Urdu naturally made the gulf between them wider than ever. In 1803 Hindi had been recognized along with Urdu as a court





Persian, and his own mother language was deprived of his genius. As communal separation became more pronounced, by and large the Punjabi Hindus and the Punjabi Muslims devoted themselves to Hindi and Urdu respectively.

### Check Your Progress 1

1) List briefly the main changes in the development of Indian languages in the period of transition from Mughal to British paramountcy.

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2) Was the development of Indian languages in this period uniform?

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3) The dialect from which both Hindi and Urdu have arisen is:

- i) Kannada
- ii) Ahomiya
- iii) Khari Boli
- iv) Mewati

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## 19.6 UNITY IN DIVERSITY

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Despite what has been said above, the underlying pattern of the development of the modern Indian languages cannot be grasped unless we keep in view their basic unity. As Jawaharlal Nehru said, their roots and inspiration were much the same and the mental climate in which they grew up was similar. All of them also faced the same type of impact from western thought and influence. Even the languages of Southern India, with their different origins, grew up in similar conditions. As Nehru put it, each of these languages was not merely the language of a part of India, but was essentially a language of India, representing the thought and culture and development of this country in its manifold forms.

What is often not realized is the deep interconnections between the various languages of India both before and after the emergence of standard or high forms in the nineteenth century. Guru Govind Singh, the tenth guru of the Sikhs (1675-1708), composed his verses mainly in Hindi (Braj Bhasha), but some also in Persian and Punjabi. Again, Dayaram (1767-1852), the greatest poet of the period of transition from old to new Gujarati literature, travelled far and wide, visited Gokul, Mathura, Vrindavan, Kasi and other famous places of pilgrimage, and studied Hindi, Vraja, Sanskrit and the old Gujarati Masters. He wrote many poems in Hindi, Vraja, Marathi, Punjabi, Sanskrit and Urdu, besides of course writing in his own language.

After the emergence of the standard languages, too, the interconnection between them continued to be deep. Modern prose developed in each of them under the same sort of western impact, and the successful novels in each language were studied by novelists in other languages. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee provided an early model, and later on Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's works were translated in virtually every Indian language and sold in thousands. A later example in Rabindranath Tagore who was looked up to by such widely dispersed poets as Subramania Bharati in

## 19.7 THE GROWTH OF PROSE

The main effort of the medieval writers in the vernacular languages had gone into poetry. That is not to say that prose was entirely lacking in this period. The Dravidian languages had a long but intermittent tradition of prose writing. A few of the Indo-Aryan languages also had some scattered specimens of literary prose. But Bengali, Oriya, Maithili, Sindhi etc., had virtually no prose literature. With some exceptions, only fragments of written prose are to be found in the north Indian languages.

### 19.7.1 Examples of Early Prose

The clearest form of prose literature in the Indo-Aryan vernacular languages was the historical chronicle. These are, however, found only in a few languages: the **Buranjis** of the Ahoms (in Ahom and later on in Assamese) the **Bakhars** of the Marathas (in archaic Marathi), and the **Janamasakhis** of the Sikhs (in mixed Hindi and Punjabi). The bardic chronicles of Rajputana were in verse, but there was one unique prose work in Marwari. This was the chronicle and gazetteer compiled in the seventeenth century by Muhanota Naimasi, a minister of Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur. The chronicle is known as **Muhanota Nainasi ri Khyata**, which narrates the history of all the major Rajput clans; attached to it is a gazetteer of Jodhpur state, entitled **Marwar ra Parganam ri Vigat**, a scientific and statistical work, the design of which was apparently inspired by the great **Ain-i-Akbari** of Abul Fazal in the previous century.

The prose of the **Buranjis**, the **Bakhars**, the **Janamsakhis** and the **Khyatas** was archaic. There were occasional flashes of originality in such prose, but it was not capable of conveying modern, scientific thought.

The prose literature of the Dravidian languages had a longer ancestry and a more extensive character. The typical form of old literature in these languages was a genre known as **Champu**, a mixed form of verse and prose, also familiar in Sanskrit. But there was also more straightforward prose literature. To take a few examples:

- i) The Tamil commentaries on the classic poetical works of Tamil, such as **Silappatigaram**, were, with some exceptions, in concise, lucid prose. Such prose commentaries can be traced back to the eight century, and may be said to have existed even earlier.
- ii) The **Kannada Vachanas** were the teachings of the Virashaiva preachers in simple unadorned prose dating from the twelfth century. This was a popular religious movement with an egalitarian social message, which forms the basis of the Lingayat community of contemporary Karnataka. Here is an example of a vachana from their founder, Basavanna: 'I have been like the bride who has her oil bath and who has put on the most splendid robes and worn the most charming jewels, but has not won the heart of her husband.'
- iii) The Telugu ruling class who were left stranded in Tanjore, Madurai and Pudukottai after the disintegration of the Vijayanagara empire gave special attention to developing a literature of **Kavyas** written in clear Telugu. The Telugu poets of the 'Southern School' took as much pride in their prose works as in their poetical compositions. Thus the poet Samukha Venkata Krishnappa Nayak of eighteenth century Madura regarded his prose work, **Jaimini Bharata**, as a work of art, to be looked upon as of equal importance as his famous poem **Sarangadhara**.
- iv) Finally, we may mention the brilliant Tamil diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, the diwan of the French Chief Dupleix of Pondicherry, which he started writing in 1736. It is a lively work written in a colloquial language distinct from high Tamil prose and it is full of interesting commercial lore and details of life in the French settlement.

It will be evident from the above that Tamil, Kannada and Telugu prose had attained a fairly wide range before the dawn of modernity. All the same, the new prose that developed in these languages in the nineteenth century was very different and was not modelled on these earlier examples. On the whole, new prose in the vernacular languages of India attained the developed stage in which national

scientific thought could be adequately conveyed. The new prose also expressed the process of encounter between Indian culture and Western culture.

### 19.7.2 The Beginning of the Western Impact

The year 1800 is regarded by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee as the pivotal one in the development of prose writing in most Indian languages. That was the time when the Baptist Mission Press of Serampore and the Fort William College of Calcutta started acting in conjunction to put forth a large volume of printed prose in several modern Indian languages.

It should be noted, however, that even earlier than this there had been a long, though isolated, record of Catholic missionary activity especially in the south, in connection with prose and printing. The Jesuit Missionaries who came in the wake of the Portuguese navigators and traders set up the first printing press in Goa in 1566. The two most important printing establishments in the south were later set up at Ambalakkadu (1679) and Tranquebar (1712-13) and there was a stream of printed works issued by Catholic missionaries in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They translated the Bible, wrote Christian puranas, and compiled grammar and dictionary in the Dravidian languages. Especially well remembered is Father Arnos who came to Kerala in 1700, spoke and wrote Malayalam like a native, and left long poems in that language on Christian themes, such as the **Messiah Charitram**, as well as a Malayalam grammar and dictionary now lost. The most interesting fruit of the Catholic missionary enterprise, however, was a couple of inventive Malayalam prose works by two native Christians who visited Rome in 1778—Malpan and his disciple Kathanar. Malpan wrote **Vedatarkkam** (Logic of Religion), the first Malayalam prose work to treat of social problems, and Kathanar wrote the even more interesting **Vartamana Pustakam** (Book of News) and account of their perilous voyage and triumphant entry to Rome by a circuitous route travelling via the Cape of Good Hope, Brazil and Portugal. However, the Catholic missionary enterprise in the Dravidian languages did not leave a permanent impact, and it was an isolated effort.

It may be noted that there was a smaller Portuguese missionary effort at writing Bengali prose, but it disappeared without leaving any trace on Bengali literature. The beginning of a systematic Western impact on the Indian prose literatures cannot be dated before 1800. In that year an important conjunction took place: the establishment of the Serampore Baptist Mission Press, which was the first major printing press in Northern India, and the founding of the Fort William College by Wellesley with the object of teaching the Indian languages to the officers of the East India Company, a task made urgent by the expansion of the Company's dominions all over India during his administration.

At the Serampore Baptist Press, the dedicated missionary William Carey enlisted the help of Indian scholars to translate the Bible—Ramram Basu for Bengali, Atmaram Sharma for Assamese, Vajjnath Sharma for Marathi, etc. The Baptist Mission Press employed Bengali, Nagri, Persian, Arabic and other characters for printing. Between 1801 and 1830 it printed works in about 50 languages, including Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khasi, Marathi, Punjabi, Oriya, Sindhi, Tamil and Telugu.

At the Fort William College, William Carey and John Gilchrist came to head the Bengali and Hindustani departments respectively, and they had a host of Indian munshis under them teaching and writing in these and other vernacular languages. Gilchrist, whose department was considered more important as it taught the lingua franca of the country, wrote the **Hindi Dictionary** (1802). Carey, who turned out to be a more versatile teacher, wrote grammars of Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Telugu and Kannada. The most important part of the publishing programme of the College was the text-books written by the munshis for teaching the various languages. As there existed no much works, this was an original effort and it was the first important attempt in the shaping of the new prose. The text-books of the College came to include during its short career 20 works in Urdu, 8 works in Hindi, 13 works in Bengali and 4 works in Marathi. The list included such works as Ramram Basu's **Pratibandha Charitra** (1801, Bengali, biography of a warrior Hindu

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version of **Bhagavata Purana**). The subjects covered tales, history, biography, letters, dialogues and proverbs.

On the whole, these grammars and prose works were rather artificial and they left no perceptible impact on the future literature, and the beginning of spontaneous literary composition in prose came later and had no demonstrable connection with the early efforts of the Baptist missionaries and the munshis of the Fort William College. These developments were connected with the growth of English schools and colleges, the rise of the vernacular press, and the appearance of text book societies and learned and literary associations in the great metropolitan centres like Calcutta and Bombay.

The first of the new prose literatures, that in Bengali, was the product of the growing impact of institutions like, the Hindu College (1817) and the Calcutta School Books Society (1817), the circulation of newspapers like the **Samachar Darpan** (1818), **Sambad Kaumudi** (1821) and **Samachar Chandrika** (1822) and serious writing of Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore and Akshoy Kumar Dutt. The Aligarh Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College (1877) of Saiyid Ahmad Khan created a dynamic new body of Urdu prose writings that included the works of Nazir Ahmed, Shibli Numani and Hali. The time lag between the respective developments in Bengali and Urdu was a consequence of the differential rate of Western influence: the new Bengali literary prose flowered forth between 1815-1865, while the new Urdu literary prose gathered momentum only in the 1870s. In between them, Marathi prose modernized itself, largely as a result of the impact of the new education imparted by institutions like the Elphinstone College of Bombay (1835) and the circulation of the **Darpan** (1831), **Digdarshan** (1841), **Prabhakar** (1842), and **Jnanaprakash** (1849). The final classical touch came with the **Nibandhamala** or essays of Vishnushastri Chipluukar (1874). Among the Dravidian languages the earliest and most dynamic response to the challenge of the West was exhibited by Malayalam, which owed its new prose literature to the text-books written by Kerala Varma for the Text-book committee of Travancore in the 1870s and 1880s, and to the newspapers **Keralamitram** (1860), **Kerala Patrika** (1885) and **Malayali** (1886).

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## 19.8 CONSEQUENCES

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The developments in the modern Indian languages had significant consequences for modern Indian history. These may be summarized as follows:

- i) The development of standard vernacular languages brought social leadership to the educated middle class, because it was this new class which created the standard language in each vernacular. By this means, the middle class could seize leadership of the social and cultural movements of modern India, and later on of political movements as well.
- ii) At the same time the emergence of the standard language, which was the language of the middle class, created a distance between that class and the masses of India, who clung to spoken dialects and folk literature.
- iii) There were also differential linguistic developments which accentuated the differences between the communities—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, etc.
- iv) All the same there emerged an educated middle class which was pan-Indian in its scope. In its hands, the new vernacular prose became the medium of rational, scientific thought. There sprang up a press and a public and the growth of enlightened opinion through the medium of prose formed the essential background to the shaping of the modern nation.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the impact of the Western attempt to develop Indian languages?

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- 2) How did the growth of Indian languages have an impact on the growth of the National Movement?

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## 19.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you saw :

- that the transition from the Mughals to British period saw the Indian languages, especially the vernacular, benefiting from a uniform printed script and new literary forms.
- that this growth in Indian languages was also marked by new polarizations in the kinds of language used by different classes and community groups.
- that in spite of these polarizations the process under which these languages grew up provided a degree of unity to the languages.
- that in spite of differential developments the languages of India were to prove critical as a means of communication for the rising national movement in the last half of the 19th century.

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## 19.10 KEY WORDS

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**Vernacular:** The language most widely spoken in a region.

**Classical language:** A form of language that was used in ancient times and is no longer used or used only in formal writing.

**Cleavages:** Rifts, Gaps, Differences.

**Dialect:** An underdeveloped form of language used by a particular group or a region.

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## 19.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 19.2
- 2) See Section 19.3
- 3) iii)

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-section 19.7.2
- 2) See Section 19.8