The Problem of Punjab's Language and Script

Bhagat Singh

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"AN ACQUAINTANCE OF THE LITERATURE OF A society or a country is of prime importance for the understanding of that society or country, because the consciousness of the soul of a society or country, because the consciousness of the soul of a society gets reflected in its literature also." History is witness to the authenticity of the above statement. Countries have followed the direction determined by the flow of their literature. Every nation needs literature of high quality for its own upliftment. As literature of a country attains new heights, the country also develops. Patriots — be they merely social reformers or political leaders-pay highest attention to the literature of their country. If they do not create new literature to meet the requirements of the contemporary issues and situations, all of their efforts will fail and their work will prove unstable.

Perhaps Garibaldi could not have succeeded in mobilising the army with such ease if Mazzini had not invested his thirty years in his mission of cultural and literary renaissance. The revival of Irish language was attempted with the same enthusiasm along with the renaissance in Ireland. The rulers so much wanted to suppress their language for the ultimate suppression of the Irish people that even kids were punished for the crime of keeping a few verses in Gaelic. The French revolution would have been impossible without the literature of Rousseau and Voltaire. Had Tolstoy, Karl Marx and Maxim Gorky not invested years of their lives in the creation of a new literature, Russian revolution would not have taken place, leave alone the propagation and practice of communism.

The same applies to the social and religious reformers. Kabir's ideas have a stable impact because of his literature. Till date, the sweetness and sensitivity of his poems prove captivating to the people.

Exactly the same can be said about Guru Nanak Devji, When the Sikh Gurus started establishing their new order along with the preaching of their beliefs, they felt the need of a new literature and this inspired Guru Angad Devji to evolve the Gurumukhi script. Centuries of continuous warfare and Muslim invasions had dried up the literature of Punjab. The Hindi language was at the verge of extinction. He adopted the Kashmiri script in his search for an Indian language. Later the Adi Granth was compiled by Guru Arjun Devji and Bhai Gurudasji. They took a far-reaching and useful step in this act of creating their own script and literature to perpetuate their beliefs.

Afterwards, as situations changed, the flow of literature also changed. The ceaseless sacrifices and sufferings of the Gurus changed the situation. Whereas we find devotion and self-oblivion

in the preaching of the first Guru, and experience a sense of self-effacement in the following couplet:

Nanak nanhe ho rahe, jaisi nanhi doob.

Aur ghas jari jaat hai, doob khoob ki khoob

(Nanak asks all to be as humble and insignificant as the doob grass. While all other grasses are burnt down, dood continues to flourish.)

We find a sense of fellow-feeling and helpfulness for the oppressed in the preaching of Guru Shri Teg Bahadurji:

Baanhi jinhan di pakadiye, sir dijiye baanhi na chhodye,

Guru Teg Bahadur bolya, dharati pai dharam na chodye.

(Whomsoever you provide protection, you should be prepared to sacrifice yourself but not that protection. Guru Teg Bahadur asks you not to forsake your religion on this earth.)

After his sacrifice, suddenly, we sense a warrior spirit in the preaching of Guru Gobind Singhji. When he realised that a mere spiritual devotion could not do anything, he started Chandi worship and turned Sikh community into a community of worshippers and warriors by synthesising spiritualism and fighting. We find in his poems (literature) a new spirit. He writes:

Je tohi prem khelan da chav, sir dhar tali gali mori aav,

Je it maarag pair dharijai, sir dijai kaan no dijai.

(If you are interested in playing the game of love, put your head on your palm and then only enter my lane. In case you put your feet on this path don't fall back, even if you have to loose your life.) And then:

Soora so pahchaniye, je lade deen ke het,

Purja-purja kat mare, kabhu na chhade khet.

(Only he is brave who fights for the cause of the poor. He may be cut into pieces and may be killed, but he should not leave the field.)

And then suddenly, the sword-worship starts.

Carrying the same spirit Baba Banda and other fought Muslim ruler ceaselessly. We find later that when Sikhs are reduced to mere groups of anarchists, declared outlaws, and were continuously compelled to be confined to the forests, no new literature could be created. They had a warrior spirit, a sense of courage and sacrifice and a spirit to continue their war against Muslim rulers, but they could not chalk out their future beyond this . this explains why these warrior groups fought among themselves. It is here that their lack of contemporary spirit worries us. If a warrior and shrewd ruler like Ranjit singh had not emerged afterwards, Sikhs would have gone down bereft of any high ideal or spirit to have mobilised them.

Along with all this, one more point deserves attention. All the Sanskrit literature, put together, failed to revive the Hindu society; new literature had to be written in a contemporary modern language. Till date, we feel only the effect which was created by that literature of contemporary

spirit. Even for a person of proper education and comprehension, the hymns of unintelligible Sanskrit and ayats of classical Arabic cannot be as enthusing as is possible by the simple statements in a simple language.

A short history of Punjabi language and literature is sketched out above. Now we turn to our times. Swami Vivekananda in Bengal and Swami Ramtirtha in Punjab were born approximately at the same time. Both were 'great' in the same sense. Both got fame for establishing Indian metaphysics abroad. Swami Vivekanand's mission became a permanent institution in Bengal while Punjab misses a memorial to Swami Ramtirtha. In spite of having significant differences in their thinking, we find strong similarities at the roots. Whereas Swami Vivekananda was preaching Karma Yoga, Swami Ramtirtha was singing in blissfulness:

Ham rukhe tukade khayenge, Bharat par ware jayenge,

Hum sukhe chane chabayenge, Bharat ki baat banyenge,

Ham nange umar bitayenge, Bharat par jaan mitayenge.

(We shall subsist on crumbs but sacrifice ourselves for bharat, We shall go naked the whole life, but offer our lives for Bharat.)

Several times, he wept while seeing the setting sun in America, and said:" Now you are rising in my beloved country. Drop my tears like dew-drops over beautiful water-fed fields of India." Such a great devotee of the country and God was born in our province and , if we do not have even a single memorial to him, what else could explain that, except our literary backwardness?

This we feel at every step. Many great men born in Punjab, who are comparable to Shri Devendra Thakur and Keshav Chandra Sen of Bengal, but we did not respect them and easily forgot them after their deaths-for example, guru Gyan Singhji, etc. We find only one reason on bottom, and that is the total lack of literacy interest and awakening, The truth is that no country or community can progress without its literature. But language is the primary need of literature and this is absent in Punjab. In spite of releasing this handicap for long, the question of language has still remained unresolved. The main reason behind this is the unfortunate communalisation of language in our province, in other provinces, we find that Muslims have fully adopted their provincial languages. In the literary world of Bengal. Poet Nazrul-Islam is a shining star. Latif Hussain 'Natwar' is prominent among the Hindi poets . the same is true of Gujrat also.

But Punjab is unfortunate. Here ,even Hindus and Sikhs are not united, leave the Muslims alone.

Punjab should have been the language of Punjab, like other provinces, but since this has not happened, as this question is a spontaneous question, Muslims have adopted Urdu. Muslims totally lack Indianness, therefore they want to prorogate Arabic script and Persian language. While failing to understand the importance of Indianness in the whole of India, they fail to understand the importance of one language, which could only be Hindi. That is why they keep repeating the demand for Urdu like a parrot and take an isolated position.

Then comes the turn of the Sikhs. Their whole literature is in the Gurumukhi script. Hindi is very there as a component, but Punjabi constitutes the main component. Therefore, the Sikhs adopted Punjabi written in Gurmukhi as their language. They could not leave that at any cost. They embraced that by making it a communal language.

The Arya Samaj emerged on the other side. Swami Dayanand propagated the feeling for the spread of Hindi throughout Bharatvarsha. Hindi became a religious component of the Arya Samaj

movement. These religion attachment benefited the language in one way. That is , while Sikh staunchness secured Punjabi, the insistence of Arya Samajists helped Hindi secure a place of its own.

In the early days of Arya Samaj movement, the Sikhs and Arya Samajists used to have religious gathering at the same place. At that time they had no feelings of being different, but afterwards, a few sentences of Satyartha Prakash caused malice and mutual hatred. The Sikhs, swept in the same stream, started hating even Hindi as well. Other did not take even notice of it.

Afterwards, it is said, an Samaji leader, Mahatma Hansrajji held consultations with many leaders and proposed that if they accept the Hindi script, he would get the Punjabi language in Hindi script, he would get the Punjabi language in Hindi script reognised in the University. But they could not understand the importance of this proposal because of their narrow-mindedness and absence of literary awareness. At this moment, three views prevail in Punjab. Firstly, there is strong attachment for urdu among the Muslims; secondly, for Hindi among Arya Samajis and certain other Hindus; and thirdly, for Punjabi.

It will not be important here to deal with all the languages one by one. First of all, we shall consider the Muslims view. They are staunch supporters of Urdu. At the present time, this language is dominant in Punjab. This is also the language of the court. Then some Muslims say that Urdu scripts saves space. This may be quite right, but the most important question before us at this juncture is to make India a unified nation, but this cannot be done all at once. For this we have to move step by step. If we cannot adopt one language for the whole of India at the moment, we should at least adopt one script. The urdu script cannot be called a perfect one and the most important point is that it is based on the Persian language. The flights of imagination of urdu poets- even if they are hindi (Indian)- reach the saaqis (bar-maids) of Persia and date palms of the Arbs countries. Kazi Nazrul-Islam's poems refer to Dhurjate.vishwamitra and Durvasa quite frequently, but our Punjabi Hindi-Urdu poets could not even think of them. Is it not a matter which makes one sad? Their ignorance of Indianness and Indian literature is the main reason of this. When they cannot imbibe Indianness, how can their literature make us Indian? Students confined to the study of urdu cannot attain the knowledge of the classical literature of India. It is not that these texts cannot be translated into a literary language like urdu, but it will be usefull only to a persian in hia pursuit concerning Indian literature.

It will Suffice to say in support of the above statement that when simple words like Arya and Swarajya are written as 'Ariya' and ;swarajia', what will happen to the deep metaphysical topics? Only a few days back, a government translator, using the urdu script, mistook sage Nachiketa as 'neechi Kutia' which can be translated as a 'bitch of low origin', while translating an Urdu book Qaumen kis Tarah Zinda Rah Sakti Hain(How nationalities can survive) by Lala Hardayalji, M.A . it was neither Lalaji's fault nor the translator. iT was only a shortcoming of the Urdu script and the dissimilarity between Urdu and Hindi languages and literature.

Indian languages and script prevail in the rest of India. In such a situation, should we get absolutely isolated from India point is that, among Muslim writers, the staunch supporters of Urdu write highly Persianised Urdu. The Muslim newspapers like Zamindar and Siyasat have strong Arabic influence which is quite incomprehensible to common people. How can this be propagated in such a situation? We wish our Muslim brothers, while sticking to their religion, think of Indianising themselves like Kamal the Turk. India's salvation is possible only that way. Instead of making language a communal question, we should adopt a wide perspective.

We will now return to the problem of Hindi and Punjabi. Many idealists entertain a vision of the world turned into one single nation, one global nation. This ideal is beautiful and one should keep it before oneself. But this cannot be achieved today; all of our steps, all of our efforts should be directed towards enhancement of happiness by uniting all nationalities, countries and nations into one strong bond. Before that, we have to realise that ideal in our own country. We have to adopt one language, one script, one literature, one ideal and one nation, but the adoption of a single language precedes all the other unites, so they we can communicate with and comprehend each other. A Punjabi and a Madrasi must not sit together mute at a gathering, but try to communicate their ideas and emotions, and this should be done in our own language, Hindi, rather than in an alien language like English. Even this ideal will take years to be realised. First of all, we should create literary awareness in this endeavor, not among a few but in the masses. The people's own language is essential for creating literary awareness among the people. On the basis of this logic, we say that you can succeed in Punjab only in Punjabi language.

Till now, Punjabi has not been able to become a literary language of the central Punjab, which is written in the Gurmukhi script, is now Known as Punjabi. It is neither widely prevalent nor has any literature or scientific significance. It was left unattended earlier, but even now the deficiency of its script disturbs those who now attending to it. All the words, cannot ending without the sound ' a') and its inability to write compound letter; even the word 'Poorna'(complete) cannot be written. This script is thus even more incomplete than Urdu, but when we already have a scientific and perfect Hindi script, what is there to feel hesitant about adopting it? The Gurmukhi script is only distorted form of the Hindi script. Right from the start All the rules are same, then. How much will we be benefited by our immediate switch over to this. The Punjabi language will start developing immediately by adopting this perfect script. And there is ni problem in its problem in its propagation. Hindu women of Punjab already know this script. The DAV school and Sanatan Dharma schools teach only in Hindi, what could be the problem in such a situation? We shall plead with the supporters of Hindi that, ultimately and certainly, only Hindi will be the language of the whole Bharat, but it will be more convenient to propagate it from now on. Punjabi will become like Hindi by adopting the script and then all the differences will disappear; and it is desirable, too that common people could be educated which is possible only through our own language in our own script. See this Punjabi poem:

O rahiya rahe jandya, sun ja gall meri

Sir to pag tere balait di, ihnun fuk muatara la.

(o passer by, listen to me.Burn that foreign turban Which thou art wearing on thy head, And take to 'Muatara'.)

Even beautiful Hindi poems cannot cast an impression comparable to this, as they have not yet made a place right in the hearts of the people. They still seem somewhat alien. It is so because Hindi is based on Sanskrit. And the Punjab has gone farther away from that. Persian has maintained its dominance in Punjab to a large extent. For example, a collection of things become 'cheezan' here instead of 'cheezain'. This principle prevails throughout. What is being emphasised here is that Hindi is still far from Punjabi heart in spite of being close to Punjabi; of course, Punjabi will come closer to Hindi when it will adopt the Hindi script attempt creating its literature.

By now almost every major issue has been discussed here. Only one thing now remains to be said. Many people argue that the Punjabi language lacks sweetness, beauty and emotions. This is absolutely baseless. Only recently the sweetness, beauty and emotions. This is absolutely baseless. Only recently the sweetness of this song hypnotised Kavindra Ravindra:

Lachhiye, jitthe tu pani doliya,

Utthe ug paye sandal de boote.

(o Lachhi, where you split water at that place sandlewood trees have sprouted.)

many more examples could be cited. Is the following couplet even the least inferior to the poems of any other language?

Pipal de pattya ve kehi khadkhad layee ae,

Patte jhade purane hun rut navayan di aayee ae.

(Pipal leaves, why are you making noise?
The old leaves have fallen and the season for new leaves has come.)

And when Punjab is sitting alone or in the group, will any other language move them to the extent these lines of Gauhar can:

Lam lakkhan to karoran de shah vekhe

Na musafiran koi udhar dende,

Dine raatin de kuch dere,

Na unhan gulan di vasana te

Bhauren bahande gulan di vasana te

Na sappan de muhan te koi pyar denda,

Gauhar same salook han jyuadya de

Moyan giyan un tar koi visar denda.

(i have seen armies of lakhs of millionaires. No one gives loan to the passers-by who never stay, never reside at one place. No one trust them. Black — beetles sit on flowers because of their smell. No one gives love at the hoods of the snakes. O Gauhar, good behavior and welcome is for those who are alive, but everyone says good-bye at the time of death.)

Jeev jyudiyan nu kyon marna ae

Jekar nahintu moyan nn jiaun joga,

Ghar aaye sawali nu kyon ghurna ae

Jekar nahin tu hatthin khair joga;

Mile dilan tu bichhadyan nu milaun joga,

Gauhar barhiya rakh band khaane

Jekar nahin tu nekiyan kumaun joga.

(why kill living beings when you are not able bring the dead back to life? Why do you stare at the beggar who has come to your door when you are not able to give him something? Why break the union of hearts if you are not able to reunite hearts that are separated? O Gauhar, if you cannot do go to others, then keep your good food and room closed.)

And now -a-days brilliant poets like Dard, Mastana, Dewana are enriching the Punjabi's poetry.

It is a pity that such a sweet, such a captivating language has not been adopted even by the Punjabis themselves. They still refuse; and this is the crux of the problem. Everyone backs his arguments on the basis of religious convictions. The only problem concerning the language and script of Punjab is to remove this obstruction, but the hope lies in the increasing literary awareness among the sikhs. Hindu also have it. Why not at all well-meaning people decide by mutual deliberations? This is the only way to arrive at a solution. The question can attended to by renouncing religious considerations. It should be attempled accordingly and the recognition of Punjabi language of a journal like Prem of Amritsar. This way the problem is resolved. After the elimination of this irritant, Punjab will have such beautiful and 'quality' literature that it will also be counted among the good language of India.

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[The Punjab Hindi Sahitya Sammelan had organised an essay competition on the above subject in 1923. It was for that competition that Bhagat Singh wrote this article. The General Secretary of Sahitya Sammelan, Shri Bhim Sen Vidyalankar (now expired) liked the article much and preserved it. Bhagat Singh got a prize of Rs. 50 for this article. Subsequently, it was published in Hindi Sandesh on February 28, 1933]

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