

COLUMNS

The President Missed It

Writers, thinkers and intellectuals see ahead of their times. They perceive things better than the common man. But do our rulers give any importance to them?

DURING the third week of Ramazan, President General Pervez Musharraf invited a good number of writers, scholars and intellectuals from all over the country to break one of the fasts with him at Islamabad. The president sent them air tickets, and made their brief stay in the capital of Pakistan comfortable. A substantial amount was spent on this get-together of the people who keep their eyes open. They see what others do not see. They watch what others do not watch. They clearly catch sight of the years to come. They vividly visualize long shadows of coming events.

Rulers throughout the ages are on record as having befriended, lured, bribed and cajoled writers in order to win them over. Every ruler, ancient or modern, maintains a good number of writers under his umbrella. In their write-ups, whether economic, social or political, they assure the ruler that he is doing fine for the country: "Keep it up, sir." They go to the extent of telling a ruler, "*Qdam barhā'ō Bādshāh salāmat, ham tumbārē sāth haiñ*" (Go ahead king, we are with you). Sycophants persistently convince a ruler that never before in history has a more sagacious, wise and all-knowing ruler been bestowed upon this country by Almighty Allah!

But, at times, writers are grilled and persecuted for holding fast unto their independent views and their refusal to compromise on principles. Gul Khan Naseer was a nonconformist Baluchi poet of considerable merit and standing. He was a household name in Baluchistan. So, to humiliate him, he was sent to prison for stealing a goat. At that time Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was at the helm of affairs. This action backfired and shook the foundation of the establishment in Islamabad. The bureaucrat responsible, who was more loyal than the king, was sacked. Bhutto always

lamented that his efforts to befriend Gul Khan Naseer after this unfortunate incident did not bear any fruit.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was the only ruler of Pakistan who was a voracious reader. He read extensively and always highlighted phrases, sentences, paragraphs and pages in books. He had the habit of taking down exhaustive notes while reading a book. S. R. Ghouri, the fearless columnist of the *Dawn*, was an avowed analytical critic of Bhutto's policies, particularly his later softening on the zamindars and the jagirdars of Pakistan and the induction of radical fundamentalists into his party. Once when he was in one of his blue moods, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was heard saying, "Let Ghouri alone be on my side and the rest of the columnists in the country against me."

It is a welcome gesture on the part of our rulers that they invite writers to dine with them once in a while. We do not have a Sartre and a Camus among us. We do not miss such occasions and rush to Islamabad to enjoy presidential hospitality. We forget that a writer must maintain a distance from the people in authority. Eating from the same plate will tempt you to seek personal favors from them. An obliged person fails to evaluate the performance of a person who obliges him.

Have you ever taken the trouble of assessing writers' positions in Pakistan? Who reads them in a country where concocted literacy figures are dished out to hoodwink the aid-giving agencies! According to the statisticians 70 million people out of a population of 150 million Pakistanis are literate (48 percent)! Sounds fantastic! What do the 70 million people read? A random assessment reveals that 25 books in English, 200 books in Urdu, and 50 books in Sindhi are published annually. Cumulatively, 275 books (new titles) are published in a year. If a thousand copies of each book are printed, it would mean 275,000 books are marketed for 70,000,000 (seven-crore) literate people of Pakistan! I am talking about books on literature (short-stories, novels, poetry, and literary criticism), social, cultural and political history, archaeology, anthropology, and tourism.

By the way, would our statisticians tell us the number of books published annually on technical subjects like computer-technology, the pure sciences, medicine, economics, banking, public and business administration, geology, nutrition, and agriculture? We in Pakistan do not have even one monthly magazine dedicated to English literature! For that matter, not a single monthly magazine exclusively dedicated to literature is published in Urdu. For the so-called 70 million literate population of Pakistan far less

than one million copies of English, Urdu, and Sindhi newspapers altogether are put into circulation daily.

Though few and negligible in number, writers remain the most conscious and sensitive segment of society. They assess the performance of a government from their own independent perspective. President General Pervez Musharraf frittered away the rare opportunity of listening to the writers' assessments of his five-year reign. Instead of telling them what he has achieved for Pakistan, he ought to have asked them what they thought of his five-year performance. Instead of explaining Pakistan's involvement in the Middle East conflicts, it would have been beneficial for the General to have learned from the writers what other options were open to Pakistan for finding a safe way out of the US-led conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. He should have collected writers' proposed solutions to the Kashmir issue. How do writers look at his desire for clinging on to two posts simultaneously? Does he know?

It was a costly miss!

—AMAR JALEEL

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A Word about Letters: Urdu's Punjab Link

It is not surprising that the worthy chairman of the National Language Authority has taken great exception to the East Punjab Chief Minister's statement, delivered in Lahore a few weeks ago, regarding the status of the Punjabi language in the western part of the Punjab. Captain Amrinder Singh had advised his Pakistani counterpart to introduce Punjabi as the medium of instruction in his province, replacing Urdu.

One can find some reason to agree with the chief official custodian of our national language that the East Punjab Chief Minister should not have made this suggestion. But he does not stop here. In his eagerness to express resentment against Captain Singh's statement, the learned boss of the National Language Authority has said some things that are really surprising. In the current issue of the Authority's *Akhhār-e-Urdū*, he has come out with the claim that Urdu is the mother tongue of the Punjab. He also wants us to believe that Punjabi and Urdu are primarily one and the

same language. The only considerable difference between these two forms of the same language is that Punjabi is the older form while Urdu is the newer, refined, developed and cultivated form.

I am willing to accept this novel theory because I firmly believe it has been formulated with the noble motive to enhance the worth of our national language which badly needs such boosts. However, the only problem with it is that it is next to impossible to find any facts or historical evidence to substantiate it. If you consult the latest census report, you will find out that less than five percent of people living in the Punjab use Urdu as their mother tongue. Now the mother tongue of a territory is that which is its “natural” language and is spoken by the vast majority of people inhabiting it. This is the only definition of an area’s mother tongue and it flies in the face of the claim about Urdu being the mother tongue of the Punjab.

This is the first time that Urdu has been labeled the mother tongue of the Punjab. However, some scholars have been talking about Punjabi as having mothered Urdu. They say that Urdu has been derived from the language of the land of five rivers. This idea was first presented in the early years of the past century. Hafiz Mahmood Sherani was an ardent supporter of this idea and he wrote a full-length book on it. Titled *Panjāb mēñ Urdū*, it was widely read and influenced many people. Sherani was not Punjabi. He spent the later part of his creative life in Lahore but originally belonged to Rajasthan. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Brigemohan Kaifi and Sher Ali Khan Surkhush had also voiced this idea.

In our time, renowned scholar Dr. Jamil Jalibi has thrown all his weight behind this point of view making it once again respectable. He writes in his voluminous *A History of Urdu Literature* that Punjabi and Urdu are two forms of one and the same language. However, stopping short of declaring Punjabi the older (and therefore crude, savage, boorish and backward) form or assigning Urdu the status of being Punjab’s mother tongue, Dr. Jamil Jalibi says that, due to a number of linguistic, social and political reasons, one of these two forms of the language spread over many parts of the Indian subcontinent. It was given different names in different parts of the South Asian region. Now it is mostly known as Urdu.

Strange as it may sound, the fact is that mother-tongue Urdu-speaking Indian scholars never subscribe to this view regarding the birth and early development of their language. They often laugh it away and pooh pooh the Punjabis who uphold it.

I have a book before me which can be taken as the latest volume on this subject. Written by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and titled *Urdū kā Ibtidā'ī Zamāna* (Early History of Urdu), it contains the point of view of Urdu-speaking scholars from India. Sixty-eight-year-old Faruqi was born and educated at Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh and still lives there. Go through his well-written book and you will not find a single allusion to the Punjab's contribution to the evolution of Urdu. Faruqi is *sans doute* very clear headed on this subject. He says that the language we call Urdu had many names in the past. It was called Hinduwee, Hindee, Hindi, Dehlvee, Gojree, Daikenee and Rekhta. The point to be noted here is that according to Dr. Jamil Jalibi ancient Urdu was known as Punjabi. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, on the other hand, writing from the other side of the divide, gives seven names to the language sans Punjabi.

Faruqi says that all the names included in his list remained in vogue till the end of the 19th century. The word Urdu as the name of this language was first used in 1780. He cites a poem from *Asrār-e-Kbudī*, first published in 1915, to say that the word Hindi was used by Allama Iqbal to denote Urdu.

On the basis of historical facts, Faruqi points out that it was the British scholars and rulers who divided this language into two separate forms: one retained the name Hindi while the other was titled Hindustani. The first was declared to be the language of Hindus and the other was assigned to the Muslims. John Gilchrist, who compiled a grammar of this language in 1796, named it Hindustani. With imperialist confidence, he predicated in 1798 that with the passage of time Hindus would own Hindi as their language and Muslims would claim Hindustani as exclusively theirs.

Hindustani is now known as Urdu. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, who together published *Hobson-Jobson, a Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* in 1886, throw some light on this point. They write: "Hindustani, properly an adjective, but used substantively in two senses, viz. (a) a native of Hindustan and (b) (Hindustani zaban) 'the language of that country,' but in fact the language of the Mahommedans of Upper India, and eventually of the Mahommedans of the Deccan, developed out of the Hindi dialect of the Doab chiefly, and the territory round Agra and Delhi, with a mixture of Persian vocables and phrases, and a readiness to adopt other foreign words. It is also called Oordoo, i.e., the language of the Urdu ('Horde') or Camp. This language was for a long

time a kind of Mahomedan *lingua franca* all over India, and still possesses that character over a large part of the country....”

—KAZY JAVED

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