



From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History

Tariq Rahman

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This is the first social and political history of Urdu. It analyzes the historiography of the language-narratives about its names, linguistic ancestry, place of birth-to the politics of identity construction among the Hindus and Muslims of India during the last two centuries. More importantly, and for the first time, it provides a historical account of the use of Urdu in social domains such as employment, education, printing and publishing, radio, films and television etc. These accounts are connected with the expression of Hindu and Muslim identity politics during the last two centuries.

This is a history of the evolution of Urdu from a common language of Indian Hindus and Muslims from the fifteenth till the eighteenth centuries to its standardization into two languages: Persianised Urdu and Sanskritised Hindi. The writer looks at narratives of the names, theories of genealogy and places of origin of the language in relation to the political imperatives of the identity politics of Hindus and Muslims during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In short the historiography is analysed with reference to its political and ideological dimensions which is a new angle of analysis in the linguistic history of Urdu.

This is also the first history of the use of Urdu in social domains: employment in courts, administration, educational institutions, printing and publication, radio, films etc. The point is to provide a historical narrative of such used and, more importantly, to relate this to the identity construction which inevitably flowed from it. Thus, this social history of the language is also a political history.

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