

of the pivotal Mumbai fable: the contemporary rise to ascendancy, via successive bloodlettings, of the Shiv Sena as the five hundred-pound gorilla of Bombay—make that Mumbai—politics.

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*From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History.* By TARIQ RAHMAN.  
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Fly from Delhi to Karachi and back. Take Pakistan International Airlines one-way, Air India the other. If you do, you will hear mutually unintelligible flight announcements, one in Urdu and the other in Hindi. But these flight announcements are saying the same thing and, if the airlines were really concerned about passenger safety, they could be easily crafted to be intelligible to all passengers, regardless of whether they call Delhi or Karachi “home.”

This is an example that Tariq Rahman uses to encapsulate his argument that the distinction between Hindi and Urdu is a social construct. Presently the Director of the National Institute for Pakistan Studies, Rahman wrote *From Hindi to Urdu* to consider the delineation of Urdu as a distinct language. What emerges is an encyclopedic discussion that ranges broadly from questions surrounding Urdu’s origins to its uses in present-day Pakistan and India. The work is exceedingly helpful as an overview of key issues surrounding the social construction of Urdu and would serve well as a preliminary text for scholars and students who wish to explore the politics of language in South Asia.

The first four chapters of *From Hindi to Urdu* introduce questions and debates concerning the origins of Urdu. After the introduction, chapter 2 examines the names given to the precursors of Urdu, such as Hindi, Hindvi, Hindui, and Dehlavi. The term “Urdu” itself arrives only in 1780. Chapter 3 probes the potential age of the ancestor of Hindi-Urdu, while chapter 4 examines how “the historiography of Urdu has been under the domination of identity politics” (p. 97), with notable recent examples being the effort by Pakistani nationalists to claim that languages such as Sindhi and Siraiki are the true precursors of what is today called “Urdu.”

The core of Rahman’s argument comes in chapter 5, “Identity: The Islamization of Urdu.” Initially, the move to define Urdu was located in the class sensibilities of a nervous Muslim aristocracy—not only was Persinate vocabulary emphasized, but there was a distinct preoccupation with “correctness” (*fasahat*) in expression.

As chapter 6 diagrams, Urdu moved from being a class marker to an emblem of religious identity with the rise of groups such as the Ahl-i-Hadith and the Deobandis, which preached a return to a “purer” form of Islam. Urdu began to be

used as a vehicle for religious education, and, as Muslim anxiety under British rule grew, so too did Urdu's identity as an Islamic language. In contemporary India, Rahman observes that Urdu is "anti-establishment" and "stands for the autonomy, identity, and rights of the Muslim community" (p. 159). In Pakistan, however, Urdu is associated with "pro-establishment and right-wing forces" (p. 159) and is used by the Punjabi elite to subordinate ethnic minorities—a fact that ironically conceals how both groups are "subordinated to the interests of the Westernized, English using, urban elite" (p. 162).

Chapter 7 discusses how one of the results of the Islamization of Urdu was that its status as "The Language of Love" was altered, even suppressed.

Chapters 8 and 9 survey the status of "Hindustani" and then Urdu during the period of British rule, with special emphasis on the Princely States. For those interested in ethnographic detail, there is an interesting discussion of British manuals on how to speak Hindustani—common to these tracts were grammatical errors and egregiously disrespectful uses of pronouns meant for status inferiors.

The remaining five chapters of Rahman's monograph serially engage the role of Urdu in employment, education, print, and on radio and the screen. Most interesting is a comparison of Urdu in Bollywood (Bombay) and Lollywood (Lahore) cinema.

In his conclusion, Tariq Rahman first returns to the common argument that Urdu was the language of the "camp," developed as soldiers attempted to communicate with the local population. Against this widely held view, Rahman maintains that while "urdu" does indeed mean "camp" in Turkish, the language referred to as Urdu "had been in use for at least five centuries" (p. 390). Crucial for Rahman is delinking Urdu from its association with conquest and the military. This leads to a broader point about the contemporary necessity of rediscovering the broad and deep continuities between Hindi and Urdu as both languages move further apart. Sanskritized Hindi and Perseo-Arabic Urdu have been socially constructed to reify identities that have historically been fluid or overlapping. Recognizing that spoken Hindi and Urdu are the same language is thus an important step in recognizing that Pakistanis and North Indians still share much in common.

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*Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India.*

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Weaving together history, literature, ethnography, and ethnomusicology, Davesh Soneji's impressive work, *Unfinished Gestures*, showcases the