

# Urdu Historiography within the Literary Landscape of Rajasthan

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## Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of Urdu language and historiography within the literary landscape of Rajasthan. Tracing the evolution of Urdu from its origins influenced by Persian and Turkic invasions, the paper examines its development in the Mughal era and subsequent centuries, probing the cultural, social, and political factors that contributed to the prominence of Urdu in the region. While Hindi is the official language of Rajasthan, Urdu's influence is evident, especially during the Mughal period. The focus then shifts to Urdu historiography in Rajasthan, highlighting the late commencement of historical writing in Urdu and its inheritance from Persian traditions. The paper emphasizes the significant but often overlooked wealth of literature about Rajasthan in Urdu, stored in archives and institutions such as the State Archives of Bikaner and Jaipur, shedding light on the region's history facets. Several Urdu chronicles are examined, providing intricate narratives of Rajput kingdoms, their lineages, victories, and conflicts.

The paper showcases specific works, such as *Tarikh-e-Mewar* and *Mirat-i-Sikandar Shahi*, offering insights into Rajput history. It also explores works that examine social customs, traditions, and the complex relationship between Rajput states and Mughal rulers, often incorporating elements of storytelling and poetry. Prominent Urdu writers in Rajasthan, including Munshi Debi Parsad and Maulvi Atta Mohammed, are discussed for their contributions to historical narratives. The paper highlights various Urdu manuscripts, such as *Hadiqa-I-Rajasthan* and *Mahasra-I-Ranthambore*, which inquire into the historical context of specific regions within Rajasthan. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of these Urdu sources, likening them to coral reefs in historical documentation, providing valuable insights into Rajasthan's multifaceted history during the early 19th century. Overall, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and historical dimensions of Rajasthan through the writings of Urdu historiography.

**Keywords:** Urdu Historiography, Rajasthan, Mughal era, Persian influence, Rajput history, Urdu writings, Cultural dynamics.

## Urdu and Urdu Historiography

Language is a structured means of communication, enabling people to share a wide range of information, from knowledge and beliefs to emotions and commands. There are over 7,100 languages globally, grouped into more than 90 language families, with similarities seen in languages within the same family.<sup>i</sup> Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and others belong to the Indo-European language family. It uses the Nastaliq script, derived from Persian calligraphy, and is read from right to left.<sup>ii</sup>

Urdu is a language that emerged from the contact situation which developed as a result of the invasions of the Indian subcontinent by Persian and Turkic dynasties from the 11th century onwards. The earliest invasions were led by Sultan Mahmud of the Ghaznavid Empire, who conquered Punjab in the early 11th century.<sup>iii</sup> The Ghurids invaded northern India in the 12th century, and establishing the Delhi Sultanate was the most decisive event that led to the development of Urdu. Persian was the official language of the Ghurids, Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and their successor states, as well as the cultured language of poetry and literature. In contrast, the language of religion was Arabic. During the Sultanate period, most of the sultans and nobility were Turks from Central Asia who spoke Turkic as their mother tongue. The Mughals, on the other hand, were initially Chagatai Turks but later adopted Persian.<sup>iv</sup> Muzaffar Alam asserts that Persian became the lingua franca of the empire under Akbar for various political and social factors due to its non-sectarian and fluid nature. During the medieval period, the armies, merchants, preachers, Sufis, and later the court incorporated the local people and the medieval Hindu literary language, Braj Bhasha. This new contact language soon incorporated other dialects, such as Haryanvi, Panjabi, and, in the 17th century, Khariboli, the dialect of the new capital at Delhi.<sup>v</sup> By 1800, Khariboli had become the dominant dialect.

The language went by several names over the years: Hindawi or Hindī, "[language] of India"; Dehlavi, "of Delhi"; Hindustani, "of Hindustan"; and Zaban-e-Urdu, "the language of the [army] camp", from which came the current name of Urdu around the year 1800.<sup>vi</sup> When Wali Mohammed Wali arrived in Delhi, he established Hindustani with a light smattering of Persian words, a register called Rekhta, for poetry; previously, the language of poetry had been Persian. When the Delhi Sultanate expanded south to the Deccan Plateau, they carried their literary language with them, and it was influenced there by more southerly languages, producing the Dakhini dialect of Urdu.<sup>vii</sup> During this time, Hindustani was the language of both Hindus and Muslims. The communal nature of the language lasted until it replaced Persian as the official language in 1837 and was made co-official along with English in the British Raj. This triggered a Hindu backlash in northwestern India, which argued that the language should be written in the native Devanagari script. This "Hindi" replaced traditional Urdu as the official register of Bihar in 1881,<sup>viii</sup> establishing a sectarian divide between "Urdu" for Muslims and "Hindi" for Hindus, a divide that was formalized with the division of India and Pakistan after Independence from the British, though there are Hindu poets who continue to write in Urdu to this day.

Although there have been attempts to purge Urdu and Hindi, respectively, of their Sanskrit and Persian words, and new vocabulary draws primarily from Persian and Arabic for Urdu and Sanskrit for Hindi, this has primarily affected academic and literary vocabulary, and both national standards remain heavily influenced by both Persian and Sanskrit. English has exerted a heavy influence on both as a co-official language.

The entire western boundary of the state shares a border with Pakistan. At the same time, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh surround Rajasthan to the north, northeast, and southeast, with Gujarat situated southwest. In terms of area, Rajasthan holds the distinction of being the largest state in India. Before Independence, the region was referred to as Rajputana, denoting the homeland of the Rajputs—a martial community that governed this expanse for centuries. The process of consolidating the dispersed princely states commenced in 1948, culminating in promulgating the States Reorganisation Act in 1956. The initial step was the formation of the Matsya Union in 1948, comprising a few princely states. Subsequently, other states gradually merged into this union.<sup>ix</sup>

In the present context of Rajasthan, Hindi is the official language. While there are Urdu speakers in the state, it is less prevalent than in some other states of India. However, Urdu has significantly influenced the linguistic landscape of the Rajasthan subcontinent, and various historical and cultural factors have shaped its development. The advent of Urdu in Rajasthan can be traced back to the Mughal era when Persian, the court language of the Mughals, played a significant role. During the medieval period, Rajasthan saw the influence of Mughal rule, and this cultural incorporation likely contributed to the presence and adoption of Urdu in the region.<sup>x</sup> The vibrant exchange of ideas, trade, and administrative interactions under the Mughals enabled the spread of Urdu. The specific timeline of Urdu's arrival in Rajasthan may need to be more precisely documented, as language evolution is a gradual process influenced by social, political, and cultural dynamics. However, it is reasonable to assume that Urdu became more prominent in the region during the Mughal period and subsequent centuries.

### Urdu Historiography in Rajasthan

The Urdu historiography of Rajasthan presents an exciting and diverse perspective on the region's past. The commencement of historical writing in Urdu was relatively late, with the newly evolving Urdu prose inheriting its historical narrative tradition from Persian. This adoption encompassed Persian historiography's form, expression, and approach, primarily shaped by medieval Persian chronicles. The final three decades of the nineteenth century they were emerged as a crucial period for the development of Urdu historiography, prompting a change among writers who progressively chose Urdu as their medium. Historians employed both prose and poetry during this period, although the prevalence of prose in Urdu writing was predominant.

A wealth of literature about Rajasthan in Urdu exists, often overlooked and consigned to anonymity. Moreover, the State Archives of Bikaner and Jaipur preserved significant archival records in Urdu, shedding light on previously inaccessible facets of Rajasthan's history. Similarly, numerous writings in Urdu, directly or indirectly connected to the history of Rajasthan, remain in the form of manuscripts, *Mubayyizat*, and *Musawwadat* within Oriental Institutions, Libraries, and private collections.<sup>xi</sup> A substantial collection of Urdu and Persian manuscripts has been centralized at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic and Persian Research Institute in Rajasthan's Tonk. Additionally, many manuscripts are contained in the Punjab State Archive Patiala, Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan Institute of Advanced Studies in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, Malerkotla and Ganda Singh Reference Library.

### Rajasthan's History through Urdu Writings

Several Urdu chronicles provide intricate narratives of individual Rajput kingdoms, squarely chronicling their lineages, victories, and internal conflicts. Among these historical accounts, noteworthy examples include *Tarikh-e-Mewar*,<sup>xii</sup> authored by Kaviraj Bankidas and *Mirat-i-Sikandar Shahi*, penned by Muhammad Ibrahim<sup>xiii</sup>. These chronicles probe into the rich array of Rajput history, shedding light on the courageous exploits and dynastic complexities that defined each kingdom. Kaviraj Bankidas, through *Tarikh-e-Mewar*, meticulously traces the history of the Mewar region, summarizing the sagas of its rulers and the pivotal events that shaped its destiny. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ibrahim's *Mirat-i-Sikandar Shahi* provides insights into the socio-political landscape, military campaigns, and cultural shades of the Rajput rulers. Together, these chronicles contribute significantly to our understanding of the Rajputana heritage, offering a rich depiction of the complex dynamics within these kingdoms.

Some Urdu works offer glimpses into the social customs, traditions, and religious practices of different communities in Rajasthan. For instance, *Makhzan-e-Mewar* by Muhammad Hussain Khan<sup>xiv</sup> Provides valuable information on Mewar's social structure and courtly practices. Several Urdu chronicles document the complex relationship between Rajput states and the Mughal rulers, often offering Rajput and Mughal viewpoints on critical events and battles. *Siyar-ul-Mutakhkhirin* by Ghulam Hussain Salim<sup>xv</sup> is a notable example. Urdu historical writing often incorporated elements of storytelling and poetry, making them more engaging for a wider audience. This literary influence is evident in works like *Tarikh-e-Rajasthan* by Munshi Amichand<sup>xvi</sup>.

Munshi Debi Prasad stands out as a prominent Urdu writer in Rajasthan's history, with his significant contribution being the book titled *Iftikharul Tawrikh*. This meticulous work reflects the author's dedicated efforts in depicting the accomplishments of Nawab Ameer Khan distinctively and supremely. Munshi Debi Prasad devoted years to the arduous task of producing this historical narrative, a fact evident from the author's depictions at the commencement and completion of *Iftikharul Tawarikh*.<sup>xvii</sup> Meanwhile, *Khawab-I-Rajasthan*, another work penned by Pandit Debi Prasad, offers a perceptive critique of the governance and practices prevalent in the princely states of Rajasthan. Notably, Pandit Debi Prasad draws insightful parallels between the administrative systems of these states and the efficient governance exemplified by the East India Company. His comparative study sheds light on both strengths and shortcomings, providing a thought-provoking perspective on the socio-political landscape of the time.

Another Urdu writer is Maulvi Atta Mohammed, whose keen interest lies in improving the Qaim Khani community. He penned two books, *Tashrihul Ahkam* and *Hayatul Islam*, to enrich their condition. Subsequently, he wrote *Waqiat-i-Qaum Qaim Khani*, a work subsequently completed and published by his nephew Liaqat Husain Khan Qayam Khan and dedicated to Nawab Ghulam Moinuddin Khan Saheb. The book serves the purpose of preserving and documenting the achievements of the Qayam Khanis, offering inspiration to future generations.<sup>xviii</sup>

*Hadiqa-I-Rajasthan*, authored by Asghar Ali Abroo of Tonk and compiled in Urdu, was published in Agra in 1901. This comprehensive work provides an in-depth and exhaustive history of Tonk, presenting brief sketches of Rajasthan's history within the political context of Tonk's relations with other regional states. Another significant historical account is *Tarikh-I-Pargant I Tonk*, written by Pandit Ram Kiran Joshi in ornate Urdu in 1872. Commissioned by Nawaab Ibrahim Ali Khan, this local history of Tonk offers valuable insights into the princely states of Rajasthan. Furthermore, the author examines the history of Jaipur, Marwar, Mewar, and Jhalawar, enriching the narrative with detailed information about Rajasthan regions.

*Mahasra –I- Ranthambore* is a precious Urdu manuscript that digs into the historical context of Ranthambore. It was written by Munshi Giradhari Lal in 1846. *Tarjuma-Suleh- Namajaat -wa –Ahdo-Peman* is an Urdu translation of Aitchison's Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads, initially published in 1866.<sup>xix</sup> This compilation comprehensively records all treaties and engagements the East India Company forged with the various Princely States of Rajasthan. Offering an extensive insight into the historical agreements and relationships between the East India Company and the princely states, this work serves as a valuable resource, shedding light on the diplomatic and legal aspects of the interactions between the East India Company and the Princely state of Rajasthan.

Numerous Urdu writings explore the life of Muin ud din Chishti Ajmeri, providing detailed accounts and narratives about this well-regarded figure. Some notable works include *Zafar-ul-Islam*, written by Zafar,

*Waqat-I-Shah Muin ud Din* by Babu Lal, and *Jawhar-I-Fridi* by Asghar Ali. These writings comprehensively explore Muin ud din Chishti's life, highlighting his teachings, spiritual journey, and thoughtful impact on the region, particularly in Ajmer. These works go beyond mere biographical sketches, exploring the cultural, religious, and historical context of Muin ud din Chishti's time, capturing the crux of his teachings and the legacy he left behind. These Urdu compositions serve as valuable resources for those seeking a deeper understanding of the spiritual and historical dimensions associated with Muin ud din Chishti Ajmeri.

This paper illuminates specific Urdu sources that provide extensive accounts of the history and culture of Rajasthan. These sources have been overlooked or forgotten despite their significance, making them less readily available. These historical works shed light on Rajasthan's history and culture and reveal inaccessible aspects without consulting these informative materials. Indeed, these sources can be likened to coral reefs in the realm of historical documentation for Rajasthan during the early 19th century, acting as crucial sources of knowledge that offer valuable insights into the multifaceted historical narrative of the region.

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