



No Future? Urdu in Contemporary India

Ein Vortrag von
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mit anschließender Lesung aus Rahman Abbas' jüngstem Roman
mit der Übersetzerin Almuth Degener

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Urdu is a modern language and one of the most influential and widely spoken languages in India and Pakistan. According to the statistics available online, there are over 100 million native speakers of Urdu in India (more than 80% of it) and Pakistan together. Urdu is not just a language, but it is a *Tehzib*, a reflection of cultural heritage of Hindustan or India.

With the fall of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century, the official language, i.e. Persian, became irrelevant and Hindustani was promoted by the colonial rulers. Today, most people in Northern India are convinced that if Hindustani is written in the Devanagari script, it is Hindi – exclusively the language of the Hindus, and if written in the Perso-Arabic script, it is Urdu – exclusively the language of the Muslims. Extremists of both sides used their might to pollute minds in the last seven decades in order to purify Urdu and Hindi and hide their common heritage – Hindustani.

However, in contemporary India, although Urdu is not connected with the market economy, there are many areas where its influence is visible and unavoidable, for example, in the Indian film industry, advertisements, TV serials, songs, theatre, public speeches, and communication between people from various states. Until today, the experiment of *Shuddh Hindī* ("Pure Hindi") is confined within the government mouthpieces, but not in the public domain. The *lingua franca* of Northern India is still Hindustani, a mixture of Hindi and Urdu. Furthermore, the new generation of Hindi-educated youths has begun to accept Urdu as an integral part of Hindustani, as much as Hindi is an integral part of Hindustani. Without Hindi, Urdu is incomplete, and without Urdu, Hindi is incomplete.

