

## Mushtaq Soofi

I was born in Sahiwal. Sahiwal is nearly 1.25 miles west of Lahore. My family arrived from Jalandhar to Sahiwal in 1914. This was due to agriculture colonization, you know, canals were dug for irrigation and my family migrated as part of that development. So our family is settled here since those years.

My primary education was at Sahiwal, then middle also, indeed up to FA. Then I went to Government College, Lahore for my B.A. degree and went on to do my M.A. in English where I read English literature. Thereafter I started writing Punjabi. Then I went into television. I had a job with Pakistan television. It so happened that in Government College Lahore there was 'Punjabi Mileage' Society which was a linkage for Punjabis and when I was in the fourth year there, all of a sudden, I was asked to become its secretary. So I was chosen this society's secretary. As you know in the college everyone wants to become prominent by joining a Club or a Society and you want to feel important enough. So I had that feeling by becoming secretary of this 'Punjabi Mileage' Society. For this society we had regular meetings when we invite writers and we would listen to their poetry of anything they want to tell. This is how my relations developed with Punjabi studies. In addition, in Lahore there was very old association concerning Punjabi. It still exists in some form today. Now there used to be weekly meeting, this was held at YMCA at the Mall. There also young men were needed who would narrate their writings. So I was attracted to that association also where I would listen to somebody's poem or other writing. People used to appreciate a lot your writing and with that encouragement, one felt encouraged to write more. So this is how I started writing in Punjabi.

Punjabi was present in many collages, now in many departments of Universities also. It's also part of F.A. and B.A. in syllabi, but the policy that was working at this time was quite wrong. It was being spread from the top downwards. It was like flying sand in the air. The natural method should have been going from the ground level upwards i.e. to say it should start from Primary school then to middle class, secondary education then onwards to higher education, but you see for Punjabi it has happened the wrong way, from M.A. in the university down towards schools and this has meant a great loss. Our language has been lost because of that distance. We had deprived our language from our own children, our literary traditions and history. These are historical factors which have pushed our language on the margin. So we have turned have from our language, culture and history. This process basically started with the arrival of British Rule in Punjab.

As the English arrived in 1849 and annexed Punjab, the Punjabi language that was here, it was taught through old traditional system. Because the society of Punjab was quite colourful, just like the whole subcontinent, there were three communities- The Muslims, The Hindus and the Sikhs and each had its own traditional schools. Muslims had their Madrasas, which were attached to some mosques. Similar Sikhs had their schools attached to some gurdwaras, whereas Hindus mandirs ran their Pathshalas. In the gurdwaras Punjabi was taught beside other kind of teaching. This is confirmed by

Litner, you know Prof. Litner or Dr. Litner wrote a report, this was the year 1869 when he prepared this report where he had revealed peculiar arrangement of indigenous education. This report is quite comprehensive survey addressed to give details of traditional education system of Punjab before the British Rule. Report also tells how this system was gradually replaced by the new system introduced by the system. How Urdu and English were introduced and as a consequence of this policy, the level of literacy went down among Punjab's population. You see in the earlier time a lot of people used to learn their own language and this is what Litner argues that in India with similar surveys of other areas there was evidence of Punjabis being the most literate. It says even women could read and write. But with the arrival of British, as soon as Urdu and English were introduced English became the language of upper class while Urdu served the middle class. So the common people and in particular the rural folks. Similarly the common people in the town and the cities that are to working classes and their children had difficulty in learning languages and the new language was the foreign. So as a result of new policy children dropped out and it was a loss for Punjabi language.

Then much later, as the Pakistan idea gathered pace i.e. to say Pakistan movement started there were various ideological factors responsible for it. Muslims had started the process of identification based on Urdu language that Urdu is part of their social identity. Similarly Punjabi Hindus emphasised their link with Hindi language. So we were left with Sikhs only. If their book religious scripture books were not in Punjabi language, they might have learned other language. But in any case they kept Punjabi as a part of their language. This was the reason Punjabi was neglected by the Muslims and this process started during the Muslim Rule. As you push out the language from schools and college, its future is jeopardised. Because if the children won't learn their language, where they will get jobs? But if they were to read Punjabi they could hardly expect jobs because jobs were tied to the learning of languages which were foreign. It wasn't Punjabi, so Punjabi suffered a great loss.

This process continued even after the formation of Pakistan. In fact this process became more extreme in the 1960s when anyone who talked about Punjabi language, that person was treated as an enemy and unpatriotic. He/she was accused of breaking up of Pakistan because there was a fallacy prevailing or call it misunderstanding which argued that, the country could maintain its unity if this has just one language while the unity requires several other factors. Although a single language helps to unify the country but there are so many counties in the world which are multilingual. So in history, there are many factors as far as language is concerned. There are many factors making a nation state or a country or a country's unity. Then we had the new development of Bangladesh, a new country was formed. Then we had a new constitution for Pakistan which addresses this issue and provided successful solution to this issue. It was recognised that the different states of Pakistan have right to teach their own languages. They could make their languages as part of their administration and so on. As a result of this Sindi language was recognised. This became the teaching language in that province. But in the rest of three provinces, mother tongue was not given

particular attention. This was the case in Blochestan, in the frontier province or in Punjab. It's about two years back when Pakhtun Government in that province has implemented a language policy. More recently in Blochestan to its assembly has passed a bill about teaching its own language. So it is the Punjab province which lacks behind these developments. Here Punjabi is still not recognised but there is struggle going on for its recognition. There is number of activists who are trying hard in this direction. So it looks like somethings will happen in the near future. Certainly one can say conditions are much better than before.

### **The Partition of Punjab and its impact on Punjabi Language**

This is what happened to Punjabi language on this side of the border. The government did not patronise it, it didn't encouraged it. If it did adopt a policy in a very limited sense, then the policy was to suffuse Punjabi with Arabic and Persian words but as Punjabi was not adopted as official language even this intrusion of Arabic and Persian was minimal. So people carry on using Punjabi in their communication. There was also some resistance to foreign words as it was felt Punjabi should keep its form as it had for the last thousand years. So on the one hand there is Arabic and Persian language intruding into Punjabi on the other side of the border the same process is happening where Punjabi is intruded by the words of Sanskrit language. So from the government point of view this kind of effort means it expects two different languages emerging out of this process. But this is not what the common people expect. Common people speak the same language on the both sides, what we have the state sponsored activity on both side of the Punjab which odd to be registered. This process to be watched carefully. A language can accept words from other languages, no double about it. There is no word in isolation. All languages exist in association with each other. A particular language accepts words from other language. It borrows and loans words. But this is not one way traffic. At least it should not be one way traffic where powerful languages should be preferred or implemented. Historically, the linguistic process which goes on is this, a language accepts foreign words which then assumed local tones and connotation and become part of a language. Now we know how several words from English language are part of our Punjabi language. If you ask common people the word 'Tation' for him or her this is not an English word anymore. We had adopted English word station and common people call it 'tation', the same way the hospital becomes 'Haspatal'. So an English word had become indigenised, right? Then we had words like radio, television and so on. There is word call 'car', all these words are now common Punjabi vocabulary. People had adopted them and they have gone through the process and they have been accepted by common people. But there is government policy which is bringing all sort of words which are difficulties for common Punjabi person even to speak. There are several Sanskrit words which no Punjabi can speak fluently, the same way we are adding Persian words which are difficult to pronounce. They cannot become part of our communication. They do not come easily on our tongues.

So there is need for thinking about this process. It is something which writers, sensible people and scholars should take it up and they should resist this tendency. Yes, although words which fit easily into Punjabi does not matter if their origin is Arabic, Sanskrit or Hindi, those should be welcomed and it should be a natural process, not artificially imposed process. You see, artificial grafting which is going on that is harmful. This will take us away from common people. Common people speak the language in comfort and the language that we so called educated class speak there is quite a gulf between the two. This has created an unnecessary distance between the language spoken by the common people and the others. This is not justified and in fact, quite offensive to the common sense.

Before 1947, we have the common Punjab- a large region which started from Pishawar going towards Sind and then to the east up to Delhi. This included Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. This was very large province and it had shared culture. Of course, it had different communities living together and they had their separate identity. However, as the partition took place, Punjab was divided. Then new political forces asserted themselves and affected the two new Punjabs. On this side, it is the Pakistan state, on the other it is the Indian state. Part of Punjab became part of Pakistan; the other bit went to India. Its impact on our language and culture was immense. As I said before, on Indian side, Punjabi was forced to become Sanskritized, on this side of the border Punjabi language was subject to Arabisation and Persianisation. One result of this was that Punjab which has a cultural centre certainly for the last one thousand years, this was Lahore. It still is Lahore. I am not saying this because I am from Lahore or sitting here, this is historic fact because as Punjab emerged from the tenth or eleventh century and its language Punjabi emerged and its literature as it was written, this was also centred around Lahore. So Lahore as the centre of Punjabi culture is an established fact. So this was of course was not cultural capital of Punjab, Lahore was the capital of Punjab province also. You can also say, yes Lahore has special identity for which there are solid historical reasons. Several cultures collided in the city as were the races and the languages. This included Hindu, Buddhist presents too. And you should remember Vedas were written on the banks of Ravi river. So this was not far from Lahore and there is ancient Indian history around it like battle of ten rajas-Hiravati and Parusali are also around this city. In any case there is long history particularly from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards which has affected the evolution on Punjab, which is obvious Turks came by that time Arbs had arrived in Sind and they had settled up to Multan. On this side, it was Hindu civilization, on the other side these were Turks who were Muslim converts, they had arrived first into Afghanistan then further east into Punjab. So you know Mahmud Gajnabi invaded Punjab. He captured Lahore, destroyed Multan and instituted his own order. As a result of his invasions, part of Punjab's population underwent change. Several became Muslims. What was the meaning of this conversion? It meant some of the religious practices those were transferred to Punjabi population. As the language of Islam was Arabic because most of its sacred books were in that language. So we had Arabic words started appearing in Punjabi language among

common people's communication. And then we had Turks whose language was Turkish while they forced Persian language as the language of the court. With this Persian words started appearing in Punjabi language. These administrative words or called political vocabulary became part of Punjabi language. So all this mixing has influenced Punjabi language as it has evolved in this province. So we had a heritage of Arabic Persian and Sanskrit in this language. This new sort of language which evolved, its centre was Lahore.

Now after 1947, the major difference was that Punjab had no city like Lahore. There was no parallel cultural centre to Lahore. So the Punjab that became part of India, started looking towards Delhi in the absence of any major cultural centre like Lahore. But Delhi had its own politics and ideology just like new Pakistan state had in terms of Persian, Arabic which meant emphasis on Urdu language. On Indian side the Indian state's emphasis was on Hindi and Sanskritic origins.

The overall result of this East and West Punjab are going in two different directions culturally as well as linguistically. So until we focus ourselves on this new culture, we cannot put matters right. As we had inherited Punjabi language from the past centuries, it's much better if we turn our attention to its heritage. In political terms, this is quite right to look at two states; these are two different entities now India and Pakistan. So (East Punjab) they would certainly look toward Delhi and they odd to look towards Delhi, on this side we look towards Islam or Lahore which of course, we odd to do. But these political barriers are not of crucial importance and we should try to overcome them. It is my opinion that we should co-operate and develop communication between this Punjab and that Punjab i.e. East Punjab and West Punjab. So that we can understand each other more. It will also mean the two languages we are developing should come near each other. They should not drift so much apart that we should be able to understand each other through this language. There is need for this as a matter of priority. We can play an active role in bringing two cultures of Punjab ,ore close to each other. Our writing on two sides of the border can be part of our dialogue across the border because we still share a common language which the people of two Punjab speak. You see in overseas countries, Punjabis share living together where they share western civilization and also their indigenous culture and in those locations Punjabis understanding is much better of their common interest. In contrast, here communication between East and West Punjab is slight. We don't travel to meet across the border as much as we should. So we could not even share all those tragic stories of partition, share the kind of operation which both sides have witnessed during the partition. We could not exercise, the ghost of partitions accesses. We were all part of devil then. Muslims oppressed Hindus, Hindus killed Muslims, Muslims killed Sikhs and Sikhs killed Muslims. All were guilty. This is equally to be blamed. We cannot decide who did more or less. It was communal frenzy and it was part of dark age all around us were victims and oppresses. Everyone was a tyrant and everyone was a victim. It is important to understand this. The person who is settled abroad can perhaps understand it much better. One way of reducing this guilty feeling is to increase interaction between

east and Western Punjab. We should have extensive exchange. There should be cultural exchange, meetings, conferences. Let common people meet each other and let them see themselves what we still share and what is different. We will realize that despite different religions, the rest is so much common. We share the language, we share customs, we eat the same food, everyday life has such commonality. This is one way greater communication brings us together. The truth is neither the Indian government, nor our government of Pakistan take any interest in opening the border. They don't take any interest in facilitating better interaction across two Punjabs. In fact, both states are very suspicious and they don't want any communication. This is much based upon wrong assumptions about each other and prejudices which need not be there.

Still atmosphere is much better on this side of the border than before. We are publishing more books. In any case, poetry being a part of Punjabi, every Punjabi is a poet. Each Punjabi woman will sing and write poems like Mayia. Our propensity towards poetry is very old tradition. We have never hesitated from poetry. Prose is not something we are good at as writing essay means sitting and concentrating upon a topic while poetry can be composed as you eat chocolate, a biscuit or travelling in a bus. For writing a fiction or criticism, you need discipline and of course more time is needed. Now a days, of course, those books of fictions, short stories, novels and of criticism are also coming. and these are of good quality too. As I look towards India side, there is good fiction, the quality of stories is very high and the same goes for novels. These creative works reflect all the complex or contradictions and sufferings of modern life. All major issues of contemporary life are reflected in this new creative works. but as far as criticism is concerned those books are in such a Sanskritized language, that it is difficult to follow much of the arguments. Now it seems one should first learn Sanskrit to understand them. If you have time to learn a new language like that then only you will be able to read their literary criticism. So I am a bit disappointed as I say this to my friends. Look, what is this? how do we understand it? Of course, one understands that literary criticism requires particular kind of vocabulary, structure and so on. So I understand those professors or highly educated professional people writing such difficult kind of language. My appeal is still to try as much to keep it free from Sanskrit. AS far as poetry is concerned, a part of it is quite traditional. A part seems fashionable and of course some good poetry too. On our side there is solid good tradition of good poetry. I am quite happy about this matter. there is nothing to regret. We are producing quality literature on both sides. It again comes to the language, there is common logic to it. You pick up language where you are born or your family from your community and this is your common and natural language. This comes easily both for communication as well as reading. Whatever the concepts or ideas, it's always easy to read in one's own language. There are no two opinions that a child should start education in the language of mother tongue. We know this is declaration of United Nations also. So the language of the community, of the family, that should continue as part of communication as of literacy for the simple reason and for the benefit that we learn through such language quickly and that is the most cost effective method of learning a language or producing

teachers of that language. Now suppose we want to produce teachers of English language here, we will have to spend more resources, have to spend more time on it because it is a skilled job. Now compare this with if you want to produce Punjabi teachers, we can do that through short time as well as using less resources. So this is one issue. Second is, a major philosophical matter, that is to say all languages have right to survive. Diversity of languages is part of humanities. Diversity or diversity. The linguistic diversity of human beings is a sign of our richness. It is a powerful expression of our humanity, this is a wealthy and valuable heritage. It poses no danger to us as human beings. Earlier on it was thought by linguistics that a language is a mere tool of communication. If I was to talk with you I could use any language to convey a message. Now this simple idea of using a language for communication has undergone a fundamental change. The modern philosopher and linguistics have discovered that the role of language is not merely of communication. It is much more complex. Every language comes with a complex world view. It has its own unique insight which sees the world in a particular way. Reality is reflected in each language in a particular way. Even facts look differently in each language. There are particular words which are associated with particular kind of images for ex if you are sitting in Vancouver, if you say 'jharhi', it has a different meaning, if you say the same word in Australia for aborigines, the meaning of 'jharhi' is quite different and in Africa, 'jharhi' will have a different connotation, they may call it a bush but bush is not a 'jharhi' although it is same word, but these are associated with different images of a tree. Same goes for all sort of other commodities and categories of things. The point is each word comes with a cultural connotation, a particular image and so on. Indeed, language is a tool to understand reality and as we have more tools, we will have more power to understand more worlds and more societies. So each language is not just for communication but a way of understanding the world or that society that speaks it. To understand its particular history, its specific geography and so on which is difficult to capture through other foreign language, that is the reason an authentic poetry is so difficult to translate in another language. This difficulty arises as a particular language refers to feelings, perceptions and so on which may not be captured by another language. Because of the kind of association in a particular language cannot be evoked in another language. The nuances of the language, its evocations etc. are very difficult to translate into another language. That's why each language despite the common function of communication uniquely endowed.

So my view point is although all languages small or big are sisters of the world. Languages of minorities or majorities they have all right to exist, not only right to exist but to prosper and to develop. So as far as Punjabi is concerned, we know there is UNO reports (that Punjabi is in danger of extinction), it says literacy in our language especially among working classes, farmers, rural workers and so down is going down. The reason for this according to UNO reports is this- the language of parents is different than the language of children in schools. Children go to school where Urdu and English are the learning language and there is lot of drop-outs from such schools because these

are difficult to learn. If it was mother tongue, children would find it easy to learn and communicate and to understand the world around them. Moreover, learning your own language means, you would be able to appreciate at subconscious level, your customs, history, geography and all sort of traditions far better. If you don't know the language all those things become alienate to you. We have practical examples of such alienation. We have children who don't know the name of animals and crops and things around them. They only know them through different words in foreign languages. So we are producing a different kind of human beings if we don't teach mother tongue, we are producing children who are not familiar with our own civilization. So we need to use our own language both as a tool of communication as well as a literacy. So that our language survives that would mean our own culture will survive as well as our history.

### **Punjabi Literary Traditions and its legacy**

Derived from Arabic traditions the Punjabi literary tradition is highly significant and admirable. This tradition means it is not a monopoly of one religion in the history of those literary traditions, there are Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Christians who have contributed to it. Who have produced some classics of those language. There is diversity of people in it. This is of course part of Arabic tradition too which is based on humanism which is part of universal humanism. Indeed, this belongs to radical humanism. In fact Punjabi tradition has always been against an established order. Punjabi has supported a radical kind of resistance. It is what Baba Farid, Guru Nanak, Bulle Shah, Shah Husain and many others who through their creative works were against the established order, against the state, they were never part of the court. They were always part of the common people. These creative people knew Sanskrit and Arabic also or Persian but they used common people's language for conveying their ideas. They want to reach the common people. Their own world view was sympathetic to common people. So Punjabi has dominant theme of resistance against invaders and local exploiters. this is tradition which is matter of pride. That is why we say or argue that if we revive the Punjabi tradition, it will reduce extremism, terrorism. Instead we will have universal vision, we will connect with forces against injustice and inequality. We will find issues like gender equality and equality in general and/as part of our tradition. Our poetry preaches a universal message of common humanity, harmony, equality and justice. So we say again, if we connect to our language and its literary traditions, it will help to overcome extremism or terrorism as the central message of our tradition is universal brotherhood and universal equality.

Khuda Hafiz