

Mapping Linguistic Diffusion in the 1930s: Sulaiman Nadvi and Hindustani

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Text and Political Context:

There is a reproduction of a map in Syed Sulaiman Nadvi's book *Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'alluqat* with the following inscription on top:

“Gujarat Aur Sindh Ka Duniya Mein, Sab se pehla Naqsha. Ibn Hawqal Baghdadi ne (323 Hijri mein/943 CE) tayyar kiya.”

In 1930, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi wrote and published a book titled *Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'alluqat* (further *Arab-o-Hind*). Its purpose was to make a case for why Indian Muslims were to be considered part of the subcontinent. In fact, he argued, it would be hard not to think of India as their home. In service of this argument, Nadvi conducted a philological study of Arabo-Indic contact primarily through Indian Ocean trading

networks, from a pre-Islamic age to Arab travels after the advent of Islam up until the 19th century. In recent historiography on linguistic-regions, the region spanning India and present-day Iran have been highlighted as constituting a cultural-linguistic region, due to the prevalence, and study of clear genetic affiliations, traveller's records and the provenance of Perso-Arabic words within vernaculars. George Abraham Grierson highlights these in the 5th, 6th, and 10th volumes of his *Linguistic Survey of India* – completed around the same time as Nadvi's work. The Indo-Iranian linguistic and cultural region roughly spanning the length of the Iranian plateau to present day Patna and eventually down towards the Deccan in the subcontinent, represents a linguistic-cultural branch of Indo-Iranian languages; part of the larger Indo-European language family that has existed since the Aryan migration. The linguistic and cultural impact of what in current academic discourse has been titled 'The Persianate World' has thoroughly been studied in the early 20th century through various sources available in Braj, Awadhi, Kannauji, Hindavi, and Urdu.¹ Further impetus in studying Indo-Iranian, and largely Indo-European connections has also come through a rediscovery more generally of works in Indo-Persian philology, and particularly, of writings of Sirajuddin Ali Khan-e-Arzu's writings (most famously, *musmir*), as well as William Jones' studies, and its ensuing colonial legacies. Nadvi's book then presents a bit of a puzzle. It challenges the idea that linguistic regions had to solely be defined through genetically related linguistic branches that were territorially bound. Rather, it opens up new and possible linguistic traces and contacts, in order to speak of the region of Arabo-Indica.²

The Background to Nadvi's intervention:

In order to understand the strategies Nadvi employs in writing his *Arab-o-Hind*, we must take stock of his political affiliations. Syed

¹ See for Example Linguistic Survey Volumes 3-9

² Fracchia, Joseph, and R. C. Lewontin. "Does Culture Evolve?" *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (1999): 52-78.

Sulaiman Nadvi was centrally affiliated to an institution started in Lucknow at the end of the 19th century called the *nadwa't ul-Ulama*, a branch of which would be formalized into the Shibli academy, and would eventually come to affiliate itself with its sister institution in Azamgarh called the *dār-al-musannefīn* or “the house of writers.”³ The *nadwa* academy was eponymously named after the 19th century Muslim reformer Shibli Nomani, who had been part of a number of North Indian travellers taking stock of new political developments taking place around the world. Shibli’s travelogue took special note of the vicissitudes of the Ottoman Empire, and detailed the educational landscape of Turkey, Egypt, and Syria, while also detailing various other changes happening in western Europe.⁴

While Shibli Nomani has been associated with the creation of the *nadwa* council itself, in actuality the council was started with one Abdul Ghaffur (1855-?), who had worked as a deputy collector in the British Government. Ghaffur had proposed the setting up of a council at Kanpur at the Anglo-Oriental Educational Conference held in December of 1891 for the purposes of religious reform, only to be rejected by Sayyid Ahmad Khan. While traditional religious Muslim elites had based themselves within *qasbahs* prior to 1857, the post-1857 British move to industrialize various cities had produced the need for increased social and economic mobility among Muslim community scholars. There had been a larger demographic shift towards bigger cities, and Kanpur, due to its

³ See Akriti Kumar, “Shibli Nomani and The Making of Nadwatul Ulum.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 78, 2017, 676–682, 2021.

⁴ See Michael O’Sullivan, Pan-Islamic Bonds and Interest: Ottoman Bonds, Red Crescent Remittances, and the Limits of Indian Muslim Capital, 1877-1924, *IESHR*, April 2018, p. 184-190, this was also a period of increased religious and financial interconnectedness in which Indian Muslims had, from the mid-19th century started crediting charitable contributions towards the Ottoman State.

importance as an industrial center, emerged as one viable city where a council could be set up.⁵

These new religious elites however were of poor quality, as noted by Sayyid Muhammad Ali, styled a *mujahid* in contemporary literature for having fought through the 1857 rebellion. He took active note of the methods of Christian missionaries who were well-versed in their scholasticism (*ilm-e-kalām*). Of Muslim scholars, he noted that ‘these new religious elites’ were neither trained in Qur’anic sciences, nor did they have any knowledge of Arabic, cited by Ali as being “our religious and national language” (*hamāri madhabi awr qawmī zabān*).⁶ It was with these calls that he was able to mobilize “deputy collectors, commissioners, tradesmen, and intellectuals” laying the foundation for later activists such as Ghaffur (and later Shibli) to take action and call the first meetings of the *nadwa* into being. Even though the insistence on learning Arabic had become diffuse, Nadwa scholars were nonetheless centrally trained in thinking about language (*ilm-e-lughat*), apart from rhetoric and prosody.

Mahmood Farooq Chiriyakoti (Shibli’s teacher), was a rationalist thinker, in the school of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, but also strongly opposed to him. Chiriyakoti was one among a large group of Muslim intellectuals who had pushed for the writing of a new kind of post-1857 historiography of Indian Muslims through the study of languages such as Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Arabic. In line with this thinking, Shibli having returned from his travels pushed for Nadwa scholars to look past the internalism that had inflected institutions of religious higher education in the post-1857 landscape, and called upon a number of Ulema to dissolve their differences and come to terms with starting a new educational institution that rode the wave of Deobandism (the Hanafi, Sunni, revivalist

⁵ See Jamal Malik, The Making of a Council: The Nadwat al-'Ulamâ, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1994, Vol. 144, No. 1, (1994), pp. 60-91

⁶ See Jamal Malik, The Making of a Council: The Nadwat al-'Ulamâ, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1994, Vol. 144, No. 1, (1994), pp. 76

movement started in 1866).⁷ Despite this, the *nadwa* would remain formally separate from the Deobandis, and would intend to bridge the gap between Deobandis, and the intellectuals of the Aligarh College.

Religious polemics, revival, and competition were an ongoing part of the North Indian socio-political landscape of this time, and 19th century records show a number of regional religious and intellectual debates that rose to the fore through a wider access to the printing press. The *nadwa 't ul-ulema* therefore represented an integrationist approach in such a landscape; one that sought to bring forms of knowledge together rather than push for disparities. The *nadwa's* journal, *ma'arif's* stand on orthography was complicated for this reason. The journal of the *nadwa* published an entry on script and orthography in the very first of its issues towards the cause of preserving such orthography in the interests of accessing historical sources, with this 'integrationist' idea in mind.

A year prior to Sulaiman Nadvi's publication of *Arab-o-Hind*, in 1930, Gandhi visited Shibli Academy in Azamgarh in order to meet Nadvi, although the record of his visit is scant.⁸ Nonetheless, two decades later, in 1945, Gandhi would write a letter in Urdu to Sulaiman Nadvi to join the Tehreek-e-Hindi Conference held that very year in Delhi. 1920s onwards, a number of nationalist leaders would visit Shibli Manzil in Azamgarh in order to discuss various issues regarding the movement towards self-dependence as well as the Hindi-Urdu language issue starting with Muhammad Ali Jauhar in March 1921, and thereafter, Madan Mohan

⁷ Brannon D. Ingram, "'Modern' Madrasa: Deoband and Colonial Secularity." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, vol. 44, no. 3 (169), 2019, pp. 206–225. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26747455. Accessed 26 Feb. 2021. Here, Ingram terms this a 'conjunctural phenomenon' borrowing from Subrahmanyam, in that movements such as Deobandism were appearing in other places, separate from each other, and sometimes responding to similar sets of events.

⁸ There is however mention of this meeting whereby Gandhi's visit post afternoon prayers had led to a scrambling to get his autograph on the Siasat Daily website in the article titled, "Gandhi Ji's letter in Urdu preserved in Shibli library", by Rasia Hashmi, 3rd October, 2019

Malwiya, in June 1922, followed by Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

While a number of discussions took place in the wake of the Lucknow pact of 1916, which in turn saw prominent Muslim leaders joining Congress in demands for Indian autonomy, the *nadwa*'s discussions began to veer towards conversations about Muslim politics and the role of international networks – a moment of geo-political stock-taking that inflected the metaphors of politics and of language itself.⁹ A popular saying in smaller circles recalls the Lucknow pact as the meeting of two oceans; ‘the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.’¹⁰

While the journal *ma'arif* produced from the Shibli academy saw a number of essays published on the question of language, orthography (and why the Arabic letters were important for the *nadwa*'s self-conception of language), and the politics of Urdu versus Hindi, certain scholars associated with the *dār-al-musannefīn* sought to highlight perspectives within these discussions. Nadvi for example would both advocate for the writing of new post-1857 Islamic histories as well as push for Hindustani as the national language, and the key to understanding how and why he does this is in his *Arab-o-Hind*.

The Prehistory of Contact:¹¹

⁹ See *M'arif*, the monthly published with the *Majlis-e-Dar al-musannafin*, the issues spanning the 1920s to the 1940s, as opposed to the initial publications spanning 1916-1920, start taking stock of world-politics, Iran, and the Arab region, including scholarly relations begotten through the Arab Sea, Indian Ocean routes.

¹⁰ See Ishtiyag Ahmad Zilli, *Dar ul-Musanaffin Shibli Academy, Present Needs and Future Plans*, Darul Musanaffin, Shibli Academy, Azamgarh 2014, - in a letter produced on the website, Ishtiyag Ahmad further contends that this ocean-metaphor also had to do with the growing cognizance of Gandhi's popularity in Africa, Australia, and America.

¹¹ For an extended discussion of this contact see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “Early Arab Contact with South Asia”, in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5:1, 1994, pp. 52-69, Aligarh Muslim University – in which Nizami also details some interesting aspects of this contact in later Sangam works of the later Sangam period, - showing evidence of contact with Syria (Palmyra), Egypt

Writing from Shibli Manzil, Azamgarh, in 1929, Nadvi was very aware of the philological and linguistic debates of his time. His work is primarily a philological one, and it is important to trace his thought in order to see how he arrives at his conclusions. He asserts at the very beginning of *Arab-o-Hind* that it is not only the Aryans who found their foothold in India, but that the Arabs also have a native connection to India. He begins with the well-trodden geography of Adam's descent from heaven's garden of paradise onto a garden of paradise on earth – today popularly known as Sri Lanka's (Sarandip) "Adam's peak". He cites sources from various well-known *hadīṣ* and *tafsīrs* – those of Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim, and Hakim, - as having mentioned Adam's descent onto a place called *dajna*.¹² Nadvi surmises *dajna* as being the old name for the Deccan. Why this might be, he says, is because the trade-routes from Southern India heading towards peninsular Arabia were so numerous, that there were a number of 'scents' that went from the south of India and spread through Arabia. The surprising things he mentions that were apparently only available in one other place, namely India, were dates, lemons, and guavas. In *hadīṣ* literature, these were considered gifts that Adam took with him from paradise. Nadvi says, "*chohāre* (dates) *ke sevā, do phal, y'ani, limōn aur kelē, Hindustān hī mein maujūd hai*" (apart from dates, two other fruits are available here, i.e. lemons and bananas.)¹² Citing another custom, he asserts that *amrūd*, or guavas were considered a fruit of paradise, and that guavas were indeed a fruit of India, "*ēk aur rivāyat mein hai ke amrūd bhi jannat ka hī mivēh thhā, jo Hindustān mein pāyā jātā hai.*"¹³

Quoting from yet another tradition, he mentions the four rivers that flowed through paradise; "*nīl, farāt, jihūn, and sihūn.*" *Nīl*, he says, is the river of Egypt, and is important for its own traditions, *furāt* (the

(Alexandria), as well as the Ashokan Rock Edicts which detail trade contacts with Egypt.

¹² Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind Ke Ta'alluqat*, Published by the Hindustani Press, Allahabad, Hindustani Academy, 1930. P. 2

¹³ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 2

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Euphrates), has a strong connection to the traditions of Iraq, and *jihūn* (the Ceyhan) is a river of Turkey. The *Sihūn* he says, is a river of the Indian subcontinent, after which he asks whether this fourth river of paradise should be considered the *Ganga*?¹⁴ Most people however, he relates, had established this to be the *Sindh* river rather than the *Ganga*.¹⁵ Nadvi, for this part, mostly cites from a text titled, “*subhāt-al-marjān fī tārikh-i-hindustān*” by one Ghulam Ali Ibn Nuh Azad Bilgrami – a text produced in the 18th century, and eventually republished in Bombay in 1886. Using Bilgrami’s text, Nadvi concludes that since Adam’s forehead contained the light of Mohammad, this must mean that the Prophet Mohammad was connected with India through his origins.

In Nadvi’s time, the association of South Asian Muslims, was predominantly made to Ghazni’s entry to the subcontinent. But Nadvi refutes this and says that “India was not to be understood as just another country, but a country of the forefathers of Islam. If people did not understand this, they must be made to understand.” But alas, these were things that lay outside the realm of history he says, or were pre-history, and so he dedicates the next part to speaking of the actual historical relations he culls out of various sources.

He recounts various historical sources that speak of the connections that pre-Islamic Arabia had with India. He says that eventually, Islam came to attach itself with the Arab identity, but there are sources that spoke of Arab connections with India before this. While a large population of Muslims found in India were those of the Syeds, he traces another line of Muslims through the lineage of Imam Hussein, and through his son, Zayn Al-Abidin, whose mother he recounts, according to certain sources was of Sindhi descent; and that India had therefore played a role in producing the lineage of one of the holiest Muslim families, and that it

¹⁴ Why Nadvi does not connect this to the Sindh River, which has phonetic affinities with *sihun* is anyone’s guess.

¹⁵ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 2

would be right, if such were indeed the case, that Zayn Al-Abidin was half Indian.

The Islamic connection with India, associated with the arrival of central Turks and Afghans through the Khyber Pass, then, was to be questioned as being secondary. It would become clear if one only looked at the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, which hadn't been included in Alauddin Khilji's conquest of Gujarat in 697AH/1298CE, that parts of peninsular India remained untouched by the Northern Islamic connection. Later, while the Bahmani sultanate had stopped the onslaught of Afghans and the initial Mughals Kings from entering Bijanagar, they themselves had not been able to cross further than the Krishna River. And while various armies tried their hand at gaining access to Arcot, Mysore, and Madras, none of them were able to maintain control for too long. Nadvi eventually says, his intention with writing this history is to try and examine to what extent the Khyber Pass routed Afghans had an influence on India, but more concertedly, to speak of peninsular India as separate from the North (he also eventually published a series of lectures titled the *khubāt-e-madrās* given in Madras over the 1930s towards this end). What therefore this establishes, he says, is the existence of a separate Islamic influence between Hindus and Arabs of the Bahman sultanates up until the Afghan entry into the region.¹⁶

¹⁶ Much of what Nadvi eventually does in terms of his argument is reminiscent of what David Dean Shulman does in his *Tamil, A Biography*, United Kingdom: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, 20-25. In terms of dating Tamil, that while there is an internal dating which can be down through the reconstruction of linguistic sequences, Shulman also chooses another route – namely, of detailing loan words from Tamil present in the Hebrew Bible – words that had been known to Christian missionaries since the mid-19th century present in South India. Tamil loanwords in the Hebrew Bible such as *shenhabim*, *kofim*, and *tukki*, *ahalim*, *karkom*, and *aran-manai*, - some of which he traces to Munda loan words, some to Sanskrit, and yet others to pre-Sanskritic Tamil. While one may imagine ancient Hebrew mariners pointed to South India, there is a much more detailed literature on trade between the south India, the Persian Gulf, and the Levant, going back to the first Millennium B.C.

He then begins his discussion of the geographical locations of peninsular India and its trade routes frequented by Arab Seafarers through a discussion of the oceanic expanse that separates both landmasses, one that touches the Arabian Peninsula, while the other touching what he calls “*aryayarta*.” Arab seafarers who frequented peninsular India took salesmen and travelers through Egypt and the Levant, into Europe, while also bringing back commodities from there back to India, China, and Japan.¹⁷ While coming back, they would walk through Egypt and the Levant, and make their way to Yemen, and from there, they would use sailboats to either to make their way to Ethiopia, or to the Gulf of Iran while touching Hadramout, Oman, Bahrain, and Iraq, eventually making their way to Balochistan, Sindh, Karachi, Gujarat, Kathiawar, Cambay, and Thane, and from there further south to Calicut, Madras, Sri Lanka, the Andamans, and via Bengal would make their way to Burma, and eventually, to China. He refers to these seafarers through their Greek appellation, as, Phoenicians or through their Hebrew appellation as the Canaanites, or Arameans – the name also used for the Arabs in the Qu’ran. While Nadvi questions this identification, he takes recourse to contemporary linguistic debates of the 1920s and 30s to suggest that these people were indeed Arabs; some of whom had settled in eastern and southern sea ports; while others had made their way to the ports around the Mediterranean Sea.

Nadvi then puts this information together with the philological findings of Johann Georg Bühler (1837 – 1898). Bühler, two decades prior to Nadvi’s writing of his text, had made his way to the Benares Sanskrit College at the behest of Max Müller (1823 – 1900), and then almost immediately to the Elphinstone College, Bombay, in 1863, and would eventually die under mysterious circumstances by drowning in a lake in

¹⁷ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 6

1898;¹⁸¹⁹ Bühler's lasting contributions, apart from having also been a part-time paleographer and a commentator on Buddhist excavations, was to have translated one of the oldest extant Prakrit dictionaries.²⁰ In the 1860s Alexander Cunningham had excavated coins minted with the Kharoṣṭhī script among the ruins of Taxila. Kharoṣṭhī, like the Brahmi script, was designated as being doubtlessly of Indic origin; Bühler would question this "doubtlessness." The coins' Greek and Bactrian or Indo-Bactrian or Pali-Bactrian, as well as "Gandharian" origin theory had fallen to the way-side due to their having been found in Bharahut, Mathura, and Ujjain (although Cunningham's claim that these coins belonged to the Asvakas, or Assakenoi – parts of Alexander's army who had crossed the Indus – was a claim that stood its ground). The alphabets of the Kharoṣṭhī script engraved on the coins strongly resembled the transitional Aramaic alphabets *daleth*, *nun*, *beth*, *waw*, and *resh*. There was also ample evidence to suggest that there were Persian, and later-Egyptian loan words (as suggested by Semitic-Paleographer M. Clarendon-Ganneau) in Kharoṣṭhī. The most important discovery apart from the form of its letters was the fact that, as opposed to the universally Indic left-to-right writing system of Indic alphabets, Kharoṣṭhī employed a right-to-left system.²¹

¹⁸ Jolly, J., and G. U. Thite. "Georg Bühler (1837-1898)." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 91, 2010, pp. 155–186. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41692167. Accessed 23 Feb. 2021.

¹⁹ Charles Allen. *The Buddha and Dr. Führer: An Archaeological Scandal*. India: Penguin Books, 2010, p. 173

²⁰ Georg Bühler. "The Origin of the Kharoṣṭhī Alphabet." *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes*, vol. 9, 1895, pp. 44–66. Bühler's student, Alois Anton Führer, working for the ASI, was at the time, trying to prove, through excavation, that Gautam Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, although Führer was to only later realize that he had been at the receiving end of a number of forgeries and hoaxes – something that not only happened to a number of Indologists at the time, but also ended their careers.

²¹ Georg Bühler. "The Origin of the Kharoṣṭhī Alphabet." *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes*, vol. 9, 1895, pp. 44–66. Bühler interestingly even suggests another idea, namely, that the Kharoshti had borrowed the term – which eventually was to designate the word for writing systems (*lipi*), from the old Persian *dipi* – since no vedic or upanishadic texts employed the word *lipi* – and that this *dipi* had eventually become *lipi*. The

Nadvi reproduces large parts of Bühler's findings, along with Bühler's commentary on the index-number systems (that seemed to show affinities between Kharoṣṭhī number systems used in Gujarat, and the number systems used in Egypt during the 3rd century BC), and that evidence of a right-left script was possible evidence of linguistic contact. Using this proof, he suggests that it was both strange and wonderful, that people who lived during the period of composition of the *Mahābharatā* were aware of the Arabic language.²²

Certain parts of Nadvi's *Arab-o-Hind* are circumspect. In a number of instances, he cites 19th century perennialists and occultists, who in turn were using linguistics and philology to suggest monogenetic origins of world cultures through analyses of linguistic fragments.²³ In other instances he uses the *chach-nama*²⁴ and Baladuri's *futūh-al-buldān*

thesis is more detailed where Buhler explains that when new Persian Empires had come to inherit older Semitic ones – such as that of the Aramaens, the Persians satraps had, while also been a conquering force at the North-Western provinces of India, had also employed Aramean scribes for official correspondences – Arameans who now formed a subsidiary scribal class.

²² Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 10, “An example of this is his reading of Dayanand Saraswati's *Satyartha Prakash*, which for the most part is blindly polemical, but which relies on other historical sources of perennialism to forward its polemical accounts. Looking through the *Satyartha Prakash*, published in 1875, Saraswati was selectively choosing from the writings of Faizi, Dara Shikoh, and the French traveler Louis Jacolliot to come to the conclusion that India has been the source of all culture and religion. Philology in a number of ways, during the 19th century was akin to producing a rabbit-out-a-hat trick. Just as Louis Jacolliot in the 1870s had suggested that there was a monogenetic origin to the Krishna/Christ cycle, so had C.J. Wilford at Banaras made similar associations of *Misra* and *al-Misra* as proof of old contacts between Egypt and India.

²³ C.A. Bayley, *Orientalists, Informants, and Critics in Benares, 1790 – 1860*, in Jamal Malik (ed.) *Perspectives on Mutual Encounters*, Social Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, Leiden Boston, Brill, p. 109

²⁴ See Manan Asif Ahmed, *A Book of Conquest*. United Kingdom: Harvard University Press, 2016 in which he analyzes H.M. Elliot and John Dowson's reading of the Chachnama, alternately known as the *Fatehnama-e-Sindh*, and the *Tareekh Al-hind w'a'l-Sindh*, as speaking of a literal history of conquest

(Ahmad ibn Yahya Al-Baladuri's 9th century text titled 'Conquest of Nations), as well as Elliot and Dowson's *A History of Indian as told by its own historians* (1876-1877) to detail the religious aspects of Sindh in the 8th century; namely, the braided nature of Brahmin-Buddhist relations, their social existence, their co-mingling, and finally, the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim.

Reconstructing a Region from Arabic Sources and Linguistic Contact:

Nadvi writes this whole history in order to account for linguistic contact, and he does so in a section titled "*Hindustān ke arab siāh aur geogrāphiyā navistī*" (India's Arab travelers and their geographical writings).²⁵ Nadvi borrows freely from Ibn Khudazba's 250 AH/864 CE text titled the *kitāb al-masālik v'almumālik*, in which Sindh was considered one large region spanning the eastern frontiers of Baluchistan all the way to the southern areas of Gujarat.²⁶ He enumerates the various peoples (castes) Khudazba sees, namely the *brāhmeh*, *kastrī*, *bīsh* (*vaishas*), *chandal*, *dom*, and so on.²⁷²⁸ These travel accounts, especially after 237 AH/857 CE (Sulaiman Tajir's travel accounts known famously in Paris and published in 1811 under the title *al-tawarīkh* or "The Chronicles,"), had started designating the Indian Ocean by the name "*the ocean of hargand*" or "*dariya-e-hargand*."²⁹ The *Hargand Ocean* (this is

– but one that again was supposedly translated from period texts, but glossed as a martial history.

²⁵ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 23

²⁶ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 25

²⁷ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 25

²⁸ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 25 – the next thirty pages or so are filled with these accounts starting with Sulaiman Tajir 237 AH, who was a man of commerce, a *saudagar* – and his is one of the first histories to have reached India in its fullest form – again published in Paris in 1811 under the *Al-tawarikh*. Sulaiman Tajir's trade spanned from Iran to the borders of China,

²⁹ See *Lughatnameh Dekhoda* for the Persian meaning of entered under the name *Harkand* – probably known to the Persians as well through the same name. – translation from the dictionary "An ocean at the antipodes of the country of India, between China and India in which the Island of Sri Lanka also exists."

what today we would recognize as the Bay of Bengal and the Laccadive Sea), according to Sulaiman Tajir had 1900 islands which were ruled over by a woman, and which were abound with coconut trees. The sources claim that all the islands ended with the suffix *dīp*, and that *sarandīp* was the largest of these islands Tajir also describes the denizens of the Andamans as savages; much of which is then followed by an ethnography of the various ports and kingdoms he comes across. The accounts read like popular 19th century ethnological accounts of Indian hinterlands – about the beauty of women, accounts of strange rituals and customs, the savagery of certain laws, the usages of utensils, marriage customs, and finally, of kings and their importance.³⁰

³⁰ Nadvi also includes other travel accounts after Sulaiman Tajir's – those of 1.) *Abu Zaid Hasan Sarafi* 264 AH, (who after reading Sulaiman Tajir speaks of the fact that there was a revolution in Political China which meant that he had to stop trading there; and was also one of the first to trace the Indian ocean as it finally connected with the Mediterranean; also mentions the Javanese Islands, and Ras Kamari?, where alcohol was banned; that metempsychosis was so common in India and China that it was common for people to kill themselves; and that there were other kings such as *Vallabh Rai* – the King of Gujarat at the time, was wont to throw himself into pyres; he speaks of the Devadasis of the south, the country of coconuts; 2.) *Abu Dalf Ma'aud bin Mahalhal Yanbui*, 331 AH, 3.) *Buzurg Bin Sheheryar* 300 AH, - who writes of his travels through Collum, Kashmir, Zirin, Punjab, Saimur, Sobarah, Thatta, Thana, Manker, Mahangar, and Ceylon 4.) *Masa'audi*, 303 AH, in which he recounts the King of Qandahar being a Rajput, and that Raja Vallabh or Gujarat was under the control of a Brahman Baniya; he refers to the Himalayas as the "Tibetan mountains" and that India was the land of many languages; 5) *Istikhri*, 320 AH, in which he mentions all the other travelers; also that he meets the geographer *Ibn Howqal* (whose map has been mentioned above) while travelling to India; 6) *Ibn Howqal*, 331 AH/923 CE, 7) *Bashari Muqaddasi*, 370 AH, 8) *Albiruni*, 600 AH; the last few travelers mentioned seem to be minor travelers – or ones whose sources were not translated – with regard to which Nadvi says – if such sources were to indeed be translated and collected in one place, *Elliot (H.M.)* would probably have a much bigger picture of India's past. "*agar un tamam kitabon se Hindustan ke mutaliq-e-halaat o bayanat ko ekja kar diya jaaye, to Elliot sahib ke adhoore kaam ki takmil hojaye, aur quruun-e-vasat ke Hindustan ke mutaliq bahut se naye malumaat hamare saamne aajaye.*" And further on, he says that historians of his age don't page half as much attention to the Arab travelers

Within a few years after these travelogues had started being produced, Arab travelers had initiated the custom of using Indic words to refer to themselves. For example, in Buzurg Bin Sharhyar's accounts written around the 9th century AD, having detailed all the cities and towns of India, Shahryar begins to refer to Arab traders and merchants as "*baniehnieh*" – from the word *baniya*. He refers to small boats as *bārij*, or through the plural '*bāvārij*.' The word seems to have (either been loaned or) entered contemporary Hindi as *beḍa* meaning "water-born," "lotus, conch-shell", or "salt", a word then in turn traced by H.M. Elliot, from the Arabic to the English, as having given rise to the word *barge* – a word that seems to have entered Europe via the crusades.³¹

Perhaps the most important source that Nadvi turns to eventually is that of Ibn Hawqal, one of the first (Arab) geographers to have mapped the whole of India in his *surat al-ard* – or "A picture of the Earth." Hawqal's *surat* is important for Nadvi's discussion for having been one of the most comprehensive works on human geography in which language, region, and geography were spoken of in one breath. Nadvi uses maps as well as extent sources on linguistic contact to speak of the region of Arabo-Indica as not only a linguistic region, but a political region, one that could evoke eleven or twelve centuries of historical contact, if not more, and therefore, a linguistic-region that could speak to the politics of nationalism as it was unfolding in South Asia during the 1930s.³²

as they do to the Greeks so as to correct and contort their picture of India as much as possible. P. 23

³¹ Elliot, Henry Miers. Appendix to the Arabs in Sind, Vol.III, Part 1, of the *Historians of India* [sic]. South Africa: S. Solomon & Company, 1853.

³² Nadvi narrates that while Arab trade with India was fairly new, he also recounts the Greek control of trade through control over Egypt around 1BC, and only changed after the 7th century AD – after the Arab conquests. Although much of his account deals with earlier trade, his text is a clear example of anticolonial thought in the devices and histories he chooses to speak of – such as fight between the *ahl-e-mashriq* and the *ahl-e-maghreb* – the Asians (Egyptians, Arabians and Deccan Princes consisting of a number of different Hindu and Muslim kingdoms), and the Europeans who fought a valiant battle at sea. The dates of such a battle are themselves not mentioned.

Most of Nadvi's meticulous detailing and discussion of trading ports and routes centers revolves around linguistic contact. While he discusses the provenance of the word 'bārij' from 'beḍa', he details the life of this word as eventually picked up by Al-Biruni in the 11th century (in his *tahqiq m'al-hind*) who not only referred to the word's Indic roots, but also used it to refer to ocean pirates. Nadvi's discussion of sound changes between Hindi and Arabic is meticulous. What he refers to as Hindi around the 11th century is probably *Apabramsha* (or Sauraseni Prakrit) since the vernacular millennium had just begun, and *hindi* itself was of a slightly later appellation. He discusses a number of other words, and sound changes, such as the word *dōngi*, which changes to *daunij* (pl. *dāvaniij*), *hōrī* (he mentions, this word as still used in Bombay as *hōdi*), *blīj* (or the deck of a ship), *jōsh* (the ropes tied to sails), and *kānir* (the coir threads wound from coconut husk).³³ Of these, his discussion of the Arabic word *nākhodeh* is fascinating, but says that Indians have inherited the Persian form of this word – namely, *nākhodā*, which in its original form is *nāv-khuda* – *nāv* being ship, and *khudā* being God, or master, or lord. While discussing these words, Nadvi uses a significant linguistic convention of his time to mark out Indic words from non-Indic ones, or words of an Indic category. This is a convention that was used widely by Urdu scholars of his time – namely – the phrase *hindi al-asal*. The use of *hindi al-asal* as a lexical marker goes back (at least) to the 18th century and features extensively in lexicographical works of both 18th and 19th centuries. It must be noted that *hindi al-asal* is not a lexical or linguistic

Although he does detail the various other changes in ports and trade that took place around the time – from the change in Basra as a trading route to Sairaf, and eventually by the 10th century CE, even this port lay in ruins – since trade had shifted to other ports. He writes further of the *rus*? (who were Christian) traders, as well as Jewish traders who form intermediaries between India and Europe – especially because they spoke a number of languages covering the area between – and while Arabs traded with the Indian peninsula, Jewish traders plied European routes. Indian traders, as observed by Abuzaid Serafi, an Arab merchant, would ply their trade in the non-monsoon months, while during the monsoons would take care of agriculture.

³³ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 63

category, but a geographical category – a category that has been used alternately to mean either North or South India. Nadvi’s glossing of the term here is mostly to refer to South India, or at the very least, peninsular India.

The Weight of Words:

Arab trade with India around the 10th century was mainly concerned with pearl-fishing, jewels, and scents, as captured in various Arabic sayings of the time.³⁴ Nadvi lists and discusses a number of other such items of trade, all of which he discuss linguistic roots, corruptions, and sound changes of. He discusses the trade of a certain type of poison known in Hindi as *bas*, corrupted as the Arabic *bash*, as well as the Indo-Iranian roots of the word *Ilaichi*.³⁵

However, since much of this discussion about trade revolves around Nadvi’s central thesis of excavating linguistic contact, in the section titled *lughāt-e-arbi ki qadīm shahādat* – or, “a testimony to antiquity of the Arabic language”³⁶ – he lists out the various other words that have made it into Arabic, from Indic languages.

Much of this again goes to provide a background for Nadvi’s catholic attitude towards examining the Qur’an’s lexical past, and its sharing words with contemporary Hindi. Citing scholars such as Hafiz Ibn Hujr and Hafiz Suyuti, both of whom had collected words that were non-Arabic from the Qur’an, Nadvi says that eventually Arabic had absorbed all foreign words and completely Arabized them.³⁷ Nadvi then points to three

³⁴ An approximate translation of the saying goes, “India’s mountains so tall, its trees so scented.”

³⁵ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 66

³⁶ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 68

³⁷ See Yohanan Friedman, *Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 95, no. 2 (Apr. – Jun. 1975), pp. 214-221, Friedman details the Arabic view of India as the first place in

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other words of Indic origin in the Qur'an that have more or less made it into the Qur'an in their uncorrupted forms (suggesting that there might be others in their changed forms), namely, *mask*, (*mashk*), *zanjbīl* (from the Indic word for ginger – although Nadvi provides *sōnth*, *adrak*), and *kafūr* (*kapūr*).³⁸

It is perhaps imperative to note here that much of Nadvi's discourse around the labour that has gone into recognizing words and sounds shared between Arabic and Hindi revolves around the acceptance of a larger idea of citizenship and ethnos. If the archive of commonly used words studied through philology in the 1910s and 20s had bolstered the idea of Hindu-Hindi ethno-nationalism, Nadvi's aim was to try and widen this idea of the 'ethnos' through a philological study, and to try and include non-landed, oceanic regions within this imagination.

There is also something to be said about the overarching debt that linguistics and philology have paid to William Jones. Jones had repudiated etymology and the writing of conjectural histories based on loan words. This idea had come to inflect institutional language policies and politics after the 1800s. While having repudiated etymology as a method of conducting history, Jones had maintained that affinities between languages could not be established until loan words had been put aside; and till the stable and basic words of a linguistic system had been traced to their origins in order to establish affinities with related stocks of languages. This is probably where the problem lies, for neither Arabic, Persian, nor Urdu philology had much use for the concept of "stock". Stock in European philology meant 'common familial descent', whereas 'familiar descent', as Nadvi shows, is neither a question of tracing language spread through contiguous geographical regions, nor simply a

which idolatry was practiced, and the source of pre-Islamic idols as being of Indian origin – from an analysis of *Al-Tabari's* history. Although, accompanying this tradition, there is a long tradition also of thinking linguistically with other countries through the tradition – which shall be detailed further on.

³⁸ Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind*, 72.

matter of grammar and mechanics. While Jones had allowed for the valid study of cultural intercourse in his *Discourses*, this, Jones had maintained, was only a historically contingent fact.³⁹

It had been, up until the initial decades of the 1980s, difficult to establish any linguistic connections beyond the Indian or Arabian peninsula. Most theories of contact had, for the most part maintained the status of apocrypha, or had been traced through folkloric connections.⁴⁰⁴¹ Both India and Arabia have been studied as linguistically isolated regions.

In William Jones' estimation, both constituted separate nations; and such imaginations have been bolstered through institutional politics. Later linguists such as Franz Boas (1858-1942), Edward Sapir (1884-1939), and Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960), who were anthropologists by training, had studied American Indian languages, and had all contributed to Boas' *Handbook of American Indian Language*. They had, while agreeing to the fact that loanwords were common, proposed that languages had a certain 'tolerance' for borrowing words from each other.⁴² American anthropology was both inflected by continental structural linguistics and structuralism, while also coming out of its shadow at the same time.

³⁹ Aarsleff, Hans. *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*. United States: Greenwood Press, 1979. P. 131

⁴⁰ Again, See Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "Early Arab Contact with South Asia", in *Journal of Islamic Studies 5:1*, 1994, pp. 52-69, Aligarh Muslim University – in which Nizami also details the work of some Arab lexicographers as having suggested that the word *tuba* was the Indian word for Paradise. The other more major contention is with regard to a report of the Prophet Muhammad having asked who these Indian people were (people of the Harith tribe referred to as the *rijal al-hind*), who resembled the complexion of Prophet Moses.

⁴¹ D.A. Agius, *Arabic Literary Works as a Source of Documentation for Technical Terms of the Material Culture*, 1984, as well as Suhana Shafiq, *Seafarers of the Seven, The Maritime Culture in the Kitab 'Aja'ib Al-Hind by Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar (d. 399/1009)*, 2020, It is only now in a slew of works, that such maritime connections between peninsular india and the influences on peninsular Arabia are being studied – especially those such as on the Yemeni dialect.

⁴² See M.B. Emenau, India as a Linguistic Region, in *Language*, Linguistic Society of America, Jan-Mar, 1956, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 3-16,

American linguists, while studying languages as geographically contiguous units, had also given more agency to speakers themselves in stressing the need to think of language through people's own terms.⁴³ For the most part however, this was what language and region during the 1950s was conceived of as being, namely; the "problem of the study of spread of grammatical innovations over contiguous landmasses" signifying the rather ahistorical approach to the study of language-regions, and further, signifying a shift towards purely mechanistic study in linguistics.⁴⁴ Much of this would also inflect the study of languages and Indian politics in the Independence and post-Independence period as well. In an India which is ever more isolated, and studied as an internally geographically contiguous region of language and culture – voices such as Nadvi's, that challenge these dominant narratives, become ever more important.

Conclusion:

Nadvi would discuss this in his 1933 lecture at Aligarh in his *Naqoosh-e-Sulaimani* under the heading, "*desi zabānon mein musalmāni lafzon ka mīl*," in which he says,

"But for the speech of the country, and for common speech, neither was it possible that the Persian be designated the language of the

⁴³See M.B. Emenau, India as a Linguistic Region, in *Language*, Linguistic Society of America, Jan-Mar, 1956, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 3-16, "in a considerable number of native languages of the North Pacific Coast [of North America] we find, notwithstanding fundamental differences in structure and vocabulary, similarities in particular grammatical features distributed in such a way that neighbouring languages show striking similarities. ... It seems ... almost impossible to explain this phenomenon without assuming the diffusion of grammatical processes over contiguous areas." P. 3, and also see, Franz Boas, *Introduction to Handbook of American Indian Languages*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40, Washington; Government Print Office, (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology), Vol. I, p. 9

⁴⁴ This must not be seen as a teleological, end of history culmination in the study of linguistics. The study of purely linguistic features has been part of various philological traditions at various times – but usually, have come to signify an isolated, inward-looking, shift to the study of language.

whole nation, nor was it possible that the country be circumscribed by the chosen language of any one region; that's why, what happened naturally was that wherever Muslims went, there, through religious, civilizational, traditional, commercial, and epistemological needs, necessarily introduced their words into the languages of the country."⁴⁵

And yet, what really was a Muslim word, and what was a Hindu word, was really the question Nadvi had raised in his *Arab-o-Hind*. The process of the cultural assimilation of words, at least in Arabian Peninsula (*mu'arib, t'arib*) as has been discussed time and again was a complicated matter, and yet by the early 20th century, inflected by national politics, words had become communal markers. But Nadvi's work must not be evaluated against standards of right and wrong. Rather, the process of philological thought is more complex, and in Nadvi, one sees the use of philology as a mirror to the world around him.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *Naqoosh-e-Sulaimani*, p. 26, "lekin mulkī bol-chāl aur 'am zabān ke liye, na toh yeh mumkin thha ke tamām Hindustān ki zaban farsi kardi jaye, aur na yeh mumkin thha ke Hindustān ke kisī ek subeh ki zabān ko ikhtiyār kar ke usko purē mulk par muhit kar diya jāye, is liye, qudrati tor se yeh hua ke musalmān jis subeh mein gaye, vahan ki subehdār ikhtiyar ki sath hi, mazhabi siyasi, tamadduni sun'ati tijārti aur ilmi zarurton se apni zabān ke senkdon hazāron alfāz isī tarah is mulk ki zabān mein majburan badhāye."

⁴⁶ See for example, Auerbach, Erich., Said, Edward W., Trask, Willard R. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* - New and Expanded Edition. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2013.

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