

## TRACING THE *BEGAMATI ZUBAN* FROM NINETEENTH CENTURY INDO-MUSLIM CULTURE: AN OVERVIEW OF GAIL MINAULT'S FOCUS ON GENDER AND LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** Gender and language is a subject matter to sociolinguists, linguists and now also growing in anthropology. The formal and informal use of words, phrases and sentences can be traced down to the structure, division of labor and delegation of power to different gender in the society. The present paper however focuses on the Begamati Zuban which is a voice of sub-culture, and its study have revealed a great deal about the way Muslim women lived, thought, felt and believed in Delhi and elsewhere in nineteenth century. Though Urdu both in spoken and written forms were considered flowery and polite, later contested as a colonial tool and national language of Pakistan. The Urdu language at that time was found in different dialects from Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Amroha and other cities. However the segregation in roles and responsibilities defined a completely new set of vocabulary away from the formal, decent and rhythmic Urdu in the purdha observing society of Delhi. The graphic, earthy and colorful tone of Begamati Zuban was due to women's mostly conversation with women of different age groups and around the household activities, and observance of purdah both at father's and husband's place. The current paper has touched upon how this Begamati Zuban appeared in the heart of Indo-Muslim cultural history. It is interesting that the Begamati Zuban is withering away and has been changed due to the emergence of new material culture and abrupt socio-political wave collided in sub-continent. The partition of India and Pakistan along with migration have changed this sub-culture, however the begamati zuban is still a very much part of our darling literature, drama and movies and most above of all the mode of communication between old women and young girls.

**Key Words:** Gender, Language, Indo-Muslim Culture, Sociolinguist, linguist

### INTRODUCTION

Gail Minault is a professor of History and Asian studies at the University of Texas at Austin who's various publications are published and reprinted in various capacities. The current article focuses to understand the perceptions and findings of Gail Minault on the entirely different language which emerged in the nineteenth century India. The article will add to the existing nature of learning towards society and language of India and Pakistan. "Language is a powerful social force that does more than convey intended referential information" (Cargile, et al. 1994). Languages are a lived phenomenon stated by (Soyinka 1988) and are vehicles of cultures, collective memory and values. They are an essential component of our identities (Edwards 1985; Fishman 1989; Giles, et al. 1977; Khemlani 1998) and a building block of our diversity and living heritage as stated in UNESCO Atlas of the

World's Languages in Danger 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2010. The interaction in natural language takes place both in written and spoken forms, and language contents of these interactions has been acknowledged to have missing ingredients. Power is the quality which enables the users of a language to obtain more means of gratification than the speakers of other languages (Rehman 2002). Forms of gratification can tangible goods: houses, cars, good food etc. or, they may be intangibles like ego boosting, pleasure, and self-esteem. Language shift is defined as "the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another clearly stated by (Weinreich 1953; Crawford 1995; Seliger and Vago 1991). Feminist sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists are also increasingly asking questions about fundamental analytic concepts that must be revalued when women and gender are taken seriously. We also need to consider

how certain basic categories of analysis found in other disciplines are implemented in our own.

## FINDINGS

The connection and association between language and society has been long studied by sociolinguistics and also becoming a subject matter of anthropologists. Historians too are interested in studying and examining different roles portrayed in different past languages and existing languages with old scriptures and literature. It is indeed interesting to know that most of the novelists are women, keeping in view the delicacy, domestic depth and emotional wisdom required for the task. This also reflects the bisection of public and private where the masculine and feminine are expected respectively, especially in Indo-Muslim cultural history. Dependence, will and power are usually measured with access to resources and ownership, however I will be focusing on the selection of words (language) in everyday use which shapes cognition, culture and eventually defines social roles and responsibilities. The division in labor can also be read through daily use of different words, phrases, sentences and also the throw and timing of using different language.

Linguists revealed that women are generally more polite, more concerned for correct grammar and deferential as compare to men's slang and profane roughness. It can also be measured that women use more euphemisms, color distinction, adjectives and soft form of discourse. It is argued by linguists that such discourse defends and reflects the low self-evaluation of women which includes marginality in public. The colloquial difference indeed describes both power and powerlessness, which can be commonly observed both in west and east especially in case of sub-continent.

### ***The Begamati Zuban in Nineteenth Century India***

The rigidly segregated roles indeed reflect a clear cut distinction in use of language(s) both by male and female. The nineteenth century Delhi can be taken as a golden case study though Hyderabad, Lucknow and other cities also used to speak Urdu in different dialects. However the *Zenanas* language can be traced perfectly in Delhi both literary and lexical. The *Begamati Zuban* is earthy, graphic and colorful as compare to polite and deferential colloquial commonly cited and measured in West especially in America. The ladylike aspect which encompasses and strengthens the use of soft discourse is not considered hard and fast as men at that time were not part of the conversation. Highly straightforward

colloquial presented at that time in *Begamati Zuban* was different from flowery and polite phrase and poetry in Urdu.

The women vocabulary were away to receive the politeness through formal education. The *pardah* and respectability were interdependent as most of the women used to be carried out in a wedding palanquin from father's place and were considered to only leave husband's place on her bier. Young girls and Women's fortunate was considered interwoven with family support and domestic responsibilities.

Women without companionship were called as *Nigori* (unfortunate) and used to adopt female friends by marrying their dolls and exchanging *dupattas*, feeding cardamom or breaking wish bone. The language hence defined a new relationship as *dupatta badalna behan*, *ilaichi behan* and *zinakhi ka rishta* respectively. Women's lives were isolated in some ways but they were always in the middle of household activities where older women were engaged in training young girls. Women also used to supervise servants checking the balance of payments for ration and identifying any theft or cheat played by them.

*Begamati Zuban* was very rich in terms of endearments and blessings especially while addressing each other within the household and especially division of roles and activities. Women used to address each other as *bua*, *vari* (dear/dearest), *bhena* (younger sister), and *apa* (older sister). The other terms for women indicated respect by using male terms such as *beta* (son), *sahib* (sir) and *hazrat* (honored). It is also interesting to mention that when a daughter produces a fine piece of needle work or completes her job well, her mother may call her *beta* (son) to show admiration. The blessings on the other hand extended to women used to and still take not just herself but also her dear ones especially regarding her matrimonial life.

*Kaleja thanda rahay* or *pait thanda rahay* which metaphorically means may your children be happy/never disappoint you/have long lives. The other blessing which are commonly used as *kokh aur maang say thandi rahay* that means that your husband may live long and may you never become a widow. Interestingly the young children are also blessed as *jitay raho* or *jam jam jiyo* or *teri man ka pait thanda rahay* which means that may your mother never lose you or grieve over you.

## DISCUSSION

It can be assessed that using male terms in main women's discourse indicates not just the subordination per se but importance of their lives in relation to others such as her husband and children especially son. The mutual dependence thus is reflected in *begamati zuban* and also has significant character in times of anger. Women would barrel chest in showing her anger and by saying *chulhay mein ja* or *chulhay mein par* which is equivalent to go to hell but they would never even say or wish that even their enemy's husband or children die. Besides wishing each other dead, it was common in nineteenth century and can still be found that women would accuse one another of shamelessness, dishonoring the family or committing the crime of violating the *purdah*. Such fights or harsh exchange of words were *bodli*, *randi*, *kasbi* or *bazari*. Similarly milder forms of abuse were used to remind her of her impugning competence as housekeeper such as *pichalperi*, *phuar* and *nikkathu*. Literary works with dialogue in *begamati zuban* are another source of understanding the values of *purdah* society and women's lives and concerns. Hali's *Majlis un Nissa* and Nazir Ahmed's *Miart ul Urus* are two magnificent examples.

It is also found that non-medical cures, belief in the evil eye and exorcism were all functions of a *purdah* existence, where professional medical help was unavailable. Hakim were also men, thus ill women mostly relied on household remedies. Vows and oblations made to different *sadhu*, *faqir*, *jogi* and shrines provide another sidelight on women's beliefs and religious practices. Though *begamati* idiom persisted but with different meanings to it, the connotations have changed with the material culture especially by capitalist work rhythms, social and psychological attributes. Use of different words, continuous use of certain phrases and also the construction of domestic sentences proves that power channels can be traced by analyzing the language being used both in spoken and written forms by women and men.

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