Crossing the Borders:
Language, Literature & Social Media
A Case Study of Urdu

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Abstract

If the language and literature provides means for communication then the Social Media provides an ideal way of expressing one's self. No doubt, today the Social Media have eliminated the boundaries of time and space and geography as well. Due to the excessive use of Social Media, the social values nurtured from centuries are vanishing and new traditions are emerging. Man, the social animal is trying to fulfill his social urges in the magical screens of Desktops, Laptops or Palmtops.

Every language possesses a certain culture and every culture nurtures a certain language. Literature is nothing but a mirror of the life and culture of its era. Social Media attracts new generation through its glamour and on a large and wide scale. Everyone is having an utmost desire to express and project himself as, when and how he wants. Social media is providing the same opportunity to everyone with a click of a mouse.

In this process, language suffered a lot and as a result literature also got the wounds. Urdu being a minority language, having distinct culture, is under great threat of losing its essence. The impact of Globalization is posing a threat to its accent and syntax. Globalization, on the surface deals with economy but it affects mainly the language and culture. An economy may be on track in a certain period of time but how come a language or a culture be restored once again after losing its values and essence.

Key words: language, literature, social media, culture, globalization, Urdu

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We are living in a globalized world where the borders are getting vanished. The world has become a global village (Mcluhan 1) , where our thoughts and expressions, actions and reactions have also changed drastically. This transformation of the extensive world to a small global village is not only due to the means of transportation but due to the media. It is the media that brought people, their thinking, their feelings so close that notions of alienation are now on the verge of being erased. This is itself beautiful and touching too. But if it is 'Social' it is obviously praiseworthy and if political from behind the curtains, it is not more than a dirty game.

Hold it Tight – Your Identity

The secret of the world getting closer lies in the 'Globalization'. It is considered that this mainly has to do with the economy. But as a matter of fact, a desired and targeted social and cultural change is at the top of its hidden agenda. A close analysis of the whole scenario reveals the fact that 'there is someone behind the curtain who wishes to see the whole world in a single colour'. In a single colour, all the colours will be sub merged and there would be no other essence except the one. There should be no separate identity except the one. There would be the one and only identity.

As a matter of fact, globalization is against every small entity. It may include a small country of this large globe, a minority sect in a vast country, the small colourful fishes of the deep sea of human culture or the smaller languages from the kingdom of linguistics. Due to globalisation, whomsoever it may be, everyone's life and identity is challenged and endangered. Everyone has a potential threat to loose own identity and got lost into some unknown identity. Although economy is the prime concern of globalization but culture is its last bull's eye object. And hence, the discussion on globalization may be of mutual benefit but the end result may not be necessary the same. The topic of conversation may be of mutual benefit but the end result of the conversation not necessarily be the same. As observed by Dr. Khwaja Ekram,

"This is the second decade of twenty first century but seeing towards the rapidly changing cultural and linguistic values of this swift world, it looks like that the nations striving hard for economy and power if does not hold tight their cultural

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identity and linguistic values then they might be drowned in deep ditch by the lightest of light vibration of universal ups and downs". (2)

The Tsunami of globalization has already drifted away so many small languages and many of them are on the verge of it. According to Lee Densmer,

"One language dies every two weeks. There are nearly 6800 languages on our earth and by 2100; experts predict that more than half of them will become extinct. Many of these languages are not yet recorded; they are passed down by one generation to the next. That is if the new generation is even interested. Yet when a language dies, a culture dies, we lose the history experience and behaviour of that culture". (3)

Language, Media and Culture

Every language has a culture and every culture bears a language. Every culture nourishes a language and every language accomplishes a culture. Hence a language is a 'Barometer' and a 'Thermometer' of the culture as well. A minor motion, or vibration or under current at the level of culture may be well depicted through the language and its literature. The language and literature acts like a seismograph of the relative culture. In short language and culture are the paradigms to the social maturity.

"Social Media" is an intelligently coined term. Nowadays it has become the best place for marketing as well. Then what's social about it? My perception is, social media deprives one from being social. In reality, it is spoiling our social web. It is ruining the values and traditions that our society has nurtured and preserved through centuries. Today we don't know the condition of our next door person but we know very well the status of an unseen friend sitting hundreds of miles away through social networking. Is it social? I doubt it to be. Our day begins and our night ends up with an update on Facebook, because it is "a face of the book, and the book of a face" for its users. Twitter has turned out to be the index of mood and the moods of the friends. Whatsapp is the mirror of daily state of the affairs. If anything remains uncovered, there are Linkdein, Wordpress, Digg, Google Plus and YouTube to project it.

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What's in 'Being' Social?

Social Media helps you to count how social you are? The benefits of being social at social media are 1) You will get an instant answer of your any query. Your circle which comprises of people from various walks of life will never leave you stranded. 2) You will always feel yourself in the limelight. It does not matter to possess any exceptional quality for it. You will feel special and your friends will also help you feel the way. 3) You may increase your access and influence.

In short, you don't need any elderly figure from your family or community for small or big decisions of your life. You may follow anyone to get enlighten yourself and never mind your followers because they know well what to take and what to leave from you. You may be well known across the social communities on networking sites all over the world but still unknown to your own people, perhaps living in your own town. It is good to be social through media. But at the end of the day let's not forget to count the number of people we met through screen and the number of people with whom we shook our hands.

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Language – The Soft Target

As the use of social media is increasing the language is undergoing with remarkable changes. The Texting at social media is damaging the basic essence and beauty of the language. Formulation of new terms, new abbreviations, false construction of sentences, access use of active voice and little punchy sentences are the characteristics of the language used at social media. They are coining new words for the dictionaries. According to the blog of London School of Public Relations,

> "The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) expands every year to include the newest commonly used words in our society. So what makes a word 'official' and not just slang? The reality is that what was once considered slang has now become accepted as official. Vernacular words and phrases enter the dictionary regularly. In 2013, the entries for 'tweet', 'follow' and 'follower' have been readjusted in the OED to represent both a noun and verb, in order to reflect use in social media". (4)

The electronic mail' was 'E-mail' at first, then it became 'email' and now it is 'emailed' and emailing also. Like it you may be tweeted and 'facebooked'. OMG, LOL and TTYL are acronyms need not to be explained any more.

Like English and other languages, Urdu has also been "spoiled and disgraced" due to the Social Media. Urdu is written in Arabic script which makes it distinct from other Indian languages. This script is somewhat complex. Apart from having some excess sounds, it has some

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excess alphabets for the same sounds. This feature makes Urdu more complicated for its learners. That's why one renowned Urdu linguist Mirza Khalil Ahmed Baig (5) advocates for simplification of Urdu script so that the user can use the script easily. The complicated and less familiar keyboard of Urdu results in misstep mistakes of orthography. One finds it difficult to differentiate between the mistake and misstep.

Urdish – the New Language

The new generation of Social Media users is less careful about the orthography. They only want to communicate in shorter and faster way. The increasing use of English words is alarming as well. A new language having Urdu and English words is emerging it is being called as 'Urdish'. The presence of this new language can be noticed in the mobile SMS and the tweets and other social media sites. The use of abbreviations and some crafted acronyms is too difficult to understand for a person of higher age group. On most of the social media sites you may find the expression in Roman script, as the user is unfamiliar with the Urdu keyboard with Arabic script. Here you will find 'Asak' is nothing but the acronym for 'Assalam alaikum' and 'Wslm' stands for the answer i.e. 'Walaikum Assalam'.

It also became a common feature nowadays to add English words or Urdu words in Roman script in the advertisement, to attract the new generation. This phenomenon is common for print media, electronic media and social media. In the near past it was not possible to speak, write or misspell words. You would be noticed and get corrected accordingly by anyone. But now-a-days the new generation is even making plurals of plural. For example, 'Jazbaton' instead of 'Jazbat' and 'Halaton', instead of 'Halat'. Today we can hear sentences like "Shukriya karta hoon" and "Mubarak deta hoon". These are very often used sentences, which are meaningless without the suffixes of their verbs. The most unpleasantfact is, these fallacies are coming out of the screens of Social Media and roaming all around us all the time.

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Literature – Crossing the Borders

The entry of Urdu in Cyber space is not more than fifteen years. It has made a remarkable progress in this short span of time. Apart from Urdu Software, there is 'Unicode Urdu' through which one can easily express himself. These days use of Urdu script is becoming more and more popular in Email, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. There are plenty of postings in Urdu script at Twitter, Facebook and other Blogs. Mushaira is a popular form of poetic gatherings in India, Pakistan and new colonies of Urdu. It is considered as a symbol of Urdu culture. Apart from its literary & cultural importance, it's the power in it which attracts masses, is pivotal. This mass event now-a-days has become a quite popular 'Facebook Event'. You may find plenty of 'Facebook Mushaira' events going on, on regular basis and a number of young poets participating in it. Various Urdu websites are hosting literary forums, where contemporary literary issues are being seriously discussed. This literary interaction is called 'Mazakera'. In the past, both 'Mushaira' and 'Mazakera' were done for the real audience sitting before the performers; with the advent of social media they have become virtual.

Through social media the literature is crossing the borders and the poets and writers of Urdu throughout the world are getting closer and closer day by day. They are having hardly any chance to meet face to face but enjoying the intimacy of thinking and expressions. Mentions and memoirs of Urdu poets are also popular on Facebook. Through which the literary works are getting published and spread internationally and young budding Urdu writers are exposed to the worldwide audience.

Blogs – Substituting the Literary Genre

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Twitter was the first to introduce Urdu script in blogs and it attracted Urdu users on a large scale. The number of users for Urdu Twitter is increasing quit rapidly. The Urdu blog writers are thinking seriously for publishing there collection of Blogs electronically and in print as well. (6) As they find a certain literary value in it. They are of the view that preserving the blogs is like preserving the style, trends and behaviour of the modern age. 'Maktoob Nigari' (which literally means 'epistolary correspondence') was a very famous Urdu literary genre of the 19th century. The collection of letters of Ghalib, Sir Syed and Maulana Azad are considered as the literary classics of Urdu. These days, there is a serious discussion going on whether blogs are the substitute for 'Maktoob Nigari'? Will the Urdu bloggers succeed in their search of new classics?

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My Facebook Family

The use of internet and Social Media has brought people, groups and communities so close that was beyond imagination. A person will not be there mentally where he is present physically but he may be there where he can't reach physically. The social community is transforming itself into the family; you can hear the terms like 'My Facebook Family'.

Gone are the days when a lover has to wait his beloved facing the discrepancies of weather, limitations of the society and irony of the fate. A young man of twenty first century may fell in love through the magical screen of a Computer, Laptop, Tablet, Smart Phone or iphone. His status will immediately start showing "Seeing someone" or "In a relationship". The Progress from chat to date depends on his smartness. One day you might be invited through the same magical screen to some 'Event'. The event of his marriage. The other day his profile will be filled with the photos, likes and comments. Within a span of time there may be a pictorial evidence of fulfilling the obligation of increasing the world population. And if unfortunately there occurs any twist in the story then you may come to know in less than 140 words of a tweet the sad news of partition. The sad news will attract only so much comments and sympathy that is the figure of your social friends circle. You may not having any friend around you at the time of need but don't worry just look in the screen there are hundreds of sympathisers. What else more anyone can expect from the Social Media and this beautiful and globalized world around us. Modern technology has opened new horizons to the present day life. Its amplitude covers almost every corner of our walk of life. It has opened a new universe of possibilities and dimensions for

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the language and literature as well. The only positive note is that Urdu is also keeping up with the pace and well in harmony with the Modern age technology.

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