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GUJARATI

GUJARATI (or Gojarati), the mother tongue of Gujaratis, which has been for centuries a vehicle of thought and expression for Hindus, Parsis, and Muslims of Gu-jarat in western India. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-European family of languages. Gujarat is geographically separated from Kathiawar and Cutch, although linguistically the three might be taken as one. Gujarat is derived from Gurjar/Gujar, the name of the people who are believed to have settled there in the middle of the 5th century C.E. According to Vincent Arthur Smith (p. 303), Gurjars were "foreign immigrants," closely associated with, and possibly allied in blood to, the White Huns. Banias, Jains, Lohānas, Bhātias, Rajputs, Kolis, Bhils, Memons, Boras, and Khojas, along with Muslims and Parsis, have helped carry the use of the Gujarati language beyond the borders of India.

The language is simple and relatively easy to learn. As a conversational language, it is concise, simple, and well adapted for social and domestic dealings. It is flowing and forceful despite its rather small vocabulary but has to borrow largely from Sanskrit to express abstruse metaphysical and scientific disquisitions. Its simplicity consists in the following particulars. The conjugations of its verbs are few and less complex than those of English, Sanskrit, and Arabic; besides, it is not overloaded with auxiliaries, articles, prepositions, and adverbs. The letters are few and without any combinations except for the diacritical or vowel marks. Characters are adapted from Sanskrit with slight modifications, the most outstanding being that the top line of each letter is done away with in Gujarati. The script is phonetic, that is,

every sound is represented by a single symbol. The mode of writing these adapted characters has passed through two intermediate stages after parting company with Sanskrit. The first is the Balabodh or Devanagari mode, where the Sanskrit mode itself was reproduced with the top line for each letter kept untouched; the latest or most recent mode, used in Gujarati, is to write bald characters without a top line. The origin of the language is traced to later or Puranic Sanskrit, as distinguished from the language of the Vedas, which is called Maha Sanskrit. (Munshi, p. 112).

The history of Gujarati language can be divided into three periods: 1) the old (Apabhramsa) period (10th-14th cent.): During this period Parsis learned Sanskrit, and many of their religious texts were translated into Sanskrit from the Middle Persian versions. Thereafter when Gujarat came under Muslim influence, Arabic and Persian were studied. Parsis readily took to the Persian language and Sanskrit studies declined. It was at this time that Avestan and Pahlavi texts were translated into Gujarati with the use of existing Sanskrit translations. 2) The middle period (15th-17th cent.): During this period Persian and later Urdu became the court language and, as such, exerted a great influence on Gujarati. Parsis used the Gujarati spoken locally in the villages of Surat and borrowed freely from Persian, Pahlavi, and Zand. They translated religious texts into this Gujarati, which had traces of Sanskrit, Persian, and local dialects. 3) Modern period (after 17th cent.): This period saw the westernization of Gujarati. Traditions of British Romanticism and styles crept into literature. Parsis readily took to English and started using some of its structural peculiarities. Some tried to use pure Sanskrit, but they were considered pedantic.

The Parsis of India, whose ancestors first came to India, mainly to Gujarat, in the 10th century, have made significant contributions to the growth and development of Gujarati literature. As early as the 15th century they produced translation of their religious texts from Pahlavi into Sanskrit and thence into Gujarati. Two such texts to be mentioned are the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (q.v., tr. 1451) and the *Mēnōg ī xrad* (tr. 1554; ed. E. T. D. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1913). The first Parsi to produce original literary works in Gujarati was the 17th-century poet, Erwad Rustam Peshotan (b. 1619 in Surat), who composed four versified narrations of the adventures of four prominent figures in Iranian lore. They are *Zartošt-nāma* (1674), the *Šīavaḵš-nāma* (1680), the *Wīrāz-nāma* (1651), and the *Aspandyāar-nāma*, narrating the lives of Zarathushtra, Siāvaš, Ardā Wirāz, and Esfandiār (qq.v.). Sanskrit and Gujarati words form the

ground work, but the superstructure is composed of Avestan, Pahlavi, and Persian words and phrases, which make it difficult for an ordinary Gujarati to follow and appreciate the beauty of the verses. The *Šiāvaḵš-nāma* is particularly interesting from several points of view: literary, in so far as it introduces into Gujarati at a very early stage the methods of Persian chronicles, thus creating a landmark in its history; philological, as it retains several quaint forms of Old Gujarati words; and social, in so far as it records the imbibing by the Parsi community of the manners, customs, superstitions, and ideas of the Hindus among whom they lived.

Mobed Neryosangh Dhaval's Sanskrit translation of Zoroastrian religious texts formed one of the chief sources for later Indian Zoroastrians to produce Gujarati translations of their sacred books. These Gujarati versions became the texts studied by the Parsis as their knowledge of Persian and Sanskrit had declined considerably. Dhaval also transcribed the original Middle Persian texts into the Avestan alphabet, which was more comprehensible to the Parsis, who had lost touch with the Pahlavi script. The Parsi poets composed poems in the inaccurate variety of Gujarati prevailing in the villages around Surat, though they freely borrowed words from Avestan, Pahlavi, and Persian. Furdoonji Marz-banji (1787-1874), the father of Gujarati journalism (he published the first Gujarati journal *Punchang* in 1814), was a prolific writer in prose and verse, and so was Mancherji Kavasji Shapurji, known as Mansukh, who, among other things, transliterated Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* in Gujarati characters. Parsi authors, however, except for some notable exceptions, engrafted on the literary Gujarati of the 1850s with which they were familiar, English words and derivatives of Gujarati words that only their inadequate knowledge of the language could devise. In about three decades, they evolved a variety of the language that became known as Parsi Gujarati. Although Parsi Gujarati was used by a large number of Parsi authors for the benefit of their community, some authors, in search of purer artistic expression, resorted to Gujarati proper. The poetry composed by Parsis up to about 1880s was considered by Behramji Malabari, a Parsi critic, as "a rank growth" (Munshi, p. 282). Malabari himself (1863-1912) was a poet of some merit. Sohrab Palamkot, Dady Tarapolewalla and Pestonji Taraporewalla, and some others followed Malabari with success. Bomanji Kharshedji Framroze (1846-1920) also wrote novels, stories, sketches, and verses. The poet par excellence of the community, however, is Ardeshir Framji Khabardar (1881-1953). His receptive mind and sense of art, from time to time, fell under the spell of several literary and cultural currents prevalent in Gujarat. His songs are charming, his

language is invariably graceful, and his command of meter admirable. In the 1900s the theatrical companies in Bombay, mainly controlled by the Parsis, staged plays full of gaudy and dazzling scenery with the help of actors who generally acted with vehement and unnatural emphasis.

Parsis still speak and write Gujarati, but they have managed to impress upon it a peculiarity of their own. Certain ideas, phrases, idioms, turns of language and of thought have almost made their Gujarati into a special dialect of the language. As for the Parsi Gujarati press, mention must be made of the following: *Bombay samachar*, a weekly newspaper that was meant from inception mainly for the enlightenment of its readers regardless of their creeds; it appealed equally to Hindus, Muslims, and Parsis of Western India and apparently now commands a wider circulation than any other similar papers in India. *Kaiser-i Hind*, published in 1822, is one of the oldest weekly journals published by the Parsis. *Bombay samachar*, now more than 180 years old, is a daily paper with nationalistic tendencies and commands a very large circulation; *Jam-e Jamshed*, first published in 1832, in its early days became the mouthpiece of the orthodox Parsi Panchayat and was conservatively opposed to reform. Today it addresses current social issues and is widely circulated in the Parsi community. The other Parsi newspapers and magazines that are no longer in circulation are: *Parsi-awaz*, *Chabuk* (1833), *Mumbat Doorbin* (1835), Samanchar Durpan (1849), *Rast-guftar* (1850), *Akbar-e-Saudagar* (1852), *Apekhtyar* (1854), *Stri Gnyan Mala* (1859), *Suryodaya* (1866), *Foorsad, Cherag* (1900), *Asha* (1910), *Farshogard* (1911), *Parsi-awaz*, *Sanj Vartaman*, and *Navroze* (1947).

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