USE OF ROMAN SCRIPT FOR WRITING URDU LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the need of evolving a standardized Romanization table, which is used for writing Urdu language on mobile phones, laptops or tabs etc. Use of Urdu language in Roman script is in vogue in our daily life. Internet and mobile users have conveniently adopted Roman script since long for writing Urdu. But it is being used in an irregular and disorganized way. Therefore, an organized and systematic Roman script is imperative to explore ample possibilities of its usage. The current study is qualitative in nature. The Urdu Romanization table is used as a tool in this regard. This tool has been framed by finding out equivalents of Urdu alphabets in the Roman letters so that the sounds and etymology of the traditional Pearsio Arabic script of Urdu from different languages (Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish) could be used and preserved in a proper way.

Key words: Roman script, Romanization table, etymology ‘Pearsio Arabic’

1. Introduction
Language is a living phenomenon; great languages of the world keep on flowing like a river making turnings and curves. The day a language stops or resists assimilating ongoing changes, it becomes dead. All the great languages of the world pass through a continuous process of development, improvement and regeneration. The innovative potential of Urdu language does not fall short of the other big languages of the world. Its script was organized as Persian script, for the obvious reason that Persian was in vogue in those days. Because a script must correspond to the contemporary trends prevalent in that society. In Bhutto’s regime the government promulgated Nastaleique script and now following the modern traditions this script demands its transformation for the sake of the survival of Urdu. Urdu is a diagraphic language. It has no regional attachments. In India it is written in Devanagri script and derives its vocabulary from Sanskrit, whereas in Pakistan Persio-Arabic script serves its needs. It depends on Persian and Arabic languages. Urdu language occupies a very important place among all the languages of the world. It is not only lingua franca of Pakistan but is also spoken and understood in every nook and corner of the globe.

According to Wikipedia the speakers of Urdu language are present throughout the world. There are about 200 million Urdu speakers in Pakistan. Internet, smart phone and computers are the only source they have for keeping in contact with their relatives and friends in their native countries. They write Urdu in Latin or Roman alphabets which are used in English language also. It is not something planned or derived by anyone. In the start, people practiced it because of the non-availability of Urdu keyboard but even after it has been developed, they still prefer to use Roman script just for the sake of convenience. Especially, the younger generations of Urdu speakers use Roman Urdu on internet, because English is the language of social media. It may, thus, be called an undercurrent change spread globally without the contribution of a linguist.

The induction of Roman script should not make the custodian of Urdu language to raise the eyebrows in disgust. Roman script is there not to supplant Urdu language but rather to supplement it. If Roman script is disconnected or abolished, the people of this modern age will feel themselves cut off from the rich resources of Urdu language. As we cannot give up the use of modern equipment of communication, we cannot checkup the use of Roman Urdu. Gone are the days when postal letters were written in beautiful flowery language (Nastalieque) and we had to pray for the safe delivery of the letter; waiting for the postman for unnecessary delays on the part of GPO.

Roman Urdu has become indispensable, proving its worth for the Urdu speaking people scattered around the globe. This healthy change has made its way successfully. Any attempt to stop this surge is sure to meet failure. There is no reason to be afraid of Roman Urdu if it is serving a good job. Connecting the people, transmitting the knowledge through the small devices always present in your pockets in form of your mobile sets, in your bags everywhere you go in the form of your laptop, and in the form of desktop and computers at your table in every home and office. So we cannot repel Roman Script. It is impossible to reverse the ongoing and onward journey of information technology. At present conventional libraries have been replaced by E-libraries.
Transfer of knowledge has become swifter and Roman Script has its deep rooted presence. No attempt to thwart its existence can be helpful and advisable.

Our youngsters find it easy to type Urdu on computers and smart phone keyboards especially when they have to write short sentences, messages, chats etc. Today the world had shrunk in terms of communication. As soon as you type and send a message on your mobile phone it is received by its recipient. Face book spreads the views and news in the twinkling of an eye. No one will ever stop using this great facility on the pretext that these messages are written in Roman Urdu. It will not serve any good purpose on the planet. Throughout the world; millions and millions of Urdu speaking people keep in touch with one another using Roman Urdu. One should not bar them from adopting the script that they feel most convenient with.

**Objectives of the Research**

The study aims to evolve a Romanization table for Urdu alphabet.

To introduce a Roman Urdu keyboard and hence encourage the use of Urdu language on electronic media.

To introduce Roman script of Urdu so that it may be standardized for Urdu readership.

**Significance of the Study**

The researcher tried to move ahead in the right direction in this regard. No doubt much more can be done. It is a beginning to an end, and not an end in itself. This humble treatise will surely provoke and stimulate the people at large to come forward with very productive and useful suggestions. This onward scholarly journey will toe the lines to culminate all efforts in a meaningful end.

**2. Literature Review:**

Use of Roman Script for Urdu language is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the British Raj. The low cost of Roman printing press and easy availability of movable Roman Type Writers were the factors that contributed to the spread of the Roman Urdu in the 17th century. It was the most popular script used by the Christian community in Karachi, Utter Pradesh and Rajhestan in the 19th and 20th century. Different scholars appreciated the use of Roman script for writing Urdu (Boose, 1939). In Laknow university Faculty of science set up a committee on Nov 5, 1941 to
ponder upon the affairs of the medium of education, examination system and scientific reforms. This committee held 2 meetings on 2nd February, 1942 and 3rd February, 1943 respectively. Dr. S. H. Zaheer, Dr. S. N. Shaklaa, Dr. GorakhParshad, Dr. M. R. Siddiqui, Dr. A. N. Singh, Dr. K. N. Baahil, Dr. K. N. Paanday, Dr. M. B. Laal, Dr. K. N. Maathurand Dr. B. Saahini were the important members who attended this meeting. This committee discussed the affairs of Language and its script and recommended that Urdu or Hindi should be the medium of instruction and Hindustani (Urdu) should be written in Roman Script. So this committee proved that the selection of the Script was fairly an educational and practical problem (Haqqi, 1950).

On 31st December 1958 Ex-president Mohammad Ayub Khan suggested the use of Roman Script for all the languages of Pakistan in his article, ‘Jisrizq se aati ho parvaazmnikotahi’, Oxford UN Press. 28 Feb 1958 Pg. 140. (Khan M. A., 1958). Mohammad Ayub Khan had already appointed a commission on national education on December 1958. The commission worked for eight full months and reported that there were so many draw backs in the scripts of Urdu Bangla and Roman languages. It proposed that 3 linguistics committees should be set up for overcoming the flaws of Urdu and Bangla and to propose a standard Roman Script for writing both Bangla and Urdu. Dr Muhammad Deem Taaseer and N.M. Rashid greatly favoured the report of the commission (Hakoomat-e-Pakistan, 1959). On the 16th anniversary of Halqaa-e-Arbaabe-Zoq N.M. Rashid favoured the use of Latin Script because it would help increase the printing of books and literature that would be in the favour of all the poets and writers. Secondly, he said that by adopting Roman Script the valuable books would spread far and wide (Aziz, 1961). In 1943 Sajjad Mirzapublished a booklet in the favour of Roman Script. In this booklet, he first discussed the difficulties of Nagri and Pearsio Arabic Script and then told the merits of the Roman Script. It would be of great help to write Urdu on type writer (Mirza, 1943).

In the present era Multinational Corporations also prefer to use Roman Urdu for marketing their products both in India and Pakistan. It enables them to save both money and resources spent on printing and advertising. As regards to film industry even before partition titles were written in Roman Urdu. At present, both Lollywood and Bollywood have continued this practice (Ansari, 1944). The HamariBoli Initiative, set up in 2011, suggested that Urdu should get rid of the Devnagri and Nastaleek and should adopt Roman Script to keep pace with the modern world that is rapidly turning to a Global village. The Bible society of India printed Bibles and the Church songs in this very script and such Bibles were sold in Pakistan till 1960. Anjum Altaf in his article ‘Cracking Urdu: A Guide for Those Who Know Hindi’ (June 20, 2011) promotes Roman Urdu and States that Urdu written in another script would remain the same, even if written in Roman it would not lose its flavour. (Altaf, 2011). Misbah Daud and Rafiullah Khan in their research on ‘ROMAN URDU MINING SYSTEM (RUOMIS)’ (2010) concluded that the people in the subcontinent feel at home while writing Urdu and Hindi in the roman script which they call Roman Urdu and Roman Nagri as Urdu and devanagri script is not so common. According to them the customers find it easy to write and read comments in roman letters. Comments posted in Roman Urdu help both native and non-native customers to make buying decisions efficiently (Khan M. D., 2010)
Victor Mair (2014) points out that internet and electronic information technology is playing a vital role in the preservation and modification of scripts in general. In order to use these scripts with facility on the World Wide Web we have to change them to a great deal. Too much reliance on writing with electronic devices has reduced the practice of hand writing to a great extent. There are some scripts that are meant for and are much better suited for writing by hand than for digital devices. Such scripts require major adjustments in order to survive, otherwise these may disappear altogether. Same might be the fate of the languages of those scripts as the death of a script might be the knell of its language (Mair, 2014). So much so Pakistanis’ beloved hero Muhammad Ali Jinnah also used Roman Urdu for his speeches. After the partition of India, the Christian residing in Mega cities like Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan used Roman Urdu. Today it is regaining popularity among users of text-messages and Internet services and is developing its own style and conventions. In today’s Pakistan people use Roman Urdu for writing Urdu language as an alternate to the traditional Pears-Arabic Script of Urdu. So, it is better to facilitate the people by allowing them to write in the Roman script, and provide them a standard Romanization table to write in Urdu. In this way, we can save different unique sounds of Urdu language which would disappear otherwise.

3. Materials and Methods

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The researcher has devised a Romanization table to write Urdu in the Roman script and used it as a tool of research. The researcher has also focused on the views, reviews, opinions, interviews and biographies of different scholars who have favoured the use of Romanization table. Paragraphs, verses, and different idioms written in Roman script, which are used by the people for convenience, have been used for conducting the research.

4. Data Analysis

The roman script for Urdu language has no official standard to follow and usually a single word is written in multiple ways. So the aim of this research is to propose a system that covers these different ways of writing Urdu in Roman script by suggesting the best possible Romanization table for writing Urdu and convincing the users to follow that table. Though some Romanization tables alreadyexist which definitely are a great contribution and gateway for their successors but the Urdu users tend to ignore these already existing Romanization tables (Table Urdu alphabet - Wikipedia) as e.g., in Urdu Romanization table of American Library of Congress; People find it difficult to put an underscore with ‘ t’ or a dash on ‘ a’ and a dot on ‘ t’

الف، حا، ڇال، حا، الف are indicated by

ā, ḥ, ḏ, ṭ, ṅ, ṭ.
They plea that these could be easily represented by

a, h, dd, T, nn, and i.

Similarly in Uddin and Begum Hindustani Romanisation Table and pesh sounds indicated by

d^, r^, u', respectively could be easily donated by
d or dd, r, and u.

Though people are often online for their work or entertainment yet they are not experts in I.T., and hence don’t know how to add these marks to these letters using their laptops, desktops or tabs. Sometimes, they do have the options on their androids like:

But again not all the people can afford android or even if they do, they don’t usually care to know about how to use these letters, as one has to press the required box while keeping pressed the basic letter. Moreover these androids do not have all the characters of these Romanization tables. So here is an attempt to simplify the Romanized system for writing Urdu with a detailed discussion on Urdu script to find its suitable equivalents in roman script. Necessary changes were made based on the participants’ responses and then it was finalized.

In Urdu alphabet, majority of the letters have been borrowed from Arabic, only four alphabets are borrowed from Persian and very few, i.e. only three alphabets have been adopted from Sanskrit. In Urdu the names or the pronunciation of some of these letters differ from the original letters, for instance, ‘baa’ and ‘taa’ in Arabic are pronounced as only ‘bay’ and ‘tay’ in Urdu whereas/b/ and /t/ are their roman equivalents respectively. In order to make a list of roman equivalents of the Urdu alphabet one must go through the following table showing Urdu alphabets
with their names as well as their phonetic pronunciation. It tells us about the language from which the letter is borrowed. It also provides Latin alternatives for the Urdu alphabets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alphabets</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Borrowed From</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ا</td>
<td>Aliph</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ب</td>
<td>Bay</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پ</td>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>Persian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ت</td>
<td>Tay (soft ‘t’)</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ث</td>
<td>Tay (hard ‘T’)</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ث</td>
<td>Thay in Arabic and(‘say’) in urdu</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ج</td>
<td>Jeem</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>چ</td>
<td>Chay</td>
<td>Persian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ح</td>
<td>Hay</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>خ</td>
<td>Khay</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>د</td>
<td>Daal (soft ‘d’)</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>Daal (hard ‘D’)</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>Dhaal in Arabic and(‘zaal’) in urdu</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ر</td>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ڑ</td>
<td>Array (with very guttural ‘r’)</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ز</td>
<td>Zay</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ژ</td>
<td>Djay as ‘j’ in ‘pleasure’</td>
<td>Persian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
س
Seen

ش
Sheen

ص
Suaad

ض
Dhuaad in Arabic and (‘zuaad’) in Urdu

ط
Toay'n

ظ
Zoay'n

ع
Ain (guttural ‘a’)

غ
Ghain (guttural ‘g’ is followed by a hollow ‘h’)

ف
Fay

ق
Qaaf

ك
Kaaf

گ
Gaaf

ل
Laam

م
Meem

ن
Noon

نو
Noon ghunna; nasal equivalent of ‘noon’

و
Vao; as one says “wow”

ه
Hay
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Roman Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ء</td>
<td>Hamza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ى</td>
<td>Chhotiyeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ے</td>
<td>Bari yeh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table clearly shows the problem areas that make it difficult for Urdu user to adopt a standard Romanization table while using roman equivalents for Urdu alphabets. These are:

- long range of vowels,
- different letters indicating almost the same sound with a slight difference in the place of articulation
- and retroflex sounds i.e.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tay (hard ‘T’)} & \text{ represented by/} tt/ \text{ in roman Urdu} \\
\text{Daal (hard ‘D’)} & \text{/dd/} \\
\text{Array (with very guttural ‘r’)} & \text{/rr/}
\end{align*}
\]

There are 10 vowels in Urdu language; out of which 3 are separated as short vowels. The other 7 are long vowel sound. Due to the cursive nature of the script, most of the letters can be written in three shapes, initial i.e. when occurring in the beginning and medial when occurring in the middle. And when they occur at the end they are said to be in the joined position. Usually this final enjoined shape resembles the basic letter. Thus each one of these vowels has four forms: initial, middle, final and isolated. These forms depend on the position of the vowel. Vowel letters in Urdu, cannot stand alone; they are usually used with ء،ى،ے.

As regards to the consonants, there are duplicate and even triplicate letters standing for the same sound.

- te(ٍ) and toe (ط) and retroflex/ tt/ all the three represent /t/sound
- Similarly se (ث), seen (س) and swad (ص) represent /s/sound.
Both chotti he (**) and barri he (ح) indicate /h/sound.

zal(ذ), ze (ز), zwaad (ض) and zoe (ظ) are represented by /z/sound.

In short, Roman script is the most widely used writing system in the world and is the standard script not only of the English Language but also of the most of the European languages. In some of these languages /K/ and /W/ are abandoned, just as /c/ is not used in Urdu where as some other languages have added extra letters and sometimes double letters to indicate one sound; e.g.,/tay/ in Urdu is indicated by ‘tt’ in Roman.

Paragraphs, passages, and different verses or proverbs written in the common roman Urdu in use were presented to the participants. Then the same material written in the newly evolved Romanization table was shown to them and almost all of them were really happy to find such an easy way to write roman Urdu without any limitations or restrictions.

As it was difficult for them to use the already existing Romanization table in which they had to place dash or dot or different other super or subscripts in their writing. This Romanization table provides the Urdu purists the Roman equivalents of all the Urdu alphabets. Here they have the specific characters to indicate all the four positions of vowels as well.

People read the lyrics and versions of poetry and songs, and stories of different dramas, films and novels written in roman Urdu. Even the ‘Beyans’ and speeches of great leaders and religious scholars are present in the roman Urdu. So they are better able to discuss and analyze roman equivalents for Urdu alphabets. Some people find it easier to amalgamate all the four controversial letters or sounds of د, ض, ح, ث with z and prefer to use ‘s’ for ص, س, ض, ح. They think that ث should be denoted by ‘th’ as it does in Arabic. Simply they are in favour of replacing ض sound with dh. as in adhan or ض sound in ramdhan. They take the plea that these are internationally accepted famous roman equivalents for the Arabic alphabets. But this table makes them realize that Urdu language and Urdu alphabets have their own status. Though most of the Urdu alphabets were derived from Arabic alphabets yet they have their own identification in Urdu and they should remain the same as they exist in Urdu language.

5. Conclusion

Most of the people feel at home while writing in Roman Script instead of Pearsio Arabic Script. Keeping in view the broad based use of Roman Script it is advisable to adopt it systematically. In actual practice, Roman Script is being used in text messages and social media but they do not follow any standard Romanization table. It is well considered view of these researchers that an
organized system of writing Urdu in Roman script should be adopted to maximize its usage in more effective way. A set pattern for the use of Roman letters will be very beneficial.

The wide spread and every moment increasing use of social media has enhanced the value of Roman Script. As it is a worldwide phenomenon, so its importance cannot be overlooked. Time has come to systematize Roman Script to facilitate the users of social media in particular. A unified, approved and accepted criterion of Roman alphabet is, no doubt, the need of the hour. So the researchers devised the following table for the convenience of the people.

Initial Romanization of the Urdu Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urdu Letter</th>
<th>Romanization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ا</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ب</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پ</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ت</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ن</td>
<td>tt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>خ</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ج</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ج</td>
<td>ch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ح</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>خ</td>
<td>kh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>د</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>dd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>z'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ر</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ز</td>
<td>rr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ز</td>
<td>z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ژ</td>
<td>zh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>س</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Digraphs Representing Urdu Aspirates

Ph
bh

gh
f
q
k
g
l
m
n
w
h
y
ei/ey
The most important characteristic of this table is that it can be easily used on available keyboard of the mobile phones without adding a single letter or symbol. It not only works with the existing keyboard but also preserves the etymology of every single word i.e. Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic etc. It was welcomed at all hands. This showed the utmost importance and acceptability of this newly evolved Roman script. Leaving aside confused, abrupt and disorganized use of Roman Script, the researchers have opined for the systematized use of Roman Script making all out possible efforts in this direction. To conclude the researchers tried to move ahead in the right direction. No doubt much more can be done. It is a beginning to an end, and not an end in itself. This humble treatise will surely provoke and stimulate the people at large to come forward with very productive and useful suggestions. This onward scholarly journey will toe the lines to culminate all efforts in a meaningful end.

References


