

**A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF ABDUL
GHAFUR'S DICTIONARY
OF THE TERMS USED BY
CRIMINAL TRIBES IN THE PANJAB**

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A Detailed Analysis of Abdul Ghafur's Dictionary of the Terms Used by criminal tribes in the panjab by G. W. Leitner

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APPENDIX.

A DETAILED ANALYSIS

OF

ABDUL GHAFUR'S DICTIONARY OF THE TERMS USED BY

CRIMINAL TRIBES IN THE PANJAB.

BY

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ANALYSIS.

THE heading "Original Slang Terms in Roman" is scarcely correct as a description either of the artificial language of thieves, elsewhere called "Thieves' Latin," or of real dialects spoken by tribes, whether criminal or not. That criminals often borrow words from other languages than their own, in order to conceal their object from an ordinary listener, has been proved by the thieves in England borrowing from the language of the gipsies; but, whilst the latter have a language of undoubted Hindui origin, the former have no language at all, properly so called. Precisely the same thing has happened in India, but the author has confounded argots with dialects, as will be shown further on. The use of the word "Roman" is suggestive; if he means "Romany," or the language of gipsies, he suggests an interesting enquiry which I have endeavored to solve (*vide* pamphlet published in 1859 and republished at Lahore in 1865), and to which, I believe, I have made a recent contribution in the *real* dialect of the Changars. He probably means merely "transliteration into the Roman character." It is necessary to notice that the pages of the Dictionary in question are divided into four columns, of which the first is headed "Original Slang Terms in Roman"; the second "Translation in English"; the third "Urdu Translation"; and the fourth "Original Language (زبان اصلی)," to which, for the sake of brevity, reference will be made as "the original" in the present Analysis.

2. The repetition of the same words, instead of *one* vocabulary, unduly extends a small contribution, which is limited to about 500 half-lines or words of supposed original matter. It is unlikely that these should represent eight real or artificial languages, or twenty-five to twenty-six years' work under specially favorable circumstances. The Panjabi equivalents which I have added to the original are generally sufficient to explain the meaning of the supposed special dialects, though the task is rendered difficult by the errors of translation, transcription or transliteration which characterize almost every word in the book under review.

CHAPTER I.

SECTION I.—"GAMBLERS"

(containing 25 words or sentences).

A knowledge of the *principles* of the slang of our thieves would have been far more useful to public officers than a collection of haphazard sentences which may or may not be used within their hearing, and which are, except as regards the Sansis, so few in number as to be scarcely of any use. In the gamblers' dialect, *e.g.*, "sirá" is "a rich traveller" and also "a traveller" in the sentence of "sirá úrá do," which requires no explanation, but of which the English is given as "to cheat a traveller on the road by deception," and the Urdu as "is musafir ka mál farebse lé lo," though "take his property" is "jot lena" in the "Thieves' Latin" of the next line but one, as well as "tir kar lo" ["tir" should be "tiri"] and "ya kar sutto" with an unnecessary and confusing use of "ya" = "or." When we are told that "Thúllá" is "Thanadár or Deputy Inspector," we do not require the sentence "Thúllá áya" [though "the original" has "á," which *might* be a dialectic form]. The original has "baiti kha," but the "Roman" adds "já" for "decamp, escape." With "unchi dhur" as "a very rich man," "khopra thúllá" for "European officer," "dala" = "fair" [should be "a fair"], and the sentence "thambá gya," "kámp kháli" and "liá gya" for "has been caught" or "the stolen property found out," we close the so-called "Language of the Gamblers." Nothing could

be more misleading to a police officer on the scent of crime than to be told that "ari dhándal" is "a crowd of gamblers," and "dhándal ari" "a crowd of constables" two pages further on. The truth is that this language, so far as I can judge, is a very transparent perversion of ordinary talk. I will reserve for criticism further on the description given of the various kinds of gamblers,—"Ari-Már, who play with *kauris*, *thikris* (bits of earthenware) or *tasma* (leather strap); *Nausarbáz* or *Nausar-de-karu*, who use a pack of cards (*Ganjifá*) not bigger generally than a rupee, consisting of 96 cards divided into 8 suits (?); *Dheyáni*, who play with two dice called *kábtain* (the Urdu has 'in a secret place'); *Bhaddí*, *Sulí Lutert*, who play with three dice called *Pána*. *Kauri*, *Thikri*, *Tasma* (already explained) come under the heading *Kánsá* (better *Kánsa*). *Tásh*, *Ganjifá* = cards. The dice or 'kábtain' played by *Dheyánis* are called *Dána*, *Khilauná*, *Jorá*. *Dul*, *Golka*, is 'a die,' the long dice with which *Chaupair* is played, used by *Bhaddis*, the 4th class of gamblers, called 'Pána' or 'Pása.' 'Beela' is a *kauri* or *kábtain* filled with lead or quicksilver. *Seelá*, *Pakka*, a forged *Pána* also filled with lead or quicksilver; *Toh karna* = to gamble; *Toh gira* = a gambler; *Thúllá*, *Nokewala* *Thúllá* = *Thanadá* or *Deputy Inspector of Police*; *Baidrá*, *Papeca* = *sepo*y or police constable." This paragraph embodies the information contained in the first section of the first chapter.

Analysis.—Passing over the accounts given of the *Sansis*, *Doomras*, *Gandias*, *Sweepers*, *Harnis*, *Bawaris* (*Bauriahs*), *Minsas*, *Maos*, *Gujars*, *Ahirs* and *Thags*, which are disposed of in eight pages, I have addressed myself, for the present, to the linguistic portion only of this book (*vide* pages 28 to 66). As the first chapter, however, opens with a description of four classes of gamblers, I have to point out that even their designations are not free from objections.

I.—The first class of gamblers, "Ari-Már," is really the *Fakir* who, pressing his elbows on his knees, sits so long in front of a shop till his worn-out keeper gives him an alms. The second, "Nausarbáz," is merely a corruption of "Chausatház," the common game of 64 courts. The third, "Dheyáni," are said to play with two dice called "kábtain." Now, "kabtain" ("ai" being diacritically pronounced) is the common word for two dice, and is the dual of "Ka'bat" (كعبتين كعبه). The phrase of a converted gambler "I left the two Ka'bas for the Ká'ba" = the sacred building at Mecca, or, literally, "Leaving the two Ka'bas, I have already gone to the Ká'ba" (هم كعبتين چھوڑ کے كعبه كو جا چكے), occurs in point. Cards were used by the Arabs for the forbidden purpose of fortune-telling, whence they were called "Nablas," and the "Ká'bat," or die, was supposed to have the form of the sacred "Ká'ba," and thus perhaps to lessen the sinfulness of the amusement. In fact, "Ká'b" is our "cube."

II.—Now as regards the instruments used by the gamblers. They too, like the above designations for gamblers, are common Panjabi or Hindustani, sometimes only in thin disguise. "Tásh," "Ganjifá," "Khilauná," "Jorá" (spelt as in the original) (a pair of dice = *kabtain*) need no comment. "Dul" is a form from "dálua," the Hindustani equivalent for "kabtain." "Dána" seems to be also another incorrect rendering of "dálua." "Kan sá" is, of course, "Kánsa," which means "a set."

III.—When we come to the sentences, the observer will find pure Hindustani terms, such as "thambá gya," "liá gya," put down as "Thieves' Latin." Nor does it require special study to discover the meaning of phrases "sirá úrá do," "dhír jái hai jot lená" and "tir kar lo" in the metaphorical language that must be used by *badmashes* of all countries, whether the prize that escapes is loot or a pretty woman that may be passing along. What, however, is very suggestive is that a language said to be common to all gamblers and swindlers of the Panjab should be the same as that of the Meos of Delhi, Gurgaon, Hissar, the North-Western Provinces and Rajputana. All these points are gone into in their proper places,

SECTION II.—"THIEVES AND PICKPOCKETS"

(containing 97 words or sentences).

Introductory Remarks.—Here we have again a sub-division of thieves under the head of "Bishni Atráf,"* which seems to correspond with one made in Akbar's reign and mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari*. It is not, however, correct, for "uchakká" is a common term for "thief," whilst "utháigirá" and "subhe-keziá" denote obvious sub-divisions of labor in that profession, so that we are left with "jeb-katrá" = "pickpocket" and "uchakká" under "Bishni Atráf." Under the head of "instruments" used by thieves we learn no new names, but we have "kát" for "a piece of glass" and "shísha" (in connexion with "lakri-shísha") as "a small knife," the vernacular being "kát" for "knife" and "shísha" for "glass."

Again, no dialectic study is required to explain the Panjabi "phíl" (an ornament worn on the forehead); "dhágá," a thread; "haddi" for "hassi" = the collar worn on the neck. "Kúndal" in No. 17 is the common Hindi word for ring. "Damri" or "damra" for rupee is not the language of pilferers, but that of Panjabis generally, and of Sikhs especially, as in "the four rupees given in religious offering" = "ahár damre ardiás karáo."

The practice of having separate numerals is not confined to thieves. It is constantly invented and shifting. I have shown that the shawl-weavers and goldsmiths affect certain terms for numerals; the brokers use other terms; the horse-dealers, a third set; but this circumstance alone would not justify our classing them among criminal tribes possessing a separate language. Of the several names for "lock," "binda" is = Panjabi "jinda."

In the sentences 49, 52, 53 and 55 "kar le" is rendered as "take off." This, were it true, would certainly be a dialectic or professional sense of the word "to do." The author, however, who knows Urdu, but does not know Panjabi, has mistaken the Panjabi "kadh" = "take off," which was undoubtedly used in the original, as the Urdu "kar." The sentences which follow are Panjabi, rarely with one or two slang words in them, as "pásá wat já." Some are used metaphorically, and others are repeated from previous parts of the book. I may add that the numbers in the following Analysis correspond with those of the words and sentences of the book.

Analysis.—Here we may have a few specimens of "argot." (5) "Kát" may be used for "a broken piece of a bottle with which pockets are cut open," but the original is "kát lakri," which may be real slang, just as (6) "lakri-shísha" for "a small knife" would be real slang. (2) "Gand ghieni," "to cut a purse or a bundle of articles in an open market or large fair," is also slang. (4) "Bishni Atráf"* seems wrong for "to rob anything from a peculiar spot, such as a railway station or an inn." (1) "Lám gir" and (3) "phatka gir" are obvious, though I doubt whether the former is also "to cut a purse in an open market," which we have already had. Yet these four last words are put under the head of "four kinds of thieves," though these words merely belong to "uchakkás" or "thieves and pickpockets," on whose language there is no further information. Proceeding now to the "Utháigirás" or "PILFERERS," we find again the *gamblers'* slang. (1) "Thúllá" is Deputy Inspector; (2) "baidrá," "papeca" is watchman as well as constable [so is also "dád"]; (3) "dhúr" sinks down to an "individual" from "rich individual," as with gamblers. (4) "Dálá" keeps up as "fair." (5) "Dhándal arí," for a crowd of

* These go by the following names in India, according to the author:

Uchakká = thief.

Utháigirá = pilferer.

Jeb-katrá = pickpocket.

Subhe-keziá = a thief who rises up early in the morning and steals before people are awake.

constables or of gamblers, whichever one likes, I have already commented on. (6) "Seet" and (7) "chává," however, are added as "woman" and "boy" respectively [the latter being the true gipsy word "chay" corrupted into our "chap," viz., "a rum chap" from "a Rom chay" or gipsy-boy]. (8) "Phúl" and "khopar" are rather unnecessarily explained as head jewelry and embroidered cap respectively, though it never seems to have occurred to the author that his "European officer" was a simple "topi-walla" when the gamblers called him "khopra thúllá" or the Deputy Inspector *with a cap*. (9) "Haddi gar" is a necklet; (10) "dhágá," we are rather unnecessarily told, a thread tied to both ends of the "hansli" (and, no doubt, to other things too). Then come a few words for ornaments, either slang or Panjabi. (16) "Sundri" (ring) is evidently for "mundri"; (17) "kúndal" = "earring" probably for "bundá," and other perversions or corruptions, which can be constantly changed with ease by pilferers. In (21) "bahuti" for "piec," (22) "damri" [twice repeated on the same page as rupee or coin], "nethá," "bhuntá" = "rupee"; (23) "gullí" for "gold mohur"; (24) "seáá" = "gold"; [(25) "gár" = "silver" is dialectic]; (26) "pattá" = "note, leaf"; (28) "tali, khandóli" = eight annas; (29) "másha" = four annas; (30) "adh máshá, rattí" = two annas; (31) "dokri" = two rupees; (32) "páun sári" = three; (33 to 36) "sári" = four; "sawá sári" = five; "derh sári" = six; "dhái sári" = ten, we have slang, changeable *ad libitum*, but in the "sári" instances indicating some system. (37) "Tind" = "pocket" is slang. (38) "Ghá kerna pátká" = "To tear open a bundle or parcel," seems inexact. (39) "Khakri" for "cotton purse"; (40) "akhrot," "makra," "bindá," "kurakná" for "lock" indicate obvious distinctions; (41) "phúl, gubha" = "box, house," is unsatisfactorily put; whilst we do not require to be told, as a sentence in a peculiar dialect, (42) "Seet játi hai, pichaút kar" = "The woman is going; follow her"; (43) "Lohi tham le" = "He or she is careless, take it," or that "Saudá khinch le" in sentence (44) requires the translation "Take whatever you can," though, no doubt, the recommendation would be followed. By putting the natural pauses of the human voice in the next sentence I dare say that an officer, unacquainted with the book, could pretty well make out all he required from the following: (45) "Chawá bahiti; kasé janda hai—bol bachan karke, thasá lé" without the explanation "The boy is coming; take him to some secret place, and get whatever you can from him," or the equally inexact Urdu "Larka jata hai, kisi taraf lejár, má lelena" [which omits an important part of the sentence]. We rescue "thasá" when in the very next sentence (46) we find "Chamkainh thasá nah kha jái tu gauna pá ley," for which the Urdu is given as "Khabardár na hojawe, zewar utár lena," and the English, which is to instruct and guide our European detectives, is "Take care that he may not be on the alert; hide the jewelry"; whilst the original really is "Chamka na thasá kha gya, tu gahna pá le," which is not quite the same thing. There is, of course, the same general meaning in the Roman, English, Urdu and original slang sentences, but we require exactness in sentences of this kind; otherwise they must mislead. The "slang" does not exactly agree with the Urdu translation; the Urdu translation differs from the English translation and both from the original; whilst the transliteration is unsystematic throughout, and a portion of one word often runs into another. The book, when corrected and very considerably enlarged, will require a grammatical introduction, and, in its present form, would have been far more useful than it is had it merely contained an enumeration of terms used by the criminal classes with their exact equivalents.

"Bol bachan ker" is "coaxing" in sentence 45, and "set up a quarrel" in sentence 47, whilst it is simply the vulgar "having a jaw." There is a long account given of the following simple injunction to a thief to divert the attention of his intended victim:—(47) "Neegh pattá lé gáone tika de, bol bachan kar, ise pilich pawangee." Here again the Urdu takes flights of its own in explanation, whilst the whole thing is simply "Nigh patá le, gáone takká dé, bol bachan kar, ise pilich pawange," = "Take food, give a push, have a jaw, we will get behind him." (48 to 64) "Phúl tor le," "Khopar kar le," "saudá baná le," "patka már le," "kúndá baná le," for "tearing off,"

"doing," "dodging," &c., certain ornaments, are mere vulgar terms common among thieves in all countries, but they do not justify the author to go again through the list of ornaments with the addition of "kar," "le," "baná," and add another page containing the same information. However, (65) "Chirá de sikh bhar le" = "Cut open the pocket and draw it out with the two forefingers," is new, and so is a portion of (66) "Kát nal gha rakh de" = "Cut it open with a broken piece of bottle" (at any rate as a suggestion). (67) "Bhamp le" is simply "Look out," and not "Look well and see if he has got anything," nor the Urdu "Dekh, kuch máI hai ya nahin." In the next sentence the author seems to show a knowledge of anatomy. "Gauná" is "that hole underneath the uvula" ("virila" in the text) "which is made to conceal money." This explanation would be sufficient, and there would have been no necessity for giving a long and inexact translation of (68) "Gauná tyár hai." (69) "Phatká márná dhúr loh hai" is simply "Strike the top; the man is careless" [a few words go a long way with thieves, and "top" may be the jewelry worn on the head, the head itself, &c., according to circumstances]. (70) "Seet khandí khochar hai" = "The woman is very active and on her alert," and (71) "Seet bhuttá hai; phark le" = "The woman is very simple-looking; take whatever you can," may pass. (72) "Chándá kar le" for "Take off the sheet or chaddar or dupattá" [as the Urdu has it] I only object to on grounds already stated in connexion with adding "kar," "baná," &c., to ordinary words; but in (73) "Núk loh hai; tor le" I see more than "Take away the turban," viz., "The turban is exposed; snatch it off," and "exposed," "within reach" will often be found to be a better translation of "loh" when used by pilferers than "careless." (74) "Mádho" for "hush" is good without explaining a number of occasions when "hush" is used. (75) "Phúl já" = "Go away" is better than "Leave me." The useful "dhúr" turns up again in (76) "Dhúr sir hai," but only as "Some one is looking." (77) "Soon khinch" for "Keep quiet" is conventional. (78) "Unchá núk wálá thúllá ata hai" is rather a long title for the Deputy Inspector, now also translated as Darogha in the Urdu. It is simply the "Nokewalla Thulla" of the gamblers. (79) "Baidra, papehá náI hai" is rather Panjabi than "thieves' dialect" for "with him." (80) "Pása wat ja" = "Keep aside." (81) "Chappar khá ja" for "Get out slowly" is scarcely correct. It means "put a chappar in front of yourself by screening yourself behind some one else." The same word is used when a thief tells his associate to make a chappar to the intended victim by going in front and allowing him to rob the person from behind (*vide* my collection of slang terms, Lahore, 1872). (82) "Baihti kás já ya baihti khá já" for "runaway" can be explained by any one whom the "khá já" = "eat" does not puzzle. (83) "Phúl men thas ja" is simply "sneak into the crib," but is rendered as "Go inside the house; go there where you have been last night." The author's sentence is more elegant, but no language is learnt, at this stage, by circumlocution. (84) "Unchá darawá (thasawa?) hai, bhamp na le," I leave to be more correctly translated by any one who has read the foregoing pages with attention than "The property is too much; take care that you are not seen." (85) "Kháá hai" = "He is a receiver of stolen property" is valuable. (86) "Lia gya, thambá ya thamma gaya" for "has been caught" is a repetition; to render (87) "Man gya" = "He has owned it" is superfluous. "Kámp kháli" for "The property has been found" we will leave for the present and proceed to

SECTION III.—"OF THIEVES, KHALLAIT, UCHAKKÁS AND TAGU" (?)

(containing 21 words or sentences).

Here the introductory explanation that this class generally steal cloth, sundries, &c., from carriages and banks of streams, where people resort for religious ablutions, is valuable, if correct.

- (1) Charkhi = "carriage": *va sans dire*. Charkhi is "wheel."
- (2) Chaláwá = "a rich traveller" should be "a traveller," from "chalna."
- (3) Sutli = "bundle."
- (4) Kálki = "lota."