

Alavi Bohra Language: Languages in Contact

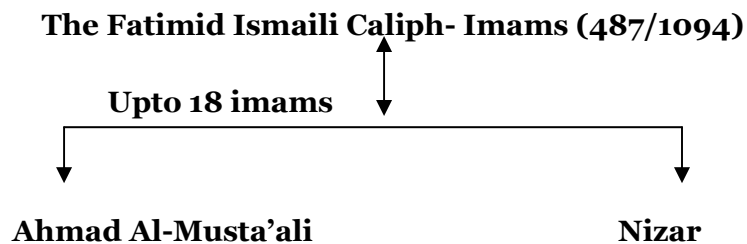
Introduction:

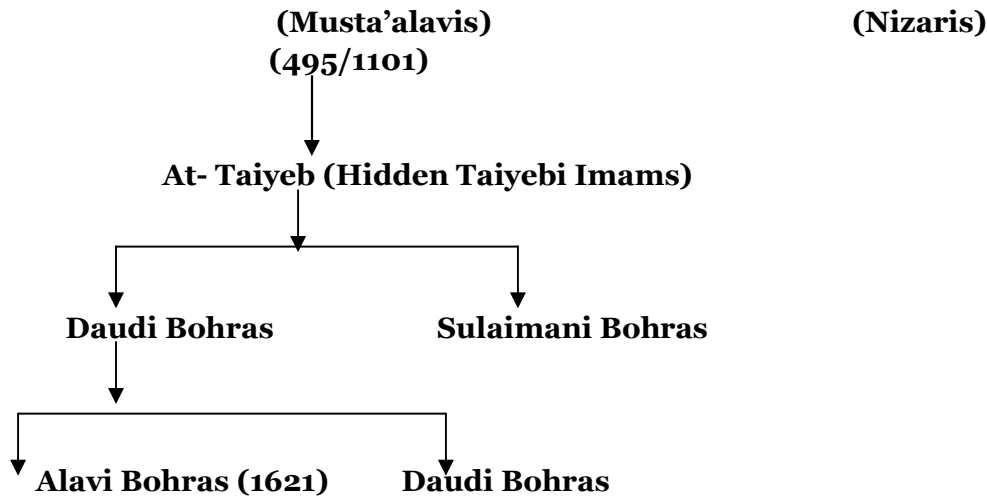
The paper represents the study of how different Languages came in Contact and formed Alavi Bohra language, which affected the Gujarati language spoken in Gujarat and some parts in Maharashtra. Thus in our paper we shall study how the Alavi Bohra language or Lisan ud-Da'wat (the language of the mission) came into being through the contact, amalgamation and interaction of various languages. "Language contact occurs when two or more languages or varieties interact." (Appel and Muysken 1987).

Gujarati language is an Indo-Aryan Language and is a part of Proto Indo European language family. Alavi Bohra language, a tribal language, is similar to Gujarati language and a person who speaks Alavi Bohra Language is known as Alavi Bohra or Bohra. "A tribal language is a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economical and religious or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader." Thus as per the definition Alavi Bohra Language is a social division consisting of a community with common culture and dialect, and at present **His Holiness Saiyedna wa Maulana Abu Hatim Taiyeb Ziyauddin** is the 44th spiritual and temporal head as a recognized leader of the Alavi Bohras in the line of succession of missionaries which began in Yemen (532 AH/1138 AD).

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the *Origin of Alavi Bohras*. The second section deals with *History of how languages came into contact or the Genealogical classification of Languages*. The third section deals with *the phonological and semantic changes in the Gujarati vocabulary due to the contact with Arabic, Persian and Urdu*. The fourth and the last section is an attempt to *conclude how these language contacts is affecting the present day Standard Gujarati language*.

1. Origin of Alavi Bohras





Alavi Bohras are the descendants of the Fatimid Ismailis Caliph Imams (487/1094) who ruled Egypt during the 4th-5th century. It consisted of 18 Imams starting from the grandsons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) then due to certain misunderstandings and disputes regarding the succession, this Fatimid Ismailis got divided into two main branches – i) Ahmad Al-Musta'ali (Musta'alvis) (495/1101) and iii) Nizar (Nizaris). During this time by the order of 18th Ismaili Imam Ma'ad al-Mustansir Billah (475/1083), some selected missionaries began the propagation of Ismaili faith in India (Khambhat) and they came to be called as Ismaili Bohras.

Each of the two branches of the Fatimid Ismailis further got divided into sub-sects. We shall see only the sub-sects of Musta'alavis (495/1101). After the seclusion of the 21st Musta'alavi Imam Al-Taiyeb (Taiyebis) in 528/1134, the seat of Taiyebi mission (da'wat) got transferred from Egypt to Yemen (532/1138). This transfer of command marked the commencement of the succession of missionaries known as Dai ul-Mutlaq (Dai), under the guidance of their secluded Imam. From the 25th Dai (missionary) Saiyedna Jalal (975/1568), the succession of Bohra missionaries began in Ahmedabad. The Bohras (Taiyebis) after their 26th Dai (997/1589), they got separated into two main branches viz. a) Daudi Bohras and b) Sulaimani Bohras. Later due to some internal disputes of succession, during the reign of 29th Dai Saiyedna Ali (1030/1621) in Ahmedabad, when Mughals ruled India, a minor group loyal to Saiyedna Ali got its name from him as Alavi Bohras and a major group Daudi Bohras seceded from Alavi Bohras and followed a separate line of missionaries.

The seat of Dawat was moved from Ahmedabad to Baroda during the time of their 32nd Dai in 1110/1699. 32nd Dai acted as per the will made by their 31st Dai that Alavi Bohras shall not get a

better place than Baroda to flourish and nourish and thereafter the Alavi Bohras swelled in numbers in Baroda and made it their headquarters. The series of the Dais ruled over Alavi Bohras till the present 44th Dai **Saiyedna wa Maulana Abu Hatim Taiyeb Ziyauddin** in the line of succession.

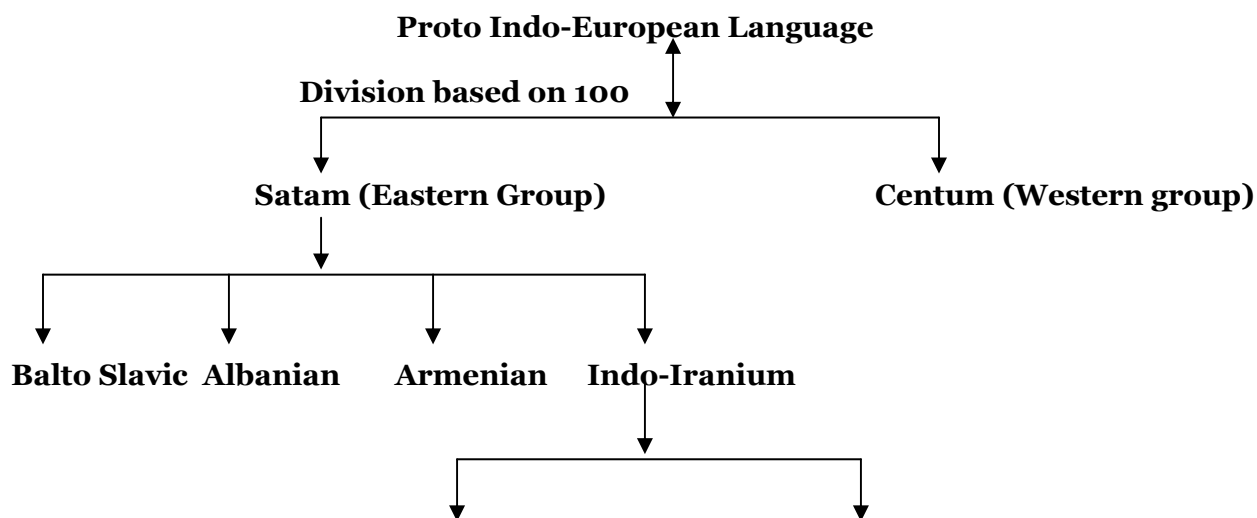
Currently Alavi Bohras are a close-knit community numbering approximately 8,000, with the majority in Baroda, Gujarat and smaller groups scattered in Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Nadiad, and other towns in India, where they have masjids and musafirkhanas.

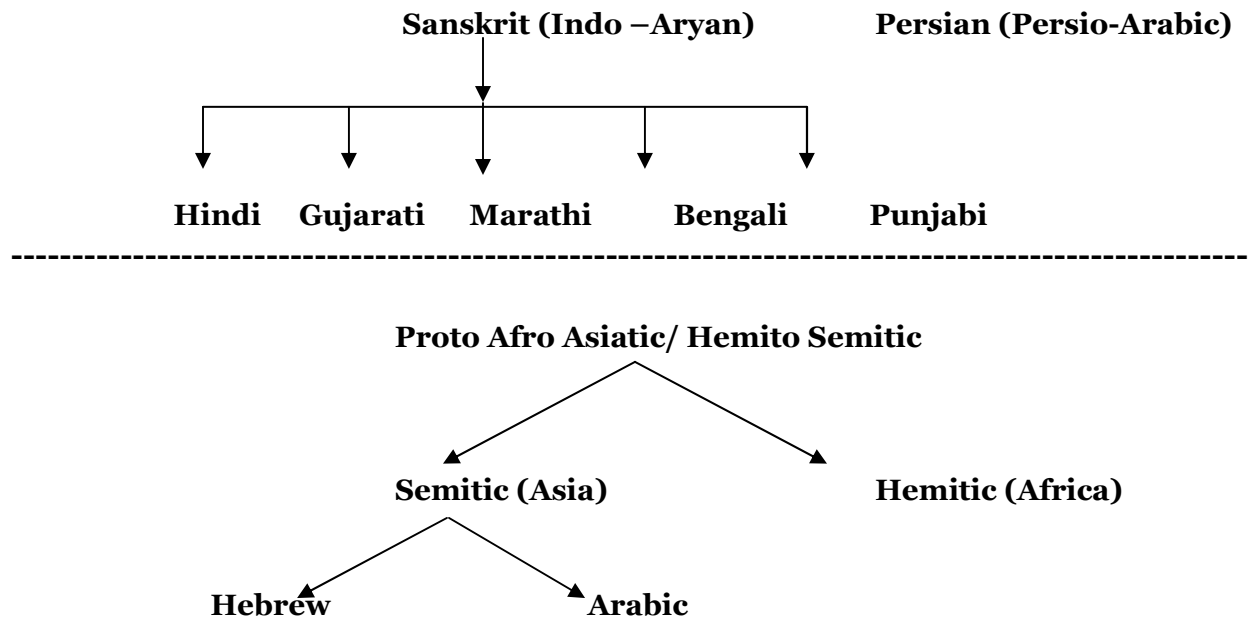
Alavi Bohras, who are mainly traders, are peace-loving and harmonious people. The word “Bohra or Vohra or Vohorwu or Vyavahar” itself indicates maintaining relations and is derived from the Gujarati word ‘Vohorwu’ or ‘Vyavahar’ which means “to trade”.

2. History: How Languages came into contact: Genealogical Classification of Languages:

A genealogical classification of languages is a classification according to their development from common ancestors. A language family is a group of languages related through descent from a common ancestor, called the proto language of that family.

We shall see the tree diagrams of the two major language families which will help us to establish the relation among the languages. The first is Proto Indo-European Language and the other is Proto Hemito-Semitic/Afro-Asiatic language families.





We shall see the contacts of the different languages from different language families into Alavi Bohra Language step by step:

i) Language Contact of Arabic and Sanskrit

As from the tree diagram above, it is clear that Arabic language is a daughter language of Proto Hemito-Semitic or Afro Asiatic Language family and Sanskrit language is a daughter language of Proto Indo-European Language family. Since both the language families prevailed at the same era so it was very obvious for the languages of these families to come into contact. So for Arabic and Sanskrit also it was obvious to come into contact.

Before the appearance of the Islam, major world religion, Arabic was a minor member of the Hemito-Semitic language family. Within a hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (632 AD), Arabic became the official language of the Muslim world empire.

Within these hundred years Islam was spread by the missionaries. Around 1000 years ago approximately during the 11th and 12th century AD (475/1083), Maulai Ahmed along with other missionaries from Egypt came to Al-Hind (old India) who brought Arabic Language with them. Maulai Ahmed met two active boys Ramnath and Roopnath, who spoke Sanskrit language. Maulai Ahmed himself learnt Sanskrit from them so that he could interact with the people. As

days passed he found that these boys were staying with their uncle and aunt (mama-mami) and were not taken care for clothes, food etc. He took these boys to Egypt with the permission of their uncle and aunt. There these boys were taught Arabic culture and Islamic rules to make them strong missionaries. Keeping Arabic Culture into mind their names were changed from ‘Ramnath’ to ‘Abdullah’ and from ‘Roopnath’ to ‘Nooruddin’ preserving the original meaning of their names.

Sanskrit	Meaning	Arabic	Meaning
‘Ramnath’	“servant of God”	‘Abdullah’	“servant of God”
‘Roopnath’	“servant of beauty”	‘Nooruddin’	“servant of beauty”

These were the two first semantic changes or similarity that prevailed between these two languages. Similarly there were also many other changes. This is how the two major world languages came into contact. During this epoch people who followed Islam and were the followers of The Fatimid Imam Al-Musta’ali were called as Musta’alians or Musta’alavi Ismailis.

ii) Language Contact of Arabic, Sanskrit with Old Gujarati (Gurjari)

Later on Maulai Ahmed, Abdullah (Ramnath) and Nooruddin (Roopnath) along with other missionaries came again to Al-Hind (old India) to spread Islam where they met hundreds of Poojaris, Aghoris, Mahatmas, Kings, common people, etc., who spoke Gurjari which is now called Gujarati using the script of Sanskrit. Many of the Poojaris, Aghoris, Mahatmas, Kings, common people embraced the religion of Islam and started speaking a language which was the amalgamation of Arabic, Sanskrit, and Gujarati. Maulai Ahmed, Abdullah (Ramnath) and Nooruddin (Roopnath) along with their missionaries and the convertants resided in Al-Hind (old India), since gradually a small community of people speaking blended language of Arabic, Sanskrit and Gujarati came into being in Gujarat near Khambat (Gulf of Cambay) and Patan. They used Arabic script for writing. This community came to be known as Bohras i.e. the people of trade and commerce with the distinct feature of making them accustomed with the local language and culture.

iii) Language Contact of Arabic, Sanskrit, Gujarati with Persian and Urdu

During the mid 16th century Mughals invaded India through the Gulf of Khambat (Cambay), since Khambat (Cambay) was the biggest port of India then. Mughals came from the land of Persia (Iran) and spoke Persian (Farsi) language. This was the period when Bohra missionaries

practiced and preached their faith openly and the local people felt their presence in Ahmedabad. Thus the blend of Arabic, Sanskrit, Gujarati and Persian now was the language of the Bohras. Also Persian art and culture amalgamated with Indian art and culture.

Invasion of Mughals arose a need of trade and commerce. New trade routes were opened between India and Persia. Along this route, Turkish also started trade and commerce. They spoke Persio-Arabic language. The amalgamation of their language with the contemporary language of India gave rise to a new language rather a link language called *Urdu* due to the mingling of Persian and Hindi. Thus it is a Pidgin language and a part of Proto Indo-European language family. Also during this era in 1621 AD, Daudi Bohras, in Ahmedabad due to the major schism of succession between the Bohras, seceded from Alavi Bohras. Thus Alavi Bohras maintained their own separate identity from the Daudi Bohras. Thus Alavi Bohras is a separate community since then, but the basic language pattern of both this Bohras remained unchanged unlike the Sulaimani Bohras who deviated to embrace Urdu as their community language.

Thus due to these reasons and migrations Alavi Bohras speak a healthy blend of Arabic, Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu, and Khojki. Khojki has an unnoticeable or minimal influence on the Bohra language and as days passed Sanskrit vocabulary also degraded due to Gujarati influence in the Bohras' Language. Alavi Bohras read, write and speak an Arabicized form (blended with Arabic vocabulary) of Gujarati language, called *Lisaan ud-Da'wat* i.e. the language of the mission, which is an amalgamation of Arabic, Urdu and Persian words and written in Arabic script.

Today these Alavi Bohras have settled in Baroda, Gujarat due to the migration and "*Ad-Dawat ul-Hadiyah ul-Alaviyah*" – the rightly guided Alavi Mission is the official headquarters of their Dai ul-Mutlaq (Spiritual and Temporal Head).

"Thus language contact, brings sometimes nothing, sometimes new words into a language, sometimes new sounds and sentence structures spreads across many languages in a large geographical region; more rarely, entirely new languages arise in a contact situation." (Appel and Muysken 1987). Hence, here we observe that due to the language contact an entirely new language is born which is neither Arabic nor Persian nor Gujarati.

We shall see a couplet as an example

1. "mohibo ibAdat karo subah-o-shAm.

arabic persian gujarati urdu
People worship do morning evening
“O people of love, worship (your lord) in morning and evening”

“ibAdat si milse fazeelat tamAm”
Persian gujarati gujarati arabic urdu
worship by to get merits all
“All merits you will get by worship”

2. “tame duniya ni daulat cho”
gujarati urdu gujarati persian gujarati
you world this wealth are
“You are the wealth of this world”

“tame uqbAA ni izzat cho”
gujarati arabic gujarati urdu gujarati
you hereafter respect are
“You are the respect of the Hereafter”

Thus from the above example of poetry written by 41st Dai in Baroda in 1335/1917, we can observe that how Alavi Bohras use a strong blend of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Gujarati. Thus it is rightly said that “Alavi Bohras read, write and speak an Arabicized form (blended with Arabic vocabulary) of Gujarati language, called *Lisaan ud-Da'wat* i.e. the language of the mission, which is an amalgamation of Arabic, Urdu and Persian words and written in Arabic script”.

Also their monthly newsletter “*Mishkaat ul-Haadi*” published by the Dawa headquarters within the community is in the language dealt above. They also have Arabic and Persian manuscripts, Urdu poetic composition in the personal dawa library. Before the migration to Baroda their last Dai i.e. 31st Dai Saiyedna Badruddin Hasan of Ahmedabad has written a poetry book named ‘Diwaan-e-Hasan’ in Arabic Language which proves that Arabic language has a larger impact on masses and it was largely accepted as a medium of expression and communication but blended with the local dialects. Their 41st Dai (Spiritual head) Saiyedna Fakhruddin have written a poetry book named ‘Diwaan-e-Haseen’ in which he wrote poetry in Arabicized Gujarati language on

variety of topics, which is in the language similar to the above examples. So these things prove that Alavi Bohras speak a healthy blend of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Gujarati Languages.

Let us now see the interaction of these languages more nearly and the affects of their contact.

3. Sound Change and Semantic Change:

In this section we shall see the sound and semantic changes in a lexicon due to the language contact. There are also syntactical changes but due to the time constraints we are not dealing here.

i) Sound Change/Phonological change

Sound change is the most studied area in Historical Linguistics. Sound tends to change over the time and due to contacts with other languages. Sound change also helps to determine whether the languages are related and also in other methods.

Let us see some examples.

Standard Gujarati	Bohra	Meaning
i) pankho	fankho	“fan”
ii) aapo	aalo	“give”

In the example i, as we can see the sound /p/ in ‘pankho’ meaning “fan” changes to sound /f/ in ‘fankho’ meaning “fan”. This change has come due to the interaction of Arabic and Persian, since both the languages don’t have sound /p/. Similar is the case with the example ii.

Let us see the other examples.

Standard Gujarati	Bohra	Meaning
iii) vAL	bAl	“hair”
iv) maL	mil	“meet”
v) vadaL	vadal	“cloud”
vi) kangaL	kangal	“poor”

vii) kAraN	kAran	“reason”
viii) AngaN	Angan	“courtyard”
ix) pahAD	pahAr	“mountaion”
x) dahAD	dahAr	“lions roar”
xi) soDam	soram	“smell”
xii) kadvAS	kadvas	“bitterness”
xiii) mithAS	mithAs	“sweetness”
xiv) Su	su	“what”

In the example iii, we can see the retroflex sound /L/ in vaL meaning “hair” changes to alveolar /l/ in bal meaning “hair”. Similar is the case in the iv, v and vi examples.

In example vii, the retroflex sound /N/ in ‘kAran’ meaning “reason” changes to alveolar sound /n/ in ‘kAran’ meaning “reason”. Similar is the case in example viii.

In example ix, the retroflex sound /D/ in ‘pahAD’ meaning “mountain” changes to alveolar sound /r/ in ‘pahAr’ meaning “mountain”. Similar is the case in examples x and xi.

In example xii, the post alveolar sound /S/ in ‘kadvAS’ meaning “bitterness” changes to alveolar sound /s/ in ‘kadvAs’ meaning “bitterness”. Similar is the case in example xiii and xiv.

From the above examples iii to xiv, we can observe that all the retroflex and post alveolar sounds in Standard Gujarati changes to alveolar sounds in Bohra Language. This change is again due to the contact of Arabic and Persian, as the later languages does not possess retroflex and post alveolar sounds, thus they are changed to alveolar sounds in Bohra language.

Rule: retroflex and post alveolar → alveolar/elsewhere.

From example i to xiv, we can observe, though they have borrowed words from Gujarati Language, the words are themselves blended with Arabic and Persian. Thus Bohras use Arabisized form of Gujarati Language.

Let us see some more examples.

Standard Gujarati	Bohra	Meaning
xv) batan	butam	“button”
xvi) cap	cop	“cup”
xvii) barAbar	barobar	“proper”

In example xv, the mid vowel shwa /a/ in ‘batan’ meaning “button” changes to close-mid vowel /u/ in ‘butam’ meaning “button” when followed by a stop. Similar is the case in example xvi.

In example xvii, the open vowel /A/ in ‘barAbar’ meaning “proper” changes to close-mid vowel /o/ in ‘barobar’ meaning “proper” when followed by a stop.

Means if the open and mid-vowels are followed by a stop/plosive sound, it changes to close-mid vowels.

Rule: open/mid-vowel → close-mid vowel/followed by a stop.

Consider some other examples

Standard Gujarati	Bohra	Meaning
xviii) kem	kim	“why”
xix) em	im	“.....thats why”
xx) namak	nimak	“salt”
xxi) maL	mil	“meet”
xxii) saL	sil	“mark”
xxiii) ketla	kitla	“how many/much”
xxiv) etla	itla	“this much”
xxv) jetla	jitla	“this much”

In example xviii, the close-mid vowel /e/ in 'kem' meaning "why" changes to close vowel /i/ in 'kim' meaning "why". Similar is the case in the example xix, that close mid vowel changes to close vowel when followed by nasal sound /m/.

In example xx, mid vowel /a/ of 'namak' meaning "salt" changes to close vowel /i/ in 'nimak' meaning "salt" when followed by the nasal sound /m/.

Also in example xxi, mid vowel /a/ of 'maL' meaning "meet" changes to close vowel /i/ in 'mil' meaning "meet" when followed by the alveolar sound /l/. Similar is the case in example xxii.

Means if the close-mid and mid vowels are followed by nasal sound /m/ and alveolar sound /l/, it changes to close vowels.

Similarly in example xxiii, the close-mid vowel /e/ in 'ketla' meaning "how many/much" changes to close vowel /i/ in 'kitla' meaning "how many/much". Similar is the case in the example xxiv and xxv.

Thus close-mid and mid vowel changes to close vowel when followed by nasal sound /m/ and alveolar sound /l/ and /t/.

Rule: close-mid vowel/mid vowel → close vowel/followed by /m/ and alveolar /l/ and /t/.

Thus from example xv to xxv, we can observe that the open vowels tend to move towards the close vowels leaving an impact on the Gujarati lexicons.

Let us see some other examples.

Standard Gujarati	Bohra	Meaning
xxvi) kyare	kivare	"when"
xxvii) tyare	tivare	"at this time/then"
xxviii) jyare	jivare	"at that time/then"

In the example xxvi, the consonant sounds /k/ and /y/ of 'kyare' meaning "when" are separated by the vowel sound /i/ and consonant sound /v/ is also infixed in 'kivare' meaning "when". Infixation is a morphological process whereby a bound morpheme attaches within a root or stem. The kind of affix involved in this process is called an infix. Infixation is a very common process in Arabic Language. Similar is the case in examples xxvii and xxviii.

A distinctive feature of the Semitic languages is trilateral or triconsonantal root, composed of three consonants separated by vowels. The basic meaning of a word is expressed by the consonants, and different shades of this basic meaning are indicated by vowel changes. So may be this distinctive feature of Semitic languages is affecting the Gujarati words in example xvi, xvii, and xviii.

Thus this distinctive feature may also be responsible for the vowel changes in examples xvi to xviii.

Hence from example i to xxviii, we can observe that although they have borrowed words from Gujarati language, there is an impact of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Language due to the Language Contact. Also we can say that these language contacts are affecting the Gujarati Language internally.

ii) Semantic Change and Semantic borrowing.

a) Semantic Change

Semantic change is a change in one of the meanings of a word. It is also a studied area in Historical Linguistics.

Let us see an example.

	Standard Gujarati	Meaning	Bohra	Meaning
i)	rasoi	"to cook"	pakAvvu	"to cook/to ripen"
	pakAvvu	"to ripen"	pakAvvu	"to cook/to ripen"

In the above example, in standard Gujarati ‘rasoi’ meaning “to cook” and ‘pakavvu’ means “to ripen” and in Bohra Language they use ‘pakavvu’ in both the cases “to cook” and “to ripen”. ‘pakna’ which means “to cook” as well as “to ripe” in Urdu language. Here the meaning of “to ripe” is extended metaphorically. Thus it is used metaphorically. Metaphor in semantic change involves extensions in the meaning of a word that suggest a semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one. Thus due to the contact of Urdu language and metaphorical extension they have dropped the word ‘rasoi’ meaning “to cook” and have adopted the word ‘pakAvvu’ meaning “to cook/to ripe” to explain both the senses cook and ripe.

Similar is the case in the example below.

Standard Gujarati	Meaning	Bohra	Meaning
ii) who (nominative)	“I (nominative)”	me (nominative)	“I (nominative)”
me (ergative)	“I (ergative)”	me (ergative)	“I (ergative)”

In the example ii, like in example i, in Gujarati language ‘who (nominative)’ meaning “I” and ‘me (ergative)’ meaning “I” but in Bohra Language they use ‘me’ meaning “I” in both the cases. Also in Urdu Language “mE” and in Persian Language “man” meaning “I” is used in both the cases. Thus due to the contact of Urdu and Persian language and metaphorical extension they have dropped the word ‘who’ meaning “I” and have adopted the word ‘me’ meaning “I” to explain both the senses I (nominative) and I (ergative).

Thus from example i and ii, we can observe the impact of Urdu and Persian language on Gujarati Language through metaphorical extension.

b) Semantic borrowing

Semantic borrowing is a process of borrowing the entire semantic meaning from a language. Means a word is borrowed from a language which is exactly similar in meaning. Semantic borrowing occurs when two or more languages come into contact.

Let us see some of the examples of semantic borrowing

Standard Gujarati	Borrowed word	Meaning
i) bhikari	fakir (Arabic)	“beggar”

ii)	ghar	makAn (Arabic)	“house”
iii)	sandeSo	pegAm (Persian)	“message”
iv)	salah	nasihat (Arabic)	“advice”
v)	icchA	khwais (Persian)	“wish”
vi)	copri	kitab (Urdu)	“book”

Thus from the above examples i to vi, we can observe the Bohras speak the semantic borrowed words from the Arabic, Persian and Urdu Language.

Hence Bohras use a particular form of Gujarati language permeated with Arabic, some Persian words, and some Urdu words and write in the Arabic script called as *lisan ud-dawat*. So Alavi Bohra Language is also called as *Lisan ud-Dawat* language.

4. Conclusion:

As from the section 2 and 3 of the paper we have observed that Alavi Bohra Language or Lisan ud-daawat Language is a blend of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Gujarati. Thus we can rightly say that “Alavi Bohras read, write and speak an Arabicized form (blended with Arabic vocabulary) of Gujarati language, called *Lisaan ud-Da'wat* i.e. the language of the mission, which is an amalgamation of Arabic, Urdu and Persian words and written in Arabic script” or It is a form of Gujarati language permeated with Arabic, some Persian words, and some Urdu words and write in the Arabic script called as *lisan ud-dawat*.

We have also observed that how the language contact of different languages affects the Gujarati Language. Sometimes, rather in a very rarer case Gujarati Language affects the other three languages.

Let us see the following examples.

Contact Languages	Gujarati	Meaning
i) izzat (Arabic)	ijjat	“respect”

In above example the sound alveolar sound /z/ in ‘izzat’ meaning “respect” changes to palatal sound /j/ in ‘ijjat’ as Gujarati language does not have alveolar sound /z/, it only has palatal

sound /j/ and /jh/ (aspirated). But Gujarati affects the other three languages minutely or very little. So we can also assume these effects as an exception

It is very obvious that when the languages come into contact, each language is affected, but here Gujarati is the most affected language in the formation of the Alavi Bohra Language.

There is also a religious factor which also leaves an impact of Gujarati Language. It is assumed in our society that Sanskrit is the language of Hindus and Arabic is the language of Islam (Muslims), so maybe they retain the Arabic, Persian, Urdu rules and words affecting the Gujarati Language.

Thus we also see “Indo-European and Afro-asiatic bear a stronger affinity, both in their phonological systems and in their vocabularies, then could possibly have been produced by accident – so strong, indeed, that no linguist could examine them without believing them to have sprung from a common source.” (Bomhard, Allan R.1984:2).

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