

HINDI-HINDUSTANI CONTROVERSY IN LITERARY AND POLITICAL SPHERES IN THE 1930s

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ABSTRACT

“IN THE 19TH CENTURY, AS MOVEMENT, HINDI-URDU CONTROVERSY WAS ON ITS PEAK. ONE GROUP WAS SUPPORTING THE HINDI AND OTHER GROUP (MAINLY HINDU KAYASTHAS AND MUSLIMS) WERE SUPPORTING URDU. THE FIGHT FOR LANGUAGE WAS NOT ONLY POLITICAL BUT ALSO ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS. WHEN COLONIAL GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO SUPORT HINDI, THEN KAYASTHAS AND MUSLIMS WERE HARASSED MORE. AFTER THE ENTRY OF GANDHI IN INDIAN POLITICS/FREEDOM STRUGGLE, THEN THE ISSUE OF LANGUAGE BECAME MORE POLITICAL. GANDHI WAS MOR INCLINED TOWARDS HINDUSTANI. HE FORMED THE HINDUSTANI PRACHAR SAMITI FOR THE PROMOTION OF HISDUSTANI. MANY LEADERS OF CONGRESS WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN LANGUAGE POLITICS. MANY LEADERS, WHO HAD VERY GOOD KNOWLEDEGE OF PERSIANISED URDU, BUT THEY WERE IN SUPPORT OF HINDI. EVEN MADAN MOHAN MALVIYA HAD GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF PERSIANISED URDU, BUT IN THE HINDI-URDU CONTROVERSY, MALVIYA WAS IN SUPPORT OF URDU.”

KEY WORDS – HINDI, URDU, HINDUSTANI, GANDHI, MALVIYA, CONGRESS.

In India, Language was one of the most important concerns of Indian reformists during the 19th century. It was the primary constituent in their discourse of reform movement and progress. On this issue, many researches have already done.¹ Language controversy arose in 19th century India, it was the debate that whether the Urdu or the Hindi should be chosen as a national language. Throughout the freedom struggle and even after independence, this issue is still not solved. Hindi and Urdu are mutually understandably and well spoken language in India and to some extent they are sometimes registers different dialects and sometimes considered as ‘Hindustani’. Nut they are written on different scripts, Hindi in Devanagri script and Urdu in Persian Script. But modern standard Hindi and Urdu are literary the forms of the Dehlavi dialect of Hindustani.

The persianised version of Urdu was core on the surface during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and Mughal Sultanate (1526-1858). In South India, it was known as Dakkani. In northern India, it became popular with other terms, such as, Hindi, Hindavi and Hindustani.

¹ Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1974; Bernard Cohn, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command,” in R. Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1985, pp. 276-329.; David Lelyveld, “The Fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of a National Language”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct., 1993), pp. 665-682; C.R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts. The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay 1994.

For the role of Fort William College in providing the initial framework and spur to linguistic and literary re-definition of the two vernaculars, see R.S. McGregor, “Bengal and the Development of Hindi, 1850-1880”, *South Asian Review*, 5, 2, 1972, and Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: In Account of the College of Fort William*, Orion Publications, Calcutta 1978.

The conflict over the superiority of Hindi and Urdu reflected in nineteenth century colonial India, when religious identities were began to utilized in the capturing of administrative posts. A division developed, one group began to support Hindi and other group began to support Urdu.

Paul R. Brass wrote in his book, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*,

“The Hindi-Urdu controversy by its very bitterness demonstrates how little the objective similarities between language groups matter when people attach subjective significance to their languages. Willingness to communicate through the same language is quite a different thing from the mere ability to communicate.”²

In many ways, this controversy was a culmination of the processes to politicize the languages and for colonial government, it was a tool to spread communalism and to use it as a divide and rule Policy. It represented the culmination of the institutionalization of Hindi and endeavored to establish it as the public language of India as a state language. (*rajbhasha*) and also national language (*rastrabhasha*). It also marked the crystallization of Hindi nationalist discourse with its historical consciousness and rigid linguistic distortions. He asserted the sole authority of a literary association like the Hindi Sahitya Samman³ (1910) as the final judge on the question of language. The controversy exposed the tensions of Hindi self-assertion when dealing with other issues and claims, as well as between literary and political authority. Not only did literary authorities find it difficult to switch to any other approach when they turned not to colonial government but to their own national institution, Congress (1885); Leaders in Congress also found it difficult to make their voices heard. These three perspectives will be our guides in unraveling the significance of the controversy for the development of the Hindi public and its consequences for the fate of Hindi in independent India.

The need for decisive support from Congress to bring Hindi to national language status seemed to be fulfilled when a triumphant Mahatma Gandhi (1868-1948) sat in the presidential seat at the eighth Hindi-Sahitya collective meeting in Indore in 1918.⁴ It seemed perfectly embodied in the overarching goal of proposing a Hindi propaganda plan in the south; For this, he provided the financial and political blessing, while the HSS provided the human resources and expertise.⁵ In the following years, propaganda in the south, especially in Madras, turned out to be the most sensational undertaking of the HSS and, along with the examination, the most successful.⁶

² Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1974, p. 57.

³ Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was established on 1 May 1910 under the aegis of Nagari Pracharini Sabha. On May 1, 1910, in a meeting of Kashi Nagri Pracharini Sabha, Varanasi, it was decided to organize a Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. According to this decision, the first conference was held in Varanasi on October 10, 1910 under the chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. The proposal to hold the second conference at Prayag was accepted and in 1911 the second conference was held in Allahabad under the chairmanship of Pandit Govind Narayan Mishra. Like the freedom movement, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan is a witness to the language movement and a symbol of national pride and pride. This organization produced high quality books (especially those related to humanities) in Hindi. People like Gandhiji also joined it. He presided over the conference at Indore in 1917.

⁴ Already mentioned in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in which Gandhi expressed himself against English and in favour of Hindi as the national language of India. After he spoke in Hindi at the Congress Session in Lucknow in 1916, Tandon invited him to preside the 8th HSS meeting in Indore, 1935. The huge crowd welcomed him at the station, the enthusiasm of volunteers who carried Gandhi's carriage on their shoulders, the official parade with elephants and horses through the streets of the city, the great tent for ten thousand people, the long and loud clapping when Gandhi took the presidential seat all marked a massive public celebration of both Gandhi and Hindi. The meeting also provided for several Hindi literary people the first occasion to hear and meet Gandhi in prison for a description and report on the proceedings, see *Sammelan patrika*, Vol. 8-9 (March-May 1918), pp. 181-206.

⁵ Gandhi suggested first Purushottamdas Tandon and then the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan to set up Hindi teaching classes and instructing Hindi teachers from the South. Before presenting his plan in front of the assembly he had secured the financial help of the Maharaja of Indore, who donated Rs. 10,000, and more were promised by other patrons. *ibid.*, pp. 199-202.

However, Gandhi's conception of Hindi, also an ideological construct, differed significantly from Sammelan's: for him too, Hindi was supposed to replace English, but it was also the village language of India, a spoken language, that frustrated literacy and shares the script,

“I cannot find the softness I find in village speech either in the way our Muslim brothers speak in Lucknow or pandits speak in Prayag. The best language is one which common people can understand; everyone understands village speech.”⁷

Although the congregation tacitly accepted his definition, probably too fortunate to have found such an influential and popular patron,⁸ this opinion completely contradicted the fifty years of public efforts by Hindi in the Hindu press and literary institutions, in the least on the part of the Collective.

In fact, when controversy erupted after Gandhi was again invited to the 24th HSS meeting (Indore, 1935) to make popular Hindi and make Hindi's claim in the Congress (1885) and make HSS a popular organization.⁹ Gandhi's language policy was very ambiguous for many. In 1918, when Gandhi was writing in Hindi, he also emphasized on Hindustani too.

Judging by their extreme reactions, most Hindu intellectuals felt threatened in their *raison d'etre* for being and their lifelong mission. *Sudha's* editor spoke of the Sammelan's pro-Muslim attempt to "kill Hindi" in January 1936. The editor predicted, in a highly charged note replete with sepulchral metaphors, that all Hindi literature

According to Kaka Kalelkar's remembrances, Tandon was sceptic about the plan initially, but he accepted when Gandhi told him with emphasis that the Sammelan should otherwise withdraw its claim that Hindi can be the national language of India, or he should resign from secretary of the Sammelan.

Kaka Kalelkar, "Rastrabhasa-prachar: Gandhiji aur Tandanji ka sahyog", in *Gandhi-tandan-smrti-ank, Sammelan patrika*, LV, 3-4 (June-December 1969), p. 25.

⁶ Some youth were sent from the South to Allahabad for training, and from Gandhi's ashram Harihar was sent to Madras to set up Hindi classes. Gandhi also sent his younger son Devdas and the experienced preacher Swami Satyadeva. In a time period of eighteen years six lakhs South Indians were taught Hindi and nearly four thousand appeared in special examinations, six hundred teachers were trained, who were working in 450 centres, see Gandhi's speech at 24th Indore HSS, 1935, quoted *ibid.*, p. 130.

However, propaganda work in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh was not as same as in other provinces of India.

⁷ 'Hindu preachers and Muslim preachers gave speeches in Hindi throughout Colonial India and illiterate people understood them' he wrote in 'Kya Angreji Rastrabhasa ho sakti hai?' (translation of a Gujarati article), in *Sammelana patrika*, V, 10 (June-July 1918), p. 227.

⁸ Gandhi's presidentship of the HSS seemed to put Hindi more immediately in the Congress agenda, and at the following Sammelan meeting in Bombay (April 1919), presided by Madan Mohan Malaviya for the second time, an unprecedented number of nationalist leaders attended: apart from Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu Rajendra Prasad, K.R. Iyengar, Jamunadas Dvarkadas, Rajagopalachari, Avantibhai Gokhale, and others all put up an appearance. Rajendra Prasad invited the next HSS meeting at Patna (March 1920).

⁹ Throughout the 1920s we find complaints about the inefficiency, inactivity and inner squabbles of the Sammelan, all of which left little time or energy for anything else. Tandon, who was the secretary of the Sammelan for the first ten years, moved to Lahore from 1925 to 1929 to work for the Punjab National Bank; this allowed a rival faction, comprising Ramjilal Sharma, Laksmidhar Vajpeyi and other book-publishers, to gain control of the managing committee and the main posts: the remarkable growth of the HSS examinations was very profitable for publishers if their text-books were included in the syllabus. In 1927 the Ramjilal Sharma led managing committee tried to take control of the Madras branch and launched a defamation campaign against Harihar Sharma to take over the office property. But Malaviya's intervention restored it to Gandhi, to whom he had entrusted it as president of the 9th HSS (Bombay, 1919). It is only Banarsidas Chaturvedi, who had a penchant for language controversies, who reveals the scheme and gives some names; all other accounts either speak of a 'painful incident' or do not mention it at all; see *Vital Bharat*, I, pt. 1, 4, April 1928, pp. 457 ff. The furious factionalism, as it was called in the press (glossing over details), lasted for over a decade; Ramjilal Sharma himself died in 1931. 'Election Sammelans' like the 20th in Calcutta in May 1931 were reduced to a squabble over managing posts and a public ritual of speeches and 'lifeless resolutions'.

see editorial note in *Madhuri*, DC, p. 2, 4, May 1931, p. 603.

would have to be cremated because none fit into Gandhi's Hindustani framework.¹⁰ We can read several motives behind Hindi intellectuals' opposition to Gandhi's emphasis on spoken language and their own emphasis on written form. For starters, they believed that for rastrabhasa's honour, status, and thus literature and a high idiom, were more important than popularity.

Literature expresses the cultural character and ancestry of Hindi; it was also his main way of asserting himself and expressing his own nationalism through "useful" literature, the curriculum, the making of a canon, and so on. From this perspective, the fact that the leaders of Congress neglected such literary endeavors and were, in fact, considered ignorant of Hindi literature, turned out to be deeply humiliating and suspicious. The linguistic controversy took the form of a struggle for authority: should it be with national politicians or with Hindu "experts"?

The Congress objective was to seize the Sammelan and control Hindi propaganda in order to strengthen its own power.¹¹ As a result, after the Indore Sammelan (1935), Congress officials and activists went to Sammelan gatherings to hold the posts.¹²

The Hindi world split into two groups, each with its own set of intellectuals and activists fighting for separate causes. Apart from Congressmen like Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963), J.L. Nehru (1889-1964), Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982), Kaka Kalelkar¹³ (Dattatreya Balkrishna Kalelkar, 1885-1981), C. Rajagopalachari (10 December 1878 – 25 December 1972), Pandit Sundarlal (1881-1940), Jannalal Bajaj (1889-1942), intellectuals of mixed Indo-Persian culture like Premchand (Dhanpat Rai, 1880-1936) or Dr Tarachand (1888-?), or those who followed Gandhi and did not feel strongly about the issue anyway, like Jainendra Kumar or Raykrishnadas¹⁴ (1904-1988), were among the Hindustani camp's intellectual.¹⁵

There were Hindi politicians like Purushottam Das Tandon (1882-1961), Dr Sampurnanand¹⁶ (1 January 1891 – 10 January 1969), V. N. Tivari, and Balkrishna Sharma¹⁷ 'Navin' (1896-1960) in the Hindi camp, as well as

¹⁰ The article went on saying that because of his pious wishes, poor Hindi would have to discard its polished vest to put on a rustic, half-Muslim costume in order to fulfil its aim. But how could Hindi, Sanskrit's daughter and the language of cow-protecting, non violent image-worshippers who considered India their only land ever come to terms with the ever-communalist language of cow eating image-destroyers, who considered Arabia and Iran their motherland, and whose foreign culture was violent, brutal and always -longing back to a Muslim empire? Luckily a few patriots like Dr Savarkar were pointing to the right solution, i.e. to stop trying vainly to woe Muslims. Editorial 'Sahitya-sammelan aur hindi ki Hatya', *Sudha*, EX, pt. 1, 6, January 1936, pp. 692-3.

¹¹ At the Nagpur Sammelan of 1936 Gandhi launched a new institution for Hindi propaganda in central India, the Rastrabhasa Prachar Sabha, to be housed in Wardha. After the take-over of the Sammelan failed, Gandhi preferred to start an autonomous organisation for propaganda in the South, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha; see Ramdhan Simh 'Dinkar', 'Hindl-hindustani vivad', in *Gandhi-tandan smrti ahk*, pp. 36

¹² In May 1936, Rajendra Prasad presided the 25th HSS meeting in Nagpur, while Kaka Kalelkar presided the welcome committee, and in April Gandhi inaugurated the new Sammelan library in Allahabad. Young Ajneya, who was attending a Sammelan meeting for the first time and reported the proceedings at Nagpur for *Vital Bharat*, remarked that 'the first thing to disturb me was that the "All-India Hindi Sahitya Sammelan" was neither an all-Indian nor a literary meeting. The atmosphere there was political rather than literary'. What he meant by it, he explained, was not Rajendra Prasad's speech but the atmosphere of intrigue and the presence of political activists rather than literary personalities.

Ajneya, 'Sammelan mein kya dekha, suna aur socha', *Visal bharat*, XVIII, 1, June 1926, p. 674.

¹³ Popularly known as Kaka Kalelkar, was an Indian independence activist, social reformer, journalist and an eminent follower of the philosophy and methods of Mahatma Gandhi.

¹⁴ Jainendra's higher education took place in Banaras Hindu University. In 1921 he left the university and came to Delhi with the aim of participating in the non-cooperation movement of the Congress. He also stayed in Lala Lajpat Rai's 'Tilak School of Politics' for some time, but eventually left that too.

¹⁵ Kishoridas Vajpeyi, *Sahityik jivan ke anubhav aur samsmaran*, Himalay Agency, Kankhal, 1953, p. 83.

¹⁶ He was a teacher and politician in Uttar Pradesh, India. He served as the second Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh from 1954 to 1960; participated in the Non-cooperation Movement; edited *Maryada*, a Hindi monthly staffed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in Benaras, contributed frequently to the *National Herald* and the *Congress Socialist*; was elected to the All-India Congress Committee in 1922, became provincial Minister for Education in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet, federal Minister from 1946 to 1951 and from 1951 to 1954, holding

those who believed that Hindi had the strength to be open and accommodating, such as Siva Prasad Gupta¹⁸ (28 June 1883 – 24 April 1944), Baburao Visnu Pararkar (1883-1955), Suryakant Tripathi "Nirala" (21 February 1896 – 15 October 1961), and Ramvilas Sharma (10 October 1912 – 30 May 2000); those who subscribed to Hindi-Hindu history and believed it was now time for Hindi to rule, Despite existing conflicts among Hindi supporters about the language policy and the authority of the previous HSS meeting, they reacted defensively to the take-over attempt.

Between 1938 and 1941, at HSS sessions in Shimla, Banaras, and Abohar, there were raging disputes and a successful attempt by Hindi supporters to reclaim leadership of the organisation.¹⁹ What national Congress officials, who were primarily pro-Hindustani, failed to recognise was how important the question of Hindi self-determination was to the Hindi public sphere, and how far the Hindi language had already been institutionalized.

Furthermore, by fighting on the terrain of a Hindi organisation, they had to contend with the public's and press's cultural internality. In reality, Congressman V.N. Tivari, former Chief Whip of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, wrote a series of articles in support of Hindi in 1939-40 that were pivotal in sustaining Hindi's claim in the political sphere and disturbing the Realpolitik of other Congress officials.²⁰ Finally, Amarnath Jha, Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University and president of the Abohar session of the Sammelan, used his academic authority to settle the internal squabble in favour of Hindi and reaffirm Hindi's claim to be India's national language.²¹ The triumph in the Hindi language The end of a possible Hindi-Hindustani compromise was marked by the HSS, which reasserted the authority of experts and the method of committees in dealing with the language issue.²²

portfolios such as education, finance, and home labour; and, became Governor of Rajasthan from April 1962 to April 1967.

¹⁷ Naveen was the poet of Dwivedi era. The tone of devotion-feeling, national-love and rebellion has come prominently in his poems. He composed poetry in Khari Boli Hindi with the influence of Brajhasha. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1960 in the field of literature and education.

¹⁸ He was a visionary, philanthropist, a leader of the Indian Freedom Movement and the founder of the Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth. Though belonging to a very wealthy industrialist and "Jamindar" family, he devoted his entire life to actively participate, assist and give financial aid to the various movements of the freedom struggle. He was a close associate and friend of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya and all the other nationalist leaders,

¹⁹ The story of those momentous sessions has been retold with ample details in Hindi sources. At the XXVII Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Simla in 1938 the debate raged furiously for three days. On the fourth, Srinarayan Chaturvedi of the Hindi camp staged a successful attempt to regain control by having a list of pro-Hindi names accepted for the managing committee, with the tacit support of P.D. Tandon and B.V. Pararkar, the appointed president; K. Vajpeyi, 'Hindi ganga ke bhagirath', in *Gandhi- Tandon-smrti-ank*, pp. 210-1.

At the next session in Benares (December 1939), presided by Ambikaprasad Vajpeyi, with Rajendra Prasad and Kaka Kalelkar present here, V Narayan Tiwari gave a powerful speech against Hindustani. Tandon assured the audience that the Nagari script would not be tampered with, and even Rajendra Prasad declared that Hindi would not be wronged.

Devdutt Shukla, *Sampadak ke pachis vars*, Kalyan Mandir, Allahabad 1956, p. 104.

²⁰ See e.g. V.N. Tivari, "Hindi banam Urdu", *Sudhd*, XII, pt. 2, 1, February 1939, pp. 3-5.

²¹ Although he became the member of HSS for one year, Amarnath Jha (Professor of English and Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University) was elected as president instead of Rajendra Prasad. In his speech, Jha emphatically upheld the original goal of HSS : "to spread Devanagari script all over the country and to try to make Hindi the national language". In this light, the Hindi-Hindustani definition was 'unnecessary': everyone knew that Hindustani was an artificial creation, and Hindi descended directly from Sanskrit. He *personally* liked Urdu poetry, but that did not detract from the fact that Hindi and Urdu literature breathed two different atmospheres; *Abahar XXX Hindi sahitya sammelan ka visisht vivaran*, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad 1941, pp. 19-23.

K. Vajpeyi, *Sahityik Jivan ke Anubhav*, p. 86.

²² Kaka Kalelkar chaired Lipi-Vistar-Parisad had, tried this avenue, and the grammar committee headed by PD Tandon, who worked out fanciful grammatic changes, which included abolishing gender for verbal forms and making all words ending in consonant masculine. quoted in *Sudhd*, X, pt. 2, 4, May 1937, p. 359.

To recapitulate, in the minds of nationalists working to gain independence for the country, the debate over Hindi-Hindustani may have looked insignificant. However, it was an issue that concerned the Hindi sphere's own existence and growth to that point.

As a result, impassioned 'rational' discussions over minor questions of style and history reveal a broader and deeper fear of Hindi intellectuals' authority within the nationalist movement and in the future state. Hindi enthusiasts and intellectuals believed they had earned the right to claim Hindi as the national language and themselves as accepted authority as a result of their long-term efforts. The Congress's support for Hindustani seemed to contradict all of this.

Hindi's victory in the Sammelan, however, was a paradoxical success, one that would be repeated in the Constituent Assembly and foreshadowed Hindi's future role in independent India. First and foremost, it was a victory that refused to compromise with other subjects and only accepted them as second-class citizens inside the Hindi-Hindu cultural mainstream. In this regard, Hindi supporters continued their campaign of distinct self-determination that they had begun with the colonial authorities.

They asserted their authority over Congress in a way that would have been impossible with the Colonial government- by claiming a hegemonic space for Hindi over Hindustani and Urdu - and yet, by pursuing such an exclusive language as their national language, they further weakened its chances of truly replacing English as the nation's language. Their faith in their own speech and the letter of the law kept them from recognising Hindi's structural flaws (and the strengths of English). In this way, Hindi's fate was similar to that of Hindi politicians like Purushottam Das Tandon (1882-1961), Dr Sampurnanand (1 January 1891 – 10 January 1969), in that its power remained provincial.

The Hindi win was also a victory for the Sammelan; it bolstered its power and that of its hardline linguistic policy in the Hindi literary realm at the expense of other, more flexible positions. It was an unavoidable consequence of the nineteenth-century process of institutionalisation and cultural self-assertion. The Sammelan was able to galvanise Hindi literary individuals and create public momentum with the cry of "Hindi in peril" in the heat of the moment, but it did not mean it would become more receptive to voices from the literary public realm. As a result of their status as heads of academic institutions and publishers of textbooks, they have become mini-powerhouses.

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