WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HINDUSTANI?
LANGUAGE POLITICS IN LATE COLONIAL INDIA

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Richard Forster

Thesis Committee:
Ned Bertz, Chairperson
Peter H. Hoffenberg
Miriam Sharma
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During that summer of 2011, I spent so much time in the Private Papers section of the archive (actually mostly entirely alone but for the staff and piles and piles of index books and file folders) that when it was finally time leave I almost felt I had become one of the family, or at least an item of furniture. I am grateful to all of the staff of the Private Papers, but especially to Anu, for making me feel so welcome and doing so much to assist me in my often beleaguered efforts. Also, thanks to Mukesh for always smiling so often, and to Kishan for smiling so rarely but so avidly when he did.

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A Note Regarding Transliteration

Hindi is transliterated according to the system employed in R. S. McGregor’s Outline of Hindi Grammar, while Urdu follows that of Ruth Laila Schmidt’s Urdu: An Essential Grammar. Exceptions include commonly known Indian words and names such as “Hindi,” “Hindustani,” or “Gandhi” where such a guide to proper pronunciation is unlikely to be necessary. Quotations employing Romanized words from Hindi and Urdu are, of course, reproduced as they appear in the original.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Ever since its inception the Congress has kept itself meticulously free of the communal taint. It has thought always in terms of the whole nation and has acted accordingly.” Such was the claim made by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in the course of his famous “Quit India” speech at a meeting of the All India Congress Committee in Bombay on August 8, 1942. The following thesis interrogates this claim as it considers the question enunciated in its title: whatever happened to Hindustani? It finds, in short, that Gandhi’s claims regarding the secular credentials of Congress, however noble and optimistic, were not an accurate reflection of the realities on the ground, or in the hearts and minds of many key Congress leaders. The decision to effectively privilege the majority Hindu community by designating Sanskritic Hindi as the official language of the independent Indian Union, though influenced by the horrors of Partition and the adoption of Urdu by the state of Pakistan, was the result of tendencies present among the Congress leadership well before Partition and even the earliest calls for a separate Muslim state. Elements of the politics of Hindutva (or “Hindu-ness”) as openly espoused in a more extreme form by the Hindu Mahasabha were, in fact, present in the sense of a Hindu cultural identity that had comprised a significant dimension in the nationalism of certain Congress leaders for decades. The power of language as both a symbol and vehicle of cultural identity, and as both a mobilizing yet polarizing factor in anti-colonial nationalism was to have tragic consequences in South Asia.

The post-colonial history of the subcontinent has been fraught with Hindu-Muslim communal tensions that have periodically deteriorated into violent conflict. The ongoing
divergence of Hindi and Urdu as languages associated with these communities continues to play a part through symbolizing and reinforcing perceived differences between these putative communities and traditions. In India, where communal violence has in recent decades occasionally taken the form of state-sponsored (or at the very least state-complicit) episodes of localized ethnic cleansing, the movement to purify the national language of supposedly foreign elements acquires a particularly fatal gravity. Although the worst episodes of communal violence in recent decades may have erupted at the instigation - if not under the administration of - political parties who have openly endorsed a Hindutva agenda, this thesis demonstrates that even the supposedly secular tradition of the Congress party has been subject to strong currents of barely concealed Hindu nationalism.

Despite long-standing Congress policy that the national language of India should be Hindustani in both Devanagari and Urdu scripts and Gandhi’s affirmation of the secular credentials of the Congress, in 1949 the Congress-dominated Constituent Assembly of the Indian Union agreed to make Hindi in the Devanagari script the official language of the newly independent nation. This decision was something of a pyrrhic victory for the proponents of Hindi, or the Hindi-wallahs, in their long-fought campaign to unseat Urdu and to replace English as privileged languages in the colonial order. The uncompromising manner in which the Hindi-wallahs insisted upon this preeminent status for a particular conception of the north Indian language in the Devanagari script led many in non-Hindi speaking communities, especially in the South, to become wary of the potential threat to their interests of an unrestrained ‘Hindi imperialism.’ Ultimately this “victory” resulted in the retention of English not only as an official language but as a language of status and
power long after the fifteen-year transitional period envisioned by the framers of the constitution. Nonetheless, the victory of Hindi and Devanagari, which over the course of the preceding century had increasingly come to signify Hindu cultural identity and tradition, marked a radical and somewhat sudden departure from the long-established policy of the Indian National Congress regarding the language of its proceedings and of the national language (राष्ट्रभाषा) of India.

This departure merely confirmed the worst suspicions of many Muslims and advocates of Urdu, who feared that an independent India governed by Congress would be no more than a ‘Hindu Raj.’ Such suspicions, not to mention the decision of the Constituent Assembly, are nevertheless surprising in view of the fact that many of the most senior Congress leaders, including Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and most notably Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, were avowed and active supporters of Hindustani in both scripts as राष्ट्रभाषा of the Indian nation.

In focusing on the struggle for a national language at the level of high politics this thesis does not presume that other domains were unimportant. Indeed, in advocating for various conceptions of a national language, nationalist elites invariably invoked - at least implicitly - competing conceptions of the language of the common people. For example, a major argument produced by advocates of a Sanskritized Hindi, as we will see below, claimed that India’s numerous regional languages held a mutual affinity for Sanskrit, while insisting generally that their own variety of Hindi was that of the largest language community in the nation. By contrast, proponents of Urdu argued that their language was understood by members of all communities throughout India - a claim that was perhaps true at least of a certain segment of urban populations. Meanwhile, promoters of
Hindustani in turn recognized it as the most widely spoken and understood register of the north Indian vernacular, albeit one without a highly developed literature or even a literate community of speakers. An evaluation of these competing claims to the popular, and to the language of the people, although important, is ultimately beyond the scope of this thesis. At one level, the excavation of a truly popular national language on the eve of independence presents the type of difficulties inherent to the project of subaltern histories in general, not least of which is the absence of written sources. Moreover, the problem of identifying the language of the people is in itself perhaps a chimerical one; even protagonists of the positions outlined above tended to acknowledge that the creation of a truly popular, national language was a work in progress, a project which would require concerted effort and all the resources that the nation state had to offer.

One of the central aims of this thesis is simply to understand how it was that the Congress-dominated Constituent Assembly came to abandon the more inclusive, pluralistic definition of *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* of the long-espoused Congress platform, especially in light of the sympathies of many of its senior leaders. Why did the organization established by Gandhi to promote Hindustani in both scripts as the lingua franca of independent India, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, fail so utterly in its most fundamental objective, despite boasting the membership of Congress luminaries such as Prasad, Azad and Nehru? What does this failure suggest about the nature of Congress nationalism and its claim that Indian culture was essentially comprised of a “unity in diversity”? In order to answer these and related questions it is necessary, of course, to understand something of the longer history of what is frequently referred to as the “Hindi-Urdu controversy,” and how this struggle came to carry such symbolic equivalency with, and indeed provide
fuel for, the conflagration of the wider Hindu-Muslim communal conflict. It is therefore also necessary to situate the struggle over the definition of the national language within the politics of anti-colonialism during the late colonial period, and the influence of a host of factors both tangible and otherwise that can be characterized as “modernity.”

The very desire to enshrine and promulgate a standard national language is in itself symptomatic of the condition of “modernity.” As C. A. Bayly has convincingly demonstrated, “the birth of the modern world” in the long Nineteenth Century was attended by an enormous growth in uniformity across a wide range of human practices, from sartorial habits to the use of language.⁵ In the Indian context, of course, the Congress-led anti-colonial movement found an effective means of visible expression, and indeed quite literally a kind of uniform, in the adoption of khāḍī (homespun) cloth and swadeshi (indigenous or traditional) styles of dress, both of which contained an implicit rejection of dependency upon the culture of the colonizer.⁴ Khāḍī was not merely a symbolic reaction against the “dark, satanic mills” of British industrial capitalism and colonial exploitation, however. Its potent appeal lay substantially in its promise of economic self-reliance. Khāḍī evoked India’s past greatness as a global center of textile production, while its simple, pre-industrial mode of production potentially empowered all Indians to actively participate in drawing on this rich cultural heritage to craft an independent future. It was a potent symbol of populist politics par excellence. That the Gandhian vision of village sufficiency would largely succumb in the end to the modernity of centralized, mechanical factory production financed by alliances of indigenous and

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global capital has hardly detracted from the mythic power of khādī as symbol of Indian nationalism.

The affective power of language as a mobilizing principle of nationalism in modern South Asian history is even more fraught with irony, tragedy and even farce. Although the economic burden of the swadeshī ("indigenous" or "homegrown") movement was felt unevenly across communal boundaries to varying degrees in different places and moments during the freedom struggle, khādī was more or less “unmarked” in terms of religious signification. By the dawning of the nationalist era in the early twentieth century, by contrast, languages, in particular Hindi and Urdu, had become intensely potent symbols of religious identity. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the proliferation of modern methods of information transmission, from the printing press to the telegraph, radio, and cinema, played a key role in the intensification of this process. In such a context, the deployment of a particular language as both a symbol of anti-colonial resistance and a constructive tool for forging a substantive national identity presented intractable difficulties for nationalist leaders such as M. K. Gandhi. In seeking to harness the enormous mobilizing potential of linguistic nationalism, leaders such as Gandhi flirted dangerously with the risk of further provoking divisive communal conflicts.

Gandhi’s determination to replace English with a commonly understood Indian language in many ways preempted the call to action by Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Decolonizing the Mind*, in which the Kenyan writer argues that in order to undo much of the psychological and cultural damage of colonialism it is necessary for postcolonial
subjects to express themselves in their own languages. Similar concerns appear to have inspired the adoption of official national languages by other decolonizing nations in the twentieth century such as Ireland and Israel, for example. For Gandhi, as for many other Indian nationalists, the need to develop a national language stemmed not only from its immediate practical value in communicating with the masses, mobilizing anti-colonial sentiment, and fostering the development of a truly participatory national discourse, but also from a desire to resist and reverse the effects of the cultural imperialism that inexorably accompanied military occupation and economic exploitation. Throughout the nationalist era Gandhi repeatedly emphasized the notion that liberation from colonial rule depended upon liberation from a dependency on the ruler’s language. As he wrote in his weekly journal Young India in 1921,

The development of the Indian mind must be possible without a knowledge of English. It is doing a violence to the manhood and specially the womanhood of India to encourage our boys and girls to think that an entry into the best society is impossible without a knowledge of English. It is too humiliating a thought to be bearable. To get rid of the infatuation for English is one of the essentials of Swaraj.6

Nonetheless, Gandhi faced an obvious problem in locating a single standard language capable of giving expression to a national life as diverse as that of India. The question arose, and was fiercely debated, as to how such a language, and indeed such a nation, was to be envisioned. This debate, as we shall see in further detail below, inherited all the animosity and mistrust of the long-running Hindi-Urdu controversy. The most poisonous legacy of this controversy was undoubtedly the conflation of linguistic and religious identities, with Urdu and its Perso-Arabic script coming to stand for Islam, and Hindi and

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6 M. K. Gandhi, Thoughts on National Language (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1956), 204. (Swaraj can be translated as “self-rule” or independence).
Devanagari representing Hindu culture and religion. That these two languages (or styles of the same language) are more or less indistinguishable in their most common spoken registers, and according to one view the composite product of a fusion of these religious and cultural traditions, was an insufficient basis to broach a compromise between extremists on either side of this debate.

Hindustani, defined as the language commonly understood by a majority of people across a broad swathe of northern India as well as by a minority in many other parts of South Asia, was presented as a middle path between the polar extremes of Sanskritic Hindi and highly Persianized and Arabicized Urdu. Doubts were raised by advocates of both extremes as to whether this simple language of the common folk, devoid as it was of a well-developed literature, had the capacity to express the technical, scientific, legal and otherwise higher orders of thought demanded by the life of a modern nation. Another factor that hampered efforts to promote Hindustani as an inclusive compromise was that partisans on both sides of the divide often regarded Hindustani as a kind of linguistic Trojan horse sent by the opposing camp to usurp their own linguistic territory.

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7 The mutual opposition and indeed the very reification of these categories of religious identity were in themselves arguably in part the product of linguistic processes having their origin in practices of colonial rule.

8 For an extended statement on the composite character of Hindi-Urdu as a product of cross-cultural interaction, see Tara Chand’s letter to the editor, The Leader, “Hindi and Urdu,” April 12, 1942.

9 Ironically, it was, no doubt, precisely this type of “cultural cringe” that Gandhi was seeking to overcome in advocating a departure from the language of the colonizer.

10 At this point it is perhaps worth pointing out that the territorial aspirations of linguistic nationalists in the late colonial period often offer stark reminders of the contingency of the nation state as a geographic entity. For instance, the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha (the Banaras Society for the Promotion of Nagari) established a chapter in Colombo in 1936 which it called the Lanka Nagari Pracharini Sabha, which noted in its annual report of 1937-38 that “The object of Hindi-Prachar is to provide a “Lingua Franca” for the people of India. Of course, Ceylon has been considered a part of India.” See: NAI, PD Tandon Papers, List 5, Book 6, File “Miscellaneous,” Serial 39. For further discussion on the contingency of the production of territorially bounded national spaces, see: Manu Goswami, Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
At an overarching level then, this thesis is concerned with the nexus between linguistic affiliation and more broadly conceived forms of religious and cultural nationalism. The affective power of language as a marker of distinctive religious identities and the cultural traditions within which these identities were fostered and maintained was carefully cultivated by self-serving elites on both sides of the Hindi-Urdu divide, beginning in the nineteenth century if not earlier. In one sense, of course, language is very much constitutive of culture, in that cultures are complex systems of signs and symbols for creating shared meaning. In this sense, as an important vehicle of culture, language arguably plays a defining role in setting the limits of a collective worldview or weltanschauung, as was believed by German Romantics such as Willhelm von Humboldt, or as is similarly argued with regards to individual consciousness in the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.\footnote{Michael N. Forster, \textit{German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond} (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89. In fact, according to James Underhill, Humboldt’s conception of “worldview” involved a distinction between \textit{Weltanschauung} as a personal, intuitive view of the world more properly translated as “ideology” or “belief system,” and \textit{Weltansicht}, “according to which ‘each speaker of a language is led by its structure and by the particular modes in which meaning is put into form in that language, to divide his experience in a certain manner.'” See: James W. Underhill, \textit{Humboldt, Worldview and Language} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 17-18.}

Certainly, it was in this sense, implicitly at any rate, that partisans in the Hindi-Urdu controversy appear to have taken up language as both a symbol and a constitutive element of the cultures they saw themselves as upholding. One representative example of this view of language and culture was expressed in an essay published in 1942 as part of a long-running campaign to gain a greater role for Hindi (in Devanagari) in public life. Entitled “Hindi & Courts,” the essay opined:
No nation can boast of a common culture or even of a Nationalism which has not got a common language. The evolution of a national character and outlook depends upon the common language in which the people speak and the language in which they think.12

As Lisa Mitchell, among others, has recently shown, however, this monolithic view of “common culture” and “national character” was not at all in keeping with the ways in which people in India used and identified with languages in the pre-colonial past.13 According to Mitchell, who examines the growth of Telugu nationalism during the colonial and post-colonial eras, in pre-colonial southern India languages were regarded as features of the landscape with instrumental value, as opposed to comprising an aspect of individual or community identity. Prior to the colonial era, South India was, according to Mitchell, a linguistically heterogeneous region populated by multi-lingual people who readily deployed their various languages according to different social contexts and specific communicative needs. The imposition of colonial administrative institutions such as the census, as well as European grammatical concepts and principles of translation, as well as technologies such as print which would revolutionize the ways in which information could be stored and transmitted, created the conditions under which the category of the “mother tongue” would come to be valorized as an inalienable feature of personal identity signaling participation and belonging in a larger, linguistically defined collectivity.

The logic and affective allure of these linguistic nationalisms, once in motion, seem to have acquired an inexorable inertia of their own. Thus, although those like Gandhi who argued for Hindustani as an unmarked, inclusive national language that could absorb

within its parameters influences from both Hindu and Muslim cultural traditions, they often did so in an idiom that betrayed their own grounding in the former. At the same time, the Congress claim to represent the nation as a “unity in diversity” carries striking parallels with certain expansive notions of Hinduism itself as a heterogeneous and all-inclusive continuum of indigenous spirituality. Seen in this context, fears that Congress rule would mean little more than a majoritarian Hindu Raj, and suspicions that “Hindustani” was little more than a smokescreen for Sanskritized “Hindi” become eminently understandable, if not entirely accurate.

The following thesis offers a narrative of the struggle to define the national language of India in the final decades of the colonial era. In doing so, it attempts to probe somewhat further than the compelling yet not wholly satisfying explanation that the abandonment of Hindustani in the Constituent Assembly was a product of Partition and the bitterness that it brought, an inevitable outcome of the two-nation theory and the adoption by Pakistan of Urdu as its national language. While the impact of Partition on the ultimate designation of India’s official language was clearly momentous, this thesis suggests that woven through the cultural sensibilities of many key figures within the Congress were distinct threads of Hindu nationalism, whatever the official policies of their political organization. Indeed, Hindi and Devanagari as markers of Hindu identity were key components of the nationalist agenda of Congressmen such as P. D. Tandon, and arguably even Gandhi himself, well before the demand for Pakistan was ever voiced. The research presented below furthermore suggests that many prominent advocates of Hindustani were themselves so much the product of a distinctly Hindu cultural tradition.

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14 For example, see Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).
and worldview that their ultimate acquiescence in the final denouement of the language question, while disappointing, need not be particularly surprising.

The organization of what follows is essentially chronological. Chapter two offers a historiographical survey of some important works that have explored various aspects of the history of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, particularly as it emerged and unfolded under colonial rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While not exhaustive, this survey, in addition to “taking the pulse” of the current field of scholarship on the topic, is intended to familiarize the reader with the general contours of the social and political context and the various positions that were staked out in language debates during the period preceding the starting point of our own narrative in the 1930s.

The third chapter provides further context through an exploration of a range of primary sources which document the ways in which the fight between Hindi and Urdu continued to play out on new battlefields including those of radio and cinema, as well as in older arenas of print media and government institutions. These included the decennial Census. It then turns to consideration of the profoundly significant interventions of M. K. Gandhi. Without doubt, Gandhi’s high profile leadership generated much support and activity toward the promotion of a national language, but, as we shall see, his efforts to define this language in particular ways only served to further polarize debate.

The fourth chapter examines the terms of this debate and the struggle for influence within the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Hindi Literature Conference), an organization based in Allahabad but which held annual meetings throughout India in the decades prior to independence, and was active in promoting the development of Hindi not only as a literary language but as an all-India lingua franca. Gandhi and his followers were
ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts to steer the policies of this organization towards what they regarded as a more moderate and inclusive vision of the national language. This chapter is therefore also concerned with the ways in which the nationalisms of otherwise socially progressive elements within the Congress organization were conditioned by a particularly Hindu cultural worldview.

The fifth chapter investigates the aims and activities of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, and attempts to account for its failure in securing its definition of the national language in the Constituent Assembly. The organization faced two severe setbacks when most of its senior members were imprisoned by the British regime shortly after its inception during the Quit India campaign of 1942, and with the assassination of its founder M. K. Gandhi early in 1948. At the same time, the evidence also strongly suggests that despite sincere ideological commitment to the notion of a common language capable of transcending the Hindi-Urdu divide, many of the members of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha were themselves far more comfortable with Devanagari and a form of Hindi that tended towards the Sanskrit. Furthermore, with the onset of independence, the perceived urgency of the technical and practical challenges involved in replacing English and the Roman script with Hindi and Devanagari in the bureaucratic machinery of modern government appears to have distracted some of the most senior Hindustani prachāraks (propagandists) from their commitment to promoting a common language in both scripts.

The concluding chapter reflects briefly on the language of the constitution itself as it was formulated between 1947 and 1950, and discussions over which language or languages should be employed in the authentic or authoritative version of that document. These discussions reveal the extent to which opinions on such matters varied at the
highest levels of Congress authority and throughout the broader Indian public. They also suggest that this critical juncture in the molding of Indian national self-representation may easily have been taken in a different direction but for the forcefulness, or otherwise, of particular individual actors, most notably Gandhi’s lieutenants in the campaign for Hindustani including Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Acharya Kaka Kalelkar.
Chapter 2: A Historiographical Survey of the Hindi-Urdu Controversy

In their introduction to *Hindi and Urdu Since 1800: A Common Reader*, Christopher Shackle and Rupert Snell note that even Western students, spared as they are from “the physical dangers that can all too easily be produced by the linguistic chauvinisms of South Asia,” are not immune to the unconscious influence of “the insidious simplifications which would present Urdu as a bastardized version of Hindi, or alternatively Hindi as some illegitimate offspring of Urdu.” The same time, they warn against any easy conflation of the two and guard against the simple charms “of the shared Hindustani genetic stock,” noting that “these identical twins have chosen to dress themselves as differently as possible, and it is hardly helpful to begin with prejudgements as to the relative merits of simple homespun, Persian silk and Indian brocade.” What then is the nature of the historical relationship between these modern languages?

Suffice it to say, debates over the origins and divergence of these languages are rather complex and contentious affairs; the non-specialist reader attempting to distill a simple and straightforward narrative of the roots of Hindi and Urdu will quickly encounter a maze of bewildering nomenclature, a veritable quagmire of contradictory claims and definitions. “On the issues of when and why Hindi and Urdu broke away from one another, and which is more to blame,” writes Harish Trivedi, “there are, predictably enough, three broad responses:”

(1) Urdu did it, beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century, when it systematically threw out indigenous words and overloaded itself with more and more imported Persian; (2) Hindi did it, beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in brute assertion of its numerical majority and its newly found nationalist political

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16 Ibid.
strength; (3) the British did it, at the College of Fort William (founded 1800) under their notorious policy of divide and rule, with John Gilchrist, the first grammarian of Hindustani and the moving spirit of that college, as the archdemon.\textsuperscript{17}

What follows is by no means a definitive summation of, much less an attempt to arbitrate among these various positions. If anything, the works consulted below together suggest that culpability is shared more or less equally by Trivedi’s three accused. Primarily, the following historiographical survey is intended to convey a sense of the complexity of the terrain and of the stakes contested in these ongoing debates, such that the remainder of this thesis is placed in a more meaningful context. After clarifying or perhaps problematizing some key terms, this section will survey existing scholarship on the Hindi-Urdu controversy, with particular attention to those works dealing with developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; that is, the period immediately preceding that which is examined in the remainder of this thesis.

The Ambiguity of Names

The intractability of the Hindi-Urdu controversy can be seen partially as the result of confusion arising from often imprecise and perhaps always shifting nomenclature. Just as “living” languages and the cultures that employ them are fluid, so too, it would appear, are the names that signify them as discrete entities. Thus, in one of many ironies of linguistic and communal politics in South Asia, the word “Hindi” - which by the twentieth century had come to be primarily associated with the Hindu community and a sense of indigeneity - is in fact of Persian origin. According to McGregor, the word Hindi was first “used by Muslim groups in north India chiefly to refer to local Indian vernacular

\textsuperscript{17} Harish Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation," in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 969-70.
language, although it could refer in principle to any Indian language.”

For instance, the Arab traveler al-Bīrūnī employed “Hindi” in the eleventh century to refer to Sanskrit, while by the thirteenth century the term along with its variants “Hindavi” or “Hindūi” had come to refer more specifically to the linguistically mixed language of Delhi. This Hindi had “incorporated a component of Persian vocabulary” and came into wide use across much of northern India. It could be written in both Persian and Devanagari (and other indigenous) scripts. At least in McGregor’s understanding, in addition to being a medium of general communication throughout northern India, Hindi also “acquired a significant literary function” via its adoption in the *sant* poetic tradition which included Kabīr of Benares. Although widespread, this Hindi was clearly less than hegemonic; it existed as part of a linguistic and literary continuum with related dialects such as Brajbhasha, “the speech of the Agra district to the south of Delhi” which “became the standard language of Kṛṣṇa poetry and court poetry” throughout a much broader expanse of territory, and Avadhi, the speech of the Lucknow/Allahabad region, “vehicle of Sufi narrative poetry” and “the language of Tulsīdās’s late-sixteenth-century scripture of Rama worship, *Rāmacaritmānas*,” which similarly came to be celebrated by audiences in a much broader region than that in which Avadhi could be said to be the vernacular. In fact, the *Khāḍi Boli* (“upright speech”) or *Dihlavi* Hindi originally spoken in the Delhi region and widely employed as a language of commerce and informal administration

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19 Ibid., 912.
20 As McGregor explains, “The title *sant* means ‘good’ or ‘holy.’ The *sant* poets’ devotion, which contained a Sufi element, arose first in west India, inspired by feelings of passionate love (*bhakti*) for God as Rāma, and was transmitted quickly to north India.” Ibid., 932.
21 Ibid., 913.
throughout those regions that came under Delhi’s political sway did not begin to develop an extensive literature until the later nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the term Urdu was yet to come into currency as a referent to any language, a development not occurring until around 1780. Before this, as Frances Pritchett notes,

There was no confusion with what is now called Hindi - the Khari Boli grammar written in Devanagari script - simply because as a literary presence that language scarcely existed. Nāṣir uses “Hindi” very often in his tazkirah, while “Urdu” occurs only rarely; the other term he uses … is of course “Rekhtah.”

According to Faruqi, “early names for the language now called Urdu were (more or less in chronological order) ‘Hindvi,’ ‘Hindi,’ ‘Dihlavi,’ ‘Gujri,’ ‘Dakani,’ and ‘Rekhtah.’” Pritchett agrees noting that, “Hindi” as the “language of Hind” could - and did - play an obvious role as an umbrella term. Like the term bhasha, or bhakha ‘(colloquial) language,’ it could mean whatever a given writer and audience understood by it. Until a much later point in the nineteenth century Hindi was the most common name… for the language we now call Urdu - a language that used the Delhi region’s Khari Boli grammar and the Persianized range of its vocabulary, and was written in a modified form of the Persian script.

The term “Rekhtah,” like the word Hindi, is also of Persian origin, and originally meant “mixed” or “scattered.” As a language referent, according to McGregor’s Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary, Rekhtah denotes “mixed language: Persianised Urdu (esp. earlier literary Urdu, with reference to its numerous Persian and Arabic loan words),” or it may

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24 Faruqi, "Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture," 806. Note that Trivedi for one is unconvinced by this historical reasoning and appears to prefer a pre-modern lineage for Hindi that is more independent of what would come to be known as Urdu. See his refutation of Faruqi in “The Progress of Hindi, Part 2,” 960 and passim.
refer to a “type of Urdu of verse.” According to Pritchett, in the time of one of its greatest exponents, Muhammad Taqi “Mir” (1722-1810), Rekhtah was the most common name for what we now know as Urdu poetry, “… rekhtah is poetry made by shaping Delhi urban language in the literary mold of Persian.” Mir identified various possible mixtures as belonging to his definition of rekhtah, including verses in which one line is Persian and one is Urdu, or half of each line is in Persian and half Urdu, but apparently disdained that form of Rekhtah in which Persian verbs and particles were used, and was cautious about the deployment of Persian grammatical structures. The term Dakani or dakhni (or “southern,” from the Sanskrit daksina) refers to a variant of khadi boli spoken in Islamic courts of the upper Deccan and in which a rich literature was sponsored by the Bahmani Sultans of Gulbarga, the Adil Shahs of Bijapur, and the Qutub Shahs of Golconda beginning during the fourteenth century. Abdul Haq, a twentieth-century scholar and staunch advocate of the Urdu cause who came to be known as bābā-e urdū (“grand old man of Urdu”) for his services to the language as mainstay of the Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdu (“Association for the Development of Urdu”), much of which was carried out from the southern city of Aurangabad under the patronage of the Nizam of Hyderabad, researched numerous Dakani manuscripts, sometimes referring to their language as “old Urdu.” Similarly, Gujri was a term used to designate another variant

of this language employed in Gujarat “which had assimilated Persian and Arabic words.”

Whatever its name, the existence of just such a Persianized literary tradition is often advanced as evidence for the idea that “Urdu did it,” according to Trivedi’s typology of the various perspectives on the causes of the Hindi-Urdu divide. One prominent account of how the word “Urdu” came to designate this mixed language is found in the preface of Mir Amman’s Bāgh-o-Bahār, a work commissioned in the early nineteenth century by British linguist John Gilchrist as a training text for the College of Fort William, quoted here from Amrit Rai’s A House Divided:

The truth about Urdu ki Zaban [the language of Urdu] as I have heard from the old people is as follows. Delhi is an ancient city of the Hindus; their kings and their subjects lived there from time immemorial. The Musalmans arrived on the scene a thousand years ago. Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi came, and then Ghori and the Lodi kings had their sway. As a result of all this there was an intermixture of the languages of the Hindus and Muslims. Finally, Amir Timur conquered India. When they came and started living there, the bazaar of the camp moved into the city. Therefore the bazaar of the camp came to be known as urdu… When Akbar sat on the throne, people from all over the country… thronged there but they all spoke differently, their languages all being different. However, being thus placed together, they had discussions with each other during their acts of give-and-take, buying and selling, questions and answers, and thus a language of the urdu [camp] was established.

Amman’s account highlights the role of Islamic military occupation in the process of linguistic assimilation. The etymology of the Turkic word urdū, cognate with the English “horde,” certainly suggests a martial provenance for the language that it would come to denote. As we shall see below, this connotation was seized upon during the later nineteenth century by advocates of Hindi as a marker of Hindu identity, who argued that Urdu was not only foreign but had been foisted on the people of India under force of arms. As we have seen, however, Amman’s account, while perhaps containing substantial

30 Rahman, From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History.
grains of truth, also betrays certain elements of anachronism. As David Lelyveld has explained:

…the Turkish word urdu, as a military encampment, appears in Indo-Muslim texts from the middle of the twelfth century. Babar in the sixteenth century refers to his own urdu-e mu’alla, the exalted camp. But the word is not explicitly associated with language until the middle of the eighteenth century… And only at the end of the century do scholars begin to find scattered references to the word urdu alone as a metonym for a language, which is still more usually called Hindi.\(^32\)

**Origins**

Amrit Rai, for one, deemed this process of “intermixture of the languages of the Hindus and Muslims” to have begun many centuries earlier than as is described in Mir Amman’s early nineteenth-century account. Indeed, Amrit Rai, writing in the 1980s, broke also with the received wisdom of mainstream Hindi scholarship, which tended to follow Ramchandra Shukla’s pioneering early-twentieth century history *Hindi Sāhitya kā Itihās* (“The History of Hindi Literature”) as the highest authority.\(^33\) While Shukla regarded Amir Khusrao (1236-1324) and his *khari bōlī* couplets and riddles as representing some of the earliest poetry in Hindi, Rai argued that the roots of Hindi should be traced to the language of the Siddha poetic tradition beginning with Gorakhnāth, an eleventh-century mystic poet in the Shaivite and Buddhist tradition.\(^34\)

Rai’s concern regarding the elision of the corpus of nāthpanthī literature from the Hindi canon directly concerns the history and politics of Hindi and Urdu. It was from the interaction with these nāthpanthīs that the early Indian Sufis, such as Bābā Farīd and Hamīduddin Nagauri of the thirteenth century, adopted the language which would

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become known to the Muslims who settled in India by the Persian name Hindavī. While Rai admits that these Sufis only occasionally used Hindavī as their literary medium, examples of such usage indeed exist and, he insists, indicate that the language was used as the medium of intellectual exchange between Hindu and Muslim yogis. This literature constitutes evidence of the growth of Sufi thought in India, and “of the growth of this new Hindi/Hindavi language.” Rai produces other examples of Sufi notables such as Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Nizamuddin Aulia and Sheikh Farid Ganjeshkar, who spread the “musical sounds of Hindavi” throughout northern India and into the upper Deccan:

…as early as the first half of the twelfth century, a distinct language called Hindavi… had developed, which, on account of the various influences it was imbibing, came to be called Panjabi, Rajasthani, Braj, Awadhi, Dakani, at the regional level at different times. It was the literary form of this Hindavi language that later got the name Hindi … it may be said that this language was serving as a link-language between Hindus and Muslims.

According to Rai then, the language which would evolve into modern Hindi in the subsequent centuries was the product of a syncretic cultural encounter.

At the same time, Rai also believed that a language separate from Hindi called Urdu arose relatively late in the Indo-Islamic encounter, as the Muslim elite consciously began to avoid the use of “indigenous” words in favor of borrowings from Persian and Arabic in an effort to “affirm their separate cultural identity.” In this view, Urdu as a language distinct from Hindi began to take shape at the court of Delhi under Shah Jahan, with this process of conscious self-differentiation intensifying as the Mughal Empire declined throughout the eighteenth century. The privileged Muslim elite sought to preserve its eroding status by further eliminating indigenous vocabulary and embarking on an

36 Ibid., 119.
37 Ibid., 229.
“excessive and deliberate Persianization of the language in an attempt to create a dialect of the ruling class.”

Eventually, this ruling class “seems to have found it expedient to project that class identity as the cultural identity of the Muslims in general.”

**Colonialism and the Conflation of Language and Community**

David Lelyveld, for one, is rather impatient with Rai’s accounting of the causes of the Hindi-Urdu divide, and instead looks to a subsequent era and the divisive impact of British colonialism in fostering discord associated with linguistic and communal affiliations. In a series of important articles, Lelyveld explores how British responses to an often bewildering linguistic diversity had lasting effects on communal relations in northern India. In doing so, he builds upon Bernard Cohn’s insightful recognition that British anxieties about maintaining an authoritative presence before their colonial subjects eventually brought them to the reluctant conclusion that a command of vernacular languages was as important as their mastery of the classical languages Sanskrit and Persian in the prosecution of successful colonial rule. A key proponent of British acquisition of the north Indian vernacular he identified as “Hindoostanee” was Scottish physician, indigo and opium planter, (arguably) political radical, and some time employee of the East India Company, John Borthwick Gilchrist (1759-1841).

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38 Ibid., 265.
39 Ibid., 266.
Although earlier attempts had been made by Europeans to describe the lingua franca of northern India in the production of formal treatises on its grammar, Gilchrist is generally credited as the first to recognize “Hindustani” as more than a “corrupt jargon,” and as a “proper” language in its own right.\(^2\) Indeed, as Richard Steadman-Jones shows, Gilchrist at least initially swam very much against the tide of prevailing British sentiment when he promoted “Hindoostanee” as an elegant language, which is used in every part of Hindoostan and the Dukhin; which is the common vehicle of colloquial intercourse among all well-educated natives; and among the illiterate also in many provinces of India; and which is almost everywhere intelligible to some among the inhabitants of every village.\(^3\)

As Lelyveld has also stressed, although Gilchrist took up a position as an assistant surgeon in the Company army immediately upon his arrival in Bombay in 1782 and was later appointed as Professor of Hindustani at Fort William, he mostly pursued his linguistic endeavors in India, publishing his grammars and dictionaries in the capacity of a private entrepreneur. Although his publications were intended for a primarily European audience and market, as Lelyveld notes, there are striking parallels between some of the outcomes of Gilchrist’s project and what Benedict Anderson has described as the role of “print capitalism” in producing modern national identities.\(^4\)


\(^{4}\) Lelyveld, “Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani,” 672. Benedict Anderson, of course, argued that the emergence of the printing press under the conditions of capitalism - “print-capitalism” - facilitated the production and dissemination of printed media in such a way that made the consumers of such literature capable of imagining themselves as part of a larger corporate identity, or nation. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, vol. 2006 (London: Verso, 2006). Several important critiques have been made regarding the universality of Anderson’s “modular” theory of nationalism, such as that of Partha Chatterjee, who argues that in Anderson’s model is inadequate in Bengal where a specific form of nationalism was the product of inner and outer worlds and not merely as a category imposed from without. See: Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
an important study on the divergence of Hindi and Urdu in the later nineteenth century, describes how several of the works commissioned by Gilchrist, such as *Prem Sagar* by Lallulal in particular, were reprinted in numerous editions throughout the nineteenth century, and were also enjoyed by native audiences. Moreover, Gilchrist commissioned works in specific registers of Hindustani that more or less embodied the emergent distinction between Hindi and Urdu, with the former eschewing words of Persian and Arabic origin in favor of those from Sanskrit, and vice versa.

That this was an essentially artificial intervention is borne out by the comments of a South Asian student from Benares College recorded in colonial Education Department’s Annual Report of 1846-47, approximately half a century after Gilchrist’s time at the College of Fort William. When challenged by their principal, Dr. J. R. Ballantyne, as to why they did not possess not a better command of the language which only their “mothers and sisters” understood, one student is reported to have responded:

> We do not clearly understand what you Europeans mean by the term Hindi, for there are hundreds of dialects, all in our opinion equally entitled to the name, and there is no standard as there is in Sanskrit… If purity of Hindi is to consist in its exclusion of Mussulman words, we shall require to study Persian and Arabic in order to ascertain which of the words we are in the habit of using every day is Arabic or Persian, and which is Hindi. …What you call the Hindi will eventually merge in some future modification of the Oordoo, nor do we see any great cause of regret in the prospect.

Despite this student’s candid response, the work of the College of Fort William does appear to have done much to enshrine the basic categories of distinction between Hindi

Meanwhile, Asha Rani (Sarangi), argues that Anderson underestimates the potential for language to operate as a sign and instrument of “social and cultural exclusivism and political dominance.” Asha Rani, “Politics of Linguistic Identity and Community Formation: North India, 1900-1947” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2002), 13.


and Urdu, by establishing distinct literary models that did indeed draw more or less exclusively on either Sanskrit or Persian.

In the words of Steadman-Jones, the work of colonial linguists such as Gilchrist was transformative in the sense that it disseminated the concept of languages as fixed entities directly linked with categories such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ or ‘provincial’ and ‘national.’ In particular, the intersection of this pair of binaries — the uneasy mapping of ‘national’ onto ‘Muslim’ — generated a political problem that has renewed itself endlessly over the last two centuries and, to a large extent, explains the heat with which linguistic issues are still discussed today, even in the most academic contexts.48

Gilchrist rejected terms such as “Hindi, Hindavi and Hindu,” preferring, as we have seen, Hindustani, “largely in keeping with his project of identifying a national language, for the region the British knew as Hindustan.”49 He also understood this language to be the property of Muslims, in contrast to what he saw as the literary languages of the Hindus such as Braj and Awadhi. Steadman-Jones points out that this view is hardly supported by literary evidence, which shows that Muslim writers worked in these supposedly Hindu varieties, while Hindus also cultivated Persian as a medium of literary expression. Nonetheless, these distinctions were reinforced by Gilchrist’s propagation of Hindustani in printed reproductions mostly in the Persian script, while the “Hindu languages” were represented in far fewer publications and typically in Devanagari.

Christopher King, whose dissertation and subsequent monograph focus on the emergence of the Hindi-Nagari movement in the later nineteenth century and, in particular, the Banaras-based Nāgari Prachārini Sabhā (“Society for the Promotion of Nagari”), tends to downplay the role of Gilchrist and the College Fort William in reifying the distinction between Hindi and Urdu and their association with Hindu and Muslim

48 Steadman-Jones, Colonialism and Grammatical Representation: John Gilchrist and the Analysis of the ‘Hindustani’ Language in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, 40.
49 Ibid., 16.
identities. Although he recognizes that “the ingredients for the bifurcation of Khaṛi Boli into two forms” existed during Gilchrist’s time, King posits that this division would not acquire political salience until the agitations of aspirant indigenous (i.e., Hindu) elites in the latter half of the century. He notes, for example, that some of the Hindustani works produced for the College of Fort William were printed in Devanagari script, although he also concedes that “Munshis, teachers and clerks of Arabic and Persian outnumbered pandits, scholars and teachers of Sanskrit, on the early lists of appointments,” and moreover, that a Nagari teacher received a stipend of only twenty rupees per month, in comparison to the Persian master’s one hundred. Surveying the careers of “four of the most important writers in Khaṛi Boli Hindi at this time”, two employed by the College and two independent, King finds that

the three Hindu authors wrote in languages associated with Muslims, while the Muslim author had the greatest success in excluding Persian and Arabic words… [T]he identification of Hindi with Hindu and Urdu with Muslim lay in the future, though a new prose model of highly Sanskritized Khari Boli Hindi excluding Persian and Arabic words now existed.

Alok Rai, son of the aforementioned Amrit Rai, considers the matter somewhat differently:

The fact of the matter is that the pundits and munshis who were appointed found themselves coerced, possibly as much by the bureaucratic necessity of justifying their separate institutional existence as by any intrinsic characteristic of the language itself into developing two gradually divergent registers, one leaning towards the Sanskrit end of the lexical spectrum, the other towards Perso-Arabic.

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50 Christopher Rolland King, “The Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Promotion of the Nagari Script and Language) of Benares 1893-1914: A Study in the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language” (Ph D, University of Wisconsin, 1974); Christopher Rolland King, One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in the Nineteenth Century North India (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994).


52 King, One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in the Nineteenth Century North India, 29.

53 Rai, Hindi Nationalism, 13.
The question remains whether or not Gilchrist and the College of Fort William created these divergent trajectories or amplified already existing trends. Certainly, as Vasudha Dalmia has written, the production of dictionaries, grammars and textbooks that began in earnest with Gilchrist and the College of Fort William and was continued by Christian missionaries at Serampore in the early nineteenth century, ultimately resulted in the standardization of modern Hindi as we know it today.\(^{54}\) As far as Dalmia is concerned, it was the work of Gilchrist and his stable of writers at the College of Fort William who first produced in printed form the distinction between Hindustani and Bhākhā (Bhāṣā or “spoken language”) which would later be perpetuated as the division between Hindi and Urdu, “not only at the literary level, but also at the more commonplace, spoken level.”\(^{55}\)

**The Mobilization of Language as a Symbol of Community and Identity**

The 1837 decision of the East India Company to replace Persian with local vernaculars as the language of its courts was undoubtedly a precipitous factor in the divergence between Hindi and Urdu. In the North West Provinces and Oudh (NWP&O), Urdu was accorded the status of court language while the continuing usage of the Persian script was permitted. In these circumstances, the Urdu used in the courts continued to be heavily laden with technical legal terms derived from Persian and Arabic, and

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\(^{54}\) Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 146-221; Vasudha Dalmia, “The Locations of Hindi,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 14 (2003). As Farina Mir has also observed, Christian missionaries across India were often among the first groups to employ the printing press as means of furthering their evangelism. They were also innovators in devising new print fonts for various scripts, as in the case of the American Presbyterian Mission in Ludhiana, Punjab, which designed both Gurmukhi and Devanagari type. See: Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 32. For the role of the Gilchrist and the College of Fort William in developing printing technologies for Indian scripts see: Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William*, 80-86.

employment opportunities in the legal system and other government offices continued to be monopolized by the traditional elite. The aspirations of an emergent Hindu middle class, which tended to educate its sons at the elementary level primarily in the Devanagari script, were therefore frustrated. Such frustrations led in the later nineteenth century to organized agitations for official recognition of Devanagari script and an increasing divergence between Hindi and Urdu.

Both Alok Rai and Christopher King in their respective works examine how this divergence played out across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the context of colonial rule. King’s analytic framework focuses on simultaneous processes of external differentiation and internal assimilation. Thus, as Khaṛi Boli was taken up as an increasingly Sanskritized Hindi, its proponents in the Hindi-Nagari movement sought not only its differentiation from Perso-Arabic flavored Urdu, but to subsume within its boundaries various other styles of Hindi such as Braj Bhāṣā, and to subordinate variant forms of script such as the cursive Kaithi form to a new, standard form of Devanagari.

Alok Rai pays particular attention to the question of the Kaithi script, a form of writing associated with the Kayastha caste, members of which traditionally pursued occupations as scribes, accountants and record-keepers. While their caste status is considered open to debate – according to some they are Śudras, others accept them as twice-born56 – it is well-known that during the pre-colonial and early colonial eras Kayasthas served as legal scribes in which Persian was the official language. Kayasthas were not only proficient exponents of Persian, but of a variety of scripts and languages.

56 Keshari N. Sahay, Ambastha Kayastha: The Evolution of a Family and Its Socio-Cultural Dimensions, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2001), 13. Alok Rai himself is descended from a famous Shrivastava family of the Kayastha caste – the work of his father, Amrit Rai, is discussed above, while his grandfather was none other than Dhanpat Rai Shrivastava, or Premchand, the famous early twentieth-century novelist, nationalist, and Gandhian proponent of Hindustani.
Rai points out that while today memory of the Kaithi script has been all but erased, at the end of the nineteenth century it was in fact more widely used than Devanagari. For example, when British official Sir George Campbell ordered the replacement of Persian script in the courts of Bihar in 1873, he granted that the vernacular language might be recorded in Nagari or Kaithi. Rai also quotes Badri Narain Upadhyaya’s address to the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan of 1912 to show that Nagari was once also known as Babhni, “the script of the Brahmins.” For Rai then, this apparently arcane underside of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, regarding two forms of one script, was in fact a form of “sublimated caste politics,” with the assertion of a Hindi-Hindu-Nagari identity also the assertion of upper-caste Hindus to a privileged position in the social hierarchy. He writes, “The antagonism between the Kayasthas and the Brahmins has been one of the great organizing (and disorganizing principles) of public life in the Hindi heartland: many a ravaged institution testifies to the fact.” Meanwhile, Rai concurs with the argument laid out by his father that Muslim elites similarly worked to create a distinctive cultural identity with Urdu as one of its symbols as a rallying point around which to defend their own position of privilege.

One of the many interesting nuances that Alok Rai brings to his account of late nineteenth-century language politics in the Hindi-speaking region is the role of the Bengali intelligensia, which, he points out, also had a distinct caste dimension. Significant numbers of upper-caste Bengalis had moved into the Hindi-speaking region of the north in search of employment opportunities in government and various other

57 Rai, Hindi Nationalism, 51.
58 Ibid., 52.
59 Ibid.
60 See also below comments on David Lelyveld’s discussion of Bengali participation in the Allahabad Institute’s campaigns on behalf of Nagari in NWP&O.
professions commensurate with their educational achievements. According to Rai, they brought with them certain baggage associated with Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal, where the “jute-based rise of the Muslim peasantry… had led to increased insecurity in the emergent Bengali middle-class.”  While in Bengal, Muslims were underrepresented in government positions and were generally perceived as “backward,” this situation was reversed in the NWP&O, where Muslims comprised the landholding elite, and a newly emergent Hindu middle-class suffered under the stigma of being represented in public and private discourse as what Rai terms “… country bumpkins, the yokels and shopkeepers and lesser folk generally.”  The corresponding characterization of Hindi as a rustic, uncultivated, dehāti language was one that the Hindi movement of the later nineteenth century centered on Banaras and Allahabad would strive to overcome via the canonization of literary Hindi and the propagation of Hindi publications in Devanagari script. With modern Bengali having recently undergone its own process of Sanksritization, Rai suggests that the Bengali bhadralok (“respectable people”) not only brought moral and material assistance to the Hindi-Nagari campaign, but provided something of a model for their upper-caste brethren in northern India to emulate, and even envy. The socially subordinate position of the Hindi-speaking upper castes, both during the period under discussion, and in more recent times under the dominance of a post-colonial English-speaking elite, is a major element of Alok Rai’s understanding of the poisonous qualities of ‘Hindi’ nationalism.

It would be wrong of course to assume that the Muslim population of north India was homogenous in terms of social class. As David Lelyveld points out, aside from the

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62 Ibid., 55.
numerically small *sharif* (respectable) landholding elite, an overwhelming majority of Muslims in the NWP&O were poor cultivators, petty traders and artisans, while only some six percent of the population was literate.\(^6^3\) Francis Robinson agrees that *sharif* Muslims had far more in common with their elite Hindu counterparts than they did with their co-religionists of the working classes, but that a progressively widening gulf between elite Hindus and Muslims emerged in the decades following 1857, as elites of both communities sought to monopolize scarce government positions.\(^6^4\)

Paul Brass, in *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, similarly lays blame for the divisiveness of religio-linguistic nationalisms at the feet of elites who sought to preserve their own interests, even at the expense of their larger communities.\(^6^5\) He argues:

> In fact, one cleavage has been more important in north India than the other: religion has been the primary line of cleavage, language a secondary one. In order to differentiate themselves further from each other and to obtain political benefits, however, the political elites of the opposing language communities have struggled to make religion and language congruent, to erect further symbolic barriers to effective communication between the groups.\(^6^6\)

While in earlier periods both Hindu and Muslim communities were characterized more by internal differentiations than external ones, Brass sees that throughout the nineteenth century religious revival and reform movements adopted symbols of difference, making conscious choices rather than being moved by some “ineluctable historical movement.”\(^6^7\)

An important institution in this process of symbolic differentiation, significantly supported by the British colonial state, was the Aligarh Muslim University which grew

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\(^6^6\) Ibid., 27-28.

\(^6^7\) Ibid., 126.
out of the earlier Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College established by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1875. In his study, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, David Lelyveld follows the intellectual development of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, showing amongst other things how his use of the term *qaum* (“nation”) shifted over time, from the more inclusive sense he employed in the 1860s, extended to his “fellow countrymen” and including “what he called the Hindustanis,” to a later designation that was very much restricted to Muslims living under the jurisdiction of British rule. 68

One might speculate that this change of heart resulted partly from the bitterness of the Hindi-Urdu debates of the later 1860s onwards. Indeed, since the 1850s, government education in mostly rural areas had sponsored the development of Hindi (Nagari) textbooks, gradually giving succor to wider agitations for official support and usage of Hindi in Nagari script. When Sayyid Ahmad proposed a vernacular-medium University in 1868, a public dispute erupted as to what exactly this vernacular medium should be. In the same year, the “predominantly Bengali organization,” the Allahabad Institute, mounted a campaign to have Hindi recognized as the language of the courts. Ahmad responded by arguing that Hindi and Urdu were the same thing, and that good Urdu avoided excessive borrowings from Persian and Arabic, although technical terminology derived from Persian or Arabic might render its use necessary in the courts. 69 In Lelyveld’s estimation, “All Sayyid Ahmad’s early writings on the issue sought to defuse

68 Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, 343-44. See also: Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 216. Pandey writes that as late as 1884, Sayyid Ahmad, in a speech given at Lahore, used the term “Hindu” to refer to the “inhabitants of Hindustan.”

69 Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, 98.
it of its cultural symbolism, but the issue became increasingly charged as the century wore on.\(^{70}\)

One of Ahmad’s most aggressive opponents in this debate was Babu (later Raja) Shiva Prasad, a prominent official in the Education Department of the NWP&O,\(^{71}\) who Lelyveld notes was “a proud descendent of Jaagat Seth, the famous Marvari banker who sold out the Navab of Bengal to Robert Clive,” and “blatantly anti-Muslim both in his textbooks and in other public utterances: the British had come to rescue the Hindu population of India from Muslim persecution.”\(^{72}\) No doubt encouraged by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal’s 1871 barring of the use of Urdu, “that bastard hybrid language,” from use in the courts of Bihar, Shiva Prasad led the charge in offering repeated submissions to the government on the Hindi-Nagari question in over the next few years in the early 1870s, though to little effect.

After a lull in hostilities of several years, the 1882 announcement of a committee of inquiry into the state of Indian education to be headed by Sir W.W. Hunter brought on a wave of mobilization by the Hindi-Nagari lobby, which organized the submission of 76 memorials containing 58,289 signatures from all over the Province. Deponents before the committee included Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Raja Shiva Prasad, and Bharatendu Harischandra, the latter a crucial figure in the development of the Hindi movement who is discussed in further depth below. Alok Rai characterizes the arguments presented to the Hunter Commission as “well worn”:

on the one side, that the Persian script was critically ambiguous, that Urdu was in any case unfamiliar to the vast majority of the population, and was the means whereby a certain class of people maintained its stranglehold on the administration. On the other

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 98.
\(^{71}\) Rai, Hindi Nationalism, 39.
\(^{72}\) Lelyveld, Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India, 98.
side it was urged that Urdu was the language of civility and of the better class of people, and that Hindi was merely “the shifting vulgar speech used by the rude villagers.”

Finally, it was Sayyid Ahmad’s influence as a member of the Viceroy’s Legislative Council that allowed him to convince Hunter that the issue was political, and had nothing to do with education.

The tone of Bharatendu Harishchandra’s deposition to the Hunter commission was, in Rai’s words, “intemperate,” and presaged a theme that would recur in Hindi literature, drama and poetry in the coming decades. Bharatendu not only repeated the standard argument regarding Urdu in the Persian script as serving to give Muslims a monopoly on government positions, but besmirched the character of a language and a community, holding both up as a threat to society at large, by claiming there was

a secret motive which induces the worshippers of Urdu to devote themselves to its cause… It is the language of dancing girls and prostitutes. The depraved sons of wealthy Hindus and youths of substance and loose character, when in the society of harlots, concubines, and pimps, speak Urdu…

Asha Sarangi has shown how such discourses were taken up with alacrity by numerous Hindi writers of the later nineteenth century, wherein Hindi and Urdu languages were frequently personified as women of very different character, reflecting their virtues in relation to Indian nationalism. Invariably, such characterizations depicted Hindi as chaste and pure, while Urdu was associated with decadent courtesan culture and the bazaar. The spectrum of filial relationships depicted between these “language women” suggests the range of possible understandings that existed regarding the linguistic

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 41-42.
relationship between Hindi and Urdu. In one schema, both were daughters of Sanskrit. Another common trope represented “Hindi as a tolerant mother towards a more unruly Urdu.” Sarangi argues that the feminization of languages operated as part of larger heteronormative, patriarchal structures “embedded within hierarchies of caste, class and religion.” She shows how the category of “mother tongue” as institutionalized by the decennial census from 1881 came to be closely associated with ideologies of nationalism in which the nation was also enthusiastically represented as the mother.

While Sayyid Ahmad had allayed the fears of the Persian script-wielding elites for the time being, in 1900, the Lieutenant-Governor of the NWP&O, Sir Anthony MacDonnell, passed a law allowing “permissive – but not exclusive – use of Devanagari in the courts of law.” Alok Rai views this “MacDonnell Moment” as the “deceptively thin edge of the wedge” which would ultimately lead to the demand for Pakistan and the partition of the subcontinent. Christopher King regards the MacDonnell decision as holding primarily symbolic value with little immediate impact, noting that throughout the province a majority of literate Hindi speakers in the province continued to be schooled in and to use in their daily business Urdu in the Persian script. While this was undoubtedly the case, the MacDonnell ruling certainly advanced the cause of Nagari-Hindi substantially. Harish Trivedi, with Alok Rai, has argued forcefully this was a crucial

77 Ibid., 292.
78 Ibid., 297.
79 Ibid. For a similar argument regarding the Tamil language as mother goddess, see: Sumathi Ramaswamy, Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
80 Rai, Hindi Nationalism, 17.
81 Ibid.
82 As the 1942 pamphlet cited in the introduction, “Hindi & Courts,” demonstrates, long after MacDonnell’s General Order in 1900 making the use of Devanagari Hindi permissible in the courts of NWP&O, Urdu in the Persian script continued to be used widely in the courts. Furthermore, at least according to the evidence presented in in the pamphlet, the use of Devanagari, at least in some locations, appears to have been actively resisted by court authorities. See: Madan Mohan Seth, “Hindi & Courts,” 1942; PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya 1928-1960, File 1.
morale booster for the Hindi-Nagari movement, and one that reversed the balance of power between Hindi and Urdu, effectively instituting a “virtual rout” of Urdu in the public domains of authorship and publishing.\textsuperscript{83} As King himself indicates, the sheer output of printed material in Hindi in books, newspapers, journals and pamphlets rapidly overtook that of Urdu in the first decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{84} It was also the result of ongoing and concerted efforts by organizations such as the Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Benares and the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan to promote education and literacy in Hindi via Devanagari, and to canonize, publish and promote a body of literature deemed worthy of taking up the mantle of the national language.\textsuperscript{85}

The career of the most celebrated novelist of Hindi-Urdu, Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), is particularly emblematic of the shift in preeminence from Urdu to Hindi in the early decades of the twentieth century. Born Dhanpat Rai Srivastava into the scribal Kayastha caste and educated in Urdu and Persian, Premchand adopted his better known \textit{nom de plume} after his first collection of Urdu short stories, \textit{Soz-e Watan} (“Lament for the Homeland”), was deemed seditious and proscribed by British authorities in 1907. Under his new pseudonym Premchand continued to publish short stories and novels in Urdu, but with an increasingly greater demand for his works in Hindi translation, from around 1915 he made the transition to writing primarily in the latter language.\textsuperscript{86} Finding himself at the center of the acrimonious Hindi-Urdu divide, as an ardent supporter of Gandhian nationalism, Premchand himself nonetheless advocated the cause of Hindu-

\textsuperscript{83} Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation."
\textsuperscript{84} King, \textit{One Language, Two Scripts}, 43-47.
\textsuperscript{85} Francesca Orsini, \textit{The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism} (New Delhi New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
Muslim unity, and wrote a great deal against the tendency to associate scripts with one or
another religious community. As Harish Trivedi observes, Premchand travelled
costantly in the last year of his life visiting numerous cities in northern India in an effort
to “propagate everywhere his ideal of a common language.”

Despite his ideological commitment to this ideal, Premchand’s earlier adoption of
Hindi as his primary literary medium signals a profound shift. Geetanjali Pandey
observes that this “switch-over owed itself to more than mere personal compulsions” and
was likely as much an economic necessity for a struggling writer seeking publication.
Pandey also speculates that Premchand’s preoccupation with themes of social reform and
small-town and rural issues may also have led him towards working in Hindi - associated
as it was with rustic, village life - as opposed to Urdu, with its connotations of urban life
and urbane sophistication. Premchand returned to Urdu for one of his last short stories,
*Kafan* ("The Shroud"), which was published in Urdu in 1935, and the following year in
Hindi under the same title.

As Ralph Russell has also observed, there is a “remarkable contrast between
Premchand’s theory and practice,” in that despite his advocacy of a common
“Hindustani” he continued to publish his work in one or the other register of Hindi and
Urdu. As Harish Trivedi observes, while the dialogue of the illiterate villagers in
Premchand’s *Kafan* is identical in both Hindi and Urdu versions, the story’s commentary
and descriptions employ a markedly different range of vocabulary in each version. In

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87 Ibid.
88 Trivedi, ”The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation,” 977. It is likely that this travel
regimen aggravated Premchand’s already poor health and accelerated his demise.
90 Ralph Russell, *How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University
Press, 1999), 135.
other words, while Premchand’s works evince a common, spoken Hindustani register, even he was compelled to admit in practice that in their more elevated literary registers Hindi and Urdu were distinct entities.

The Emergence and Divergence of Hindi and Urdu Public Spheres in the Late Colonial Era

In her monumental study, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, Vasudha Dalmia analyzes the late nineteenth-century emergence of a modern Hindu nationalist discourse through the life and work of Hariśchandra Bharatendu, the scion of a wealthy middle-class Agrawal merchant family of Banaras, widely considered the ‘father of modern Hindi literature,’ and, notably, propagator of the slogan ‘Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan.’

Dalmia writes that the fabric of this Hindu nationalist tradition was woven together out of at least three distinct, interacting strands: pre-colonial literary and socio-religious tradition, ancient ‘Hindu’ texts and institutions mediated by British and western orientalists, and British colonialism and missionary activity including administrative, legislative and educational institutions. Here she stresses, in contrast to Sandra Freitag’s characterization of mutually exclusive indigenous and colonial cultural realms, that the expression in the late nineteenth century of a distinctly Hindu cultural tradition occurred

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92 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras*, 27. According to Krishna Kumar, the slogan was actually the work of Harishandra’s associate, Pratap Narayan Misra (1856-1894). See: Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 148. Significantly, Francesca Orsini notes that Khaṛi Boli Hindi was the mother tongue of the Agrawal merchant caste, a group which used it for long-distance communication and must therefore have contributed to its wide dispersal throughout northern India and the subcontinent.

in specific historical circumstances and as the result of interaction with European culture and concepts.94

Despite his relatively brief lifespan (1850-1885), Hariśchandra’s impact upon the formation of a modern Hindu nationalist consciousness was enormously significant. Through his wide ranging literary activities as a prolific playwright and director, the inventor of the Hindi prose essay, and frenetic writer and editor, especially in the publication of his two ostensibly literary but increasingly political journals, Hariśchandra was instrumental in creating a Hindi public sphere – a space in which ideas would be circulated and debated in Hindi language via print media, a process that contributed enormously to the growth of a self-conscious Hindi language community.95 The publication of his first journal, Kavivachansudhā, began in 1868 at a time when Hindi as a print language had begun to be codified in schoolbooks, grammars and dictionaries, and, as we have seen, the Hindi movement centered on Allahabad and Banaras had begun to gather momentum. The decades following 1857 also saw a rapid growth of the press in India, in both English and vernacular languages. According to Dalmia,

Hariśchandra’s journals pioneered the creation of language and the new literature in Hindi, with an authority and charm peculiar to the author… Hariśchandra’s precocious literary talent frequently burnt itself out before it could create a steady flame, but often its flare lasted just long enough to make others catch fire as well. From the late 70s there was a spate of periodicals in Hindi. Most of them owed allegiance in one form or another to Hariśchandra.96

Francesca Orsini extends Dalmia’s work on the emergence of a Hindi public sphere into the twentieth century in her own study, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*. Orsini shows how Hindi literary

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96 Ibid., 335.
journals continued to proliferate in the early twentieth century, settling even more so on a prescriptive sensibility that privileged “high” literature at the expense of the popular. Foremost among such influential arbiters, according to Orsini, was writer and editor Mahāvīr Prasād Dvivedi, whose commercially successful magazine Sarasvatī “ushered a new era in Hindi literature” by establishing a “grammatically fixed, standard print language.” Dvivedi not only policed the boundaries of appropriate themes and content for Hindi literature to be published in his own journal through a “rigid screening and censorship,” but more widely by the use of a famously “stinging sarcasm” in his regular and extensive reviews of material published in Hindi elsewhere. Meanwhile, after the momentous “MacDonnell moment,” which allowed the use of Devanagari in the courts, a parallel expansion of the use of Hindi in school curricula had also begun to promote a śuddh (“pure”) standard of language that “excluded spoken varieties and labeled Urdu as foreign.

Orisini also tracks how the opposition between Hindi and Urdu that had emerged as a provincial affair in the late nineteenth century was now increasingly propelled onto a national stage as the “wave of Gandhi’s nationalism” of the 1920s suddenly gave the question of an Indian rāṣṭrabhāṣā (“national language”) greater plausibility and urgency. The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Hindi Literature Conference) based in

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97 Francesca Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53-54. Orsini argues with Dalmia that Hariśchandra had heralded a new era for Khaḍi Boli Hindi as a print language, but argues that while his definition of print language had been “fairly loose,” Dvivedi “took a rather more stern and normative view on the matter.”
98 Ibid., 54.
99 Ibid., 104. See also: Kumar, Political Agenda of Education : A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas, 142. Kumar beautifully contrasts the “Hindustani” vocabulary in a student’s letter seeking an excused absence with the chaste “Hindi” of Ramchandra Shukla’s Hindi reader.
100 Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism, 125.
Allahabad, a sister organization to the Banaras-based Nagari Pracharini Sabha, also began in 1906 to actively promote śuddh Hindi via the promulgation of textbooks and school curricula, and continuing efforts to canonize Hindi literature.

As will be explored in greater detail in later sections of this thesis, Gandhi was himself a long-term member of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, and an ardent supporter of Hindi as rāṣṭrabhāṣā. Yet, his vision of this “national language” was perhaps something more like Gilchrist’s Hindustani, a common language of the people of a greater part of northern India, and one that borrowed freely from both Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit literary and linguistic traditions. Although partial to the Devanagari script, Gandhi accepted the practical necessity of widespread knowledge of both Nagari and Persian scripts, and prescribed education in both accordingly.\(^\text{101}\) When the Sammelan invited him to preside over the organization’s 24th meeting in Indore in 1935, Gandhi insisted that the body accept his designation of “Hindi-Hindustani.” Orsini characterizes the ensuing uproar in the Hindi press as “extreme”:

> One editorial note in the January 1936 issue of Sudhā spoke of it as the Sammelan’s pro-Muslim attempt at ‘killing Hindi.’ With sepulchral metaphors, the editor predicted that all Hindi literature would have to be cremated since none of it fitted into the Hindustani framework of Gandhi, that ‘blind devotee of Muslims.’ Because of Gandhi’s pious wishes poor Hindi would have to discard its sumptuous garments to put on an awkward half-rustic, half-Muslim costume; 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 communalist language of cow-eating image destroyers, who considered Arabia and Iran their motherland, and whose foreign culture was violent, brutal, and always harking back to a Muslim empire?\(^\text{102}\)

As we will see later, opposition to Gandhi’s notion of Hindustani was often no less virulent from supporters of Urdu.

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\(^{101}\) See, for example, Baburama Saksena, *Gandhiji's Solution of the Language Problem of India*, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture Series (Bombay: Hindustani Prachar Sabha, 1972), 12-13; Peter Brock, *Mahatma Gandhi as a Linguistic Nationalist* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Publications, 1995), 45.

\(^{102}\) Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, 361.
Gyanendra Pandey, in *The Ascendancy of Congress in Uttar Pradesh*, examines the same period considered in Orsini’s study.\(^{103}\) He finds similarly that despite the secular tendencies of sections of the Congress leadership, the influence of Hindu nationalist elements was sufficiently strong and the temptation to mobilize the masses using explicitly Hindu imagery and symbolism was such that the Congress of the 1920s and ‘30s ultimately betrayed a distinctly Hindu bias that was to have “unforeseen implications.”\(^{104}\) Thus, while the language employed in the Congress pamphlets, tracts and newspaper editorials and - intended to be “read to illiterate hearers by literate fellows in towns, villages, railway carriages, public meetings and so on” - probably employed a common Hindustani register, it evoked religious themes. For example, the British were likened to the demonic figures from the Rāmāyana, such as Kumbhkāran or Rāvana, while Rāmrājy was frequently employed as an appealing shorthand for Swarāj, or self-rule. In this context, and with the virulent sentiments deployed against Muslims in the Hindi-Urdu debates, it is not surprising that, despite the common participation of Hindus and Muslims in the Khilafat non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s, by the 1930s and 1940s, Muslims had begun to hold themselves largely aloof from the Congress movement.

While Orsini adopts Habermas’ notion of a public sphere in a fairly straight forward way, Dietrich Reetz, in his study of Islam in the Indian public sphere of the first half of the twentieth century, qualifies the idea by emphasizing the uniquely multi-layered nature of the Indian situation, comprised as it was of three major streams of public life: the

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\(^{104}\) Ibid., 27.
semi-official, the nationalist, and the socio-religious.\footnote{Dietrich Reetz, \textit{Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900-1947} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 44.} In Reetz’ schematic, “official public opinion” in India competed with a host of ‘counter-publics’ for shares of the public sphere, while their territories interpenetrated one another as activists engaged simultaneously in different forms of public activity, and various forms of syncretism created overlapping boundaries.\footnote{Ibid., 51.}

Reetz discusses the intersection, or perhaps the collision, of two “counter-publics” in the form of Islamic \textit{Tablígh} (proselytization) movements and Ārya Samāj reconversion campaigns according to the doctrine of śuddhi (purification).\footnote{Ibid., 148.} As the Khilafat movement dissolved after the early 1920s, tensions between these fiercely opposed movements escalated. Although efforts were made by a Unity Committee to reconcile the communities at a special session of the Congress in 1923, no agreements were reached: “Due to the influence of religious leaders in Congress, it could not openly oppose conversion efforts.”\footnote{Ibid., 152.} In other words, the Hindu right was sufficiently strong within the Congress organization to prevent any compromise which might have forestalled “the alienation of the Muslims,” to borrow a phrase from Gyanendra Pandey.\footnote{Gyanendra Pandey, \textit{The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization}, 95.}

A related issue that emerged in 1937 and exacerbated the growing rift between Congress and many Muslims was the educational program that became known as the “Wardha Scheme.” Ironically this plan to radically overhaul primary education on a national scale had been outlined by a Muslim member of Congress, and long-time rector of the Urdu-medium Jām`iya Millīya University in Delhi, Dr. Zakir Husain. Nonetheless,
the Wardha Scheme’s unabashedly Gandhian rhetoric, with its commitment to *ahimsa* (non-violence) and the teaching that all religions embodied the truth equally, was perceived by certain groups of Muslims as an attack upon Islam by a Hindu Congress. That the Wardha Scheme advocated “Hindustani” as a medium of instruction did little to allay Muslim fears regarding its essentially Hindu cultural orientation.\(^{110}\) As we shall see, the plan was proposed at a crucial moment in the ongoing Hindi-Urdu controversy.

William Gould has also written about the failure of Congress to appeal to Muslim constituencies because of an implicit Hindu cultural nationalism informing the worldview of many of its members.\(^{111}\) He shows how the Urdu press was mobilized as an outlet through which Muslim frustrations with Congress were aired throughout the early twentieth century, and conversely, how, at least in specific districts, the Congress rarely engaged with the public via the Persian script, holding fixedly to a policy of publishing in Nagari-Hindi.\(^{112}\) In the western districts of Moradabad and Bulandshahr, for instance, the *Aftab-e-Hind* complained that the publication of “membership forms, leaflets, handbills and circulars were also exclusively printed in Hindi.” Unsurprisingly Gould finds that such a state of affairs was particularly difficult for Muslim members of the Congress themselves, who also complained about the low numbers of Muslim delegates selected for political conferences, proportionately low representations on Congress committees, and “perhaps most revealingly of all, some Muslim Congressmen picked up on the nationalist symbolism used during the Tripuri Congress session [in 1939]: Aftab Ahmad


\(^{112}\) Evidence presented later in this thesis tends to support this observation.
of Jubbulpur complained that the literature of the Congress was ‘90 per cent Hindi Sanskrit.’”

This chapter has provided an overview of scholarship concerning itself with the Hindi-Urdu controversy during the colonial era. This survey suggests that there is no great scholarly consensus regarding the precise nature of the relationship between these languages, their points of origin, or their mutual departure. Nonetheless, taken as a whole this scholarship indicates that Hindi and Urdu as distinct entities emerged strongly during the nineteenth century both as a result of the imposition of colonial forms of knowledge and the efforts of Indian elites to gain advantages for their particular communities under conditions imposed by the colonial regime. A significant factor in this process of differentiation was that each language looked to a different classical language or languages as sources of vocabulary and literary inspiration, with these classical languages inescapably evoking distinct religious traditions. Even more significant than this lexical divergence was the more visibly noticeable difference in the Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts, which also increasingly marked these languages as symbols of religious identity. The power of such symbolism only grew with increasing rates of literacy and a corresponding rise in the output of printed publications in both languages. The following chapters of this thesis attempt to explore in greater detail the bifurcation between Hindi and Urdu in the final decades before independence, and the ultimate failure of Congress to arrest this process, despite its official policies.

113 Gould, Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India, 227. Again, see the discussion below of Maulana Azad’s problems with this recalcitrance on the part of Congress propaganda machinery.
Chapter 3: Language Politics in the 1930s – ‘A Cobweb of Misunderstandings’

By the 1930s, rivalry between protagonists of Hindi and Urdu was well entrenched along communal lines and would continue to be fought on a number of new fronts throughout the remaining years of the colonial era. One index of the extent to which tensions had risen towards the end of the decade was the decision of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Muslim ruler of the largest of the so-called Princely States of India, to refuse to permission for the thirtieth annual meeting of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan to be held in his domain in 1938.114 This chapter surveys aspects of the new terrain upon which the Hindi-Urdu controversy would now be waged, before turning to the pivotal role played in debates over the national language by that most influential of Indian nationalists, M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi’s role is important, not only because of his influence over Congress, but because of the strong reactions he provoked from those within and outside that organization.

From certain points of view, Gandhi’s language politics may appear to have been internally inconsistent and to have “chopped and changed” over time, or worse, to have been merely expedient populism.115 These apparent inconsistencies certainly seem to have inspired a lack of confidence and sympathy in those occupying either extreme in the increasingly polarized struggle between Hindi and Urdu, ultimately undermining his

114 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, File 5 Serial 5. Unidentified news clipping (possibly The Leader), Allahabad, May 14, 1938. While the Nizam’s reasons for refusing to grant permission to the Sammelan to hold its annual meeting within his domain are not elaborated, it is likely that as a patron of Urdu he was unsympathetic to its goal of propagating Hindi as a national language.

In the absence of support from the British government, the Nizam had emerged as one of the most important patrons of Urdu in the subcontinent during the preceding decades. For example, in addition to sending grants of financial aid to Aligarh Muslim University and even for translation projects at the Benares Hindu University, he had funded the establishment of Osmania University as the subcontinent’s first modern Urdu-medium university. See Kavita Datla, "A Worldly Vernacular: Urdu at Osmania University,” Modern Asian Studies 43, no. 5 (2009); Datla, "Making a Worldly Vernacular: Urdu, Education, and Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1883-1938”.

115 For a truly embittered critique of Gandhi’s alleged inconstancy throughout his part in the language controversy, see Fatihpuri, Pakistan Movement and Hindi-Urdu Conflict.
efforts to forge a linguistic unity capable of bridging communal and regional divides. A more sympathetic reading however would recognize that Gandhi, while attempting to be faithful to his own understanding of the truth, operated within a rapidly changing milieu. Obstacles inherited from the old “cobweb of misunderstandings” that had grown up around the Hindi-Urdu controversy since the nineteenth century were now compounded by fresh misgivings arising from new developments.\textsuperscript{116} For example, tensions surrounding the imposition of (and Gandhi’s opposition to) the Communal Award in 1932 (which gave Muslims and Sikhs separate electorates), and the changed political climate resulting from the Government of India Act in 1935 (which gave Indians greater electoral representation and a degree of autonomy to provincial governments in British India) were important aspects of this larger context. The near hegemonic electoral success of the Congress in the 1936-37 provincial elections in all but three provinces, and the failure of the Muslim League to form a government in any, seems to have rendered Muslim fears (in certain quarters at least) of an impending Hindu raj particularly acute. The evidence presented below suggests that Gandhi’s apparent inconsistencies on the language question arose out not so much from any inconstancy or incoherence in his thinking, but from his very human efforts to accommodate and reconcile rapidly polarizing extremes.

The 1930s and ‘40s saw the emergence of several new arenas of tension between advocates of the two languages. Among these were contests over the ways in which language-speaking communities were to be enumerated in the decennial census, and the nature of the language to be employed in the programming of the new medium of radio broadcasting. In both cases, colonial authorities seem to have readily perceived that in its

\textsuperscript{116} This is the title of one of Gandhi’s columns on the language issue. \textit{Harijan}, August 1, 1936.
spoken form, at least, Hindi and Urdu were part of a single language continuum, if not the same language. This guiding assumption, however, far from contributing to a rapprochement of protagonists from the two language communities, only served to exacerbate existing mistrust.

**Contending for Legitimation: The Decennial Census, Currency, Education**

The role of the census as a “colonizing form of knowledge” that reified religious, caste and linguistic identities has been explored in depth by several scholars.117 Asha Sarangi has noted that prior to 1901 the census categorized differences between Hindi and Urdu in a somewhat “fluid and fuzzy manner,” whereas in the early decades of the twentieth century modes of enumeration increasingly ascribed to these languages “more specific, exclusive and fixed social and cultural identities.”118 In their determination to secure ever more accurate demographic data, or perhaps as the precise nature of their enquiry shifted over time, census officials continually modified their questionnaires as they attempted to come to terms with India’s kaleidoscopic cultural diversity. Thus, while the 1921 census instructed enumerators to list “Hindi only” and “Urdu only,” in 1931, as questions of “literacy in the vernacular” gained heightened immediacy in the context of increased agitations over government policies concerning the languages of administration, education and the courts, respondents in U. P. were directed to “enter the ordinary language of the province as Hindustani. Do not write Urdu or Hindi.”119

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119 Ibid., 209.
Deliberating over the precise instructions to be given to enumerators for the 1931 census, Census Commissioner J. H. Hutton commented, “The difficulty of the fact, that there is no hard and fast line between Hindi and Urdu as spoken, can perhaps be got over by filling in the spoken language of both alike as Hindusthani and writing in the next column, 15, the script used when writing it – Hindi or Urdu.”\(^{120}\) This seemingly simple solution provoked a startled response from sections of the Urdu press. The Delhi Urdu daily *Millat* ran an editorial on March 5, 1931 entitled “*Mardum shumari aur Urdu ke sath Dushmani*” (“Census and Opposition to Urdu”) in which it reported that,

> the enumerators while committing many irregularities which were likely to harm Muslims, were in addition to this openly opposing Urdu and are not recording Urdu as the mother tongue of those who ask this to be done and contrary to their statement “Hindustani” is recorded in its place. Even if we have no grudge against “Hindustani”, it is not understood what right has an enumerator to enter a different language in place of Urdu which is given by the person concerned as his mother tongue. We have come to know through a reliable source that on the last Thursday when the census papers were received in the Office of the Delhi Municipality, in most of the forms Urdu was shown in the column for language. The Secretary, Municipal Committee, Delhi, sent for the teachers in the Municipal Board Schools, and got the entry of Urdu replaced by Hindustani. In reply to a complaint we were told that the orders actually were that Urdu should not be recorded, but that the language of Muslims should be returned as Hindustani.\(^{121}\)

Another unidentified Urdu press clipping quoted in Home Department correspondence also complained that the census questionnaire had been formulated such that “Hindi and Urdu people may record Hindustani as their language and the name of Urdu may disappear.”\(^{122}\) It insisted that, “It is a matter of great regret that some people taking ‘Urdu’ to be the language of Muslims are trying to oppose it. It is not a language of Muslims alone, but almost all the communities in India use this language and regard it as

\(^{120}\) Home Department, File No. 45/7/30-Public, 1930.  
\(^{121}\) Home Department, File No. 1/36/31-Public, 1931.  
\(^{122}\) Home Department, File No. 45/22/31 – Public, 1931.
their own.”  

Despite these protests, the 1941 census appears to have been carried out, in certain provinces at least, according to a similar set of instructions as were followed in 1931.

The sense that many Muslims perceived Urdu to be under siege from Hindi (with Government collusion) during the 1930s emerges strongly from the United Provinces Native Newspaper Reports of that decade. This journal reported in 1933, for instance, that “the Jiddat deplores that there is no faculty of Urdu in the Agra University while there is a faculty of the little-used Marathi language.” The Jiddat complained that no Muslims had been made the Vice-Chancellor of a state university in the United Provinces, despite the region being the home of Urdu literature, and it alleged that the government pursued “antagonistic” policies towards Urdu, aiming to “wipe out the Urdu language and deal a serious blow to Muslim civilization and culture.” Meanwhile, the Safaraz reportedly railed against what it viewed as the “extremely short-sighted and communalistic tendency of the authorities of semi-Government institutions like the Agra University as revealed in embossing the word “Om” in Hindi on the top of its certificates and other documents and in removing the Urdu language from its curriculum.”  

Meanwhile, educational institutions were also an arena of contention in regions where Hindi speakers were in the minority. In 1935, Hindi newspapers (characterized by the

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123 Ibid.
124 The contingencies of WWII appear to have interrupted the complete publication of census data. The tables that were published in 1941 suggest that data collection was carried out according to various systems of categorization. Tables published for the United Provinces give no indication of how information on language was collected, while in Bihar and Orissa, the category “Hindustani” took the place of any mention of Hindi or Urdu. In Bombay and the Central Provinces and Berar, by contrast, there was no mention of Hindustani or Urdu but Hindi and the sub-categories of Eastern Hindi and Western Hindi. In each case where data on language is provided, data is given for “Mother Tongue,” and “Bilingualism.”
125 U. P. Native Newspaper Reports (hereafter NNR), No. 49 of 1933.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
Government Reporter as “the Hindu Press”) “complained bitterly against the orders of the North-West Frontier Province Government excluding Hindi and Gurmukhi as media of instruction.”

For instance, the Abhyudaya announced that this order was an “unjustifiable attack on the rights of minority communities in the Frontier Province,” warning that the “murder of the mother tongue” was to be expected “under Muslim rule there and in other provinces where Muslims will be the majority.” The Āj argued that Hindi had become the lingua franca and that the government’s decision to boycott it in the North-West Frontier Provinces amounted to “placing obstacles in the way of Indian nationalism.”

The Mādhurī characterized the Frontier Government’s policy as “a severe blow to Hindu culture,” while the Chand called upon “every lover of Hindi and lover of justice” to oppose the policy, and on “Hindu and Sikh ladies in particular” to “read their mother tongue with the object of studying their religious books and acquainting themselves with their ancient culture.”

Partisans of both sides clearly understood that the trappings of educational institutions, as well as the medium of instruction, in terms of both language and script, were key battlefronts in the struggle for linguistic preeminence and/or survival.

Even King Edward VIII’s brief ascension to the throne and the prospect of new coinage to be minted in 1936 were seized upon as an opportunity to promote Hindi in the Nagari script. The Leader sought to remind the authorities that the rupee and other such coins should be inscribed with Nagari “since by far the large majority of the people of India can read this script – and many of them are not acquainted with any other.”

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128 NNR, November 16, 1935
129 Ibid., and NNR, November 30, 1935.
130 NNR, December 21, 1935.
131 NNR, February 8, 1936.
Āj agreed, insisting that failure to strike the new coins in Nagari script would amount to a “disregard of Hindus and their culture.”¹³² Clearly, these advocates of Hindi language and Devanagari script recognized the legitimizing power of state symbols and sought to appropriate their inscription wherever possible.

As it happened, Edward abdicated before any coins were produced in British India - only in one Princely State were coins minted in his honor, and these were, incidentally, in both Nagari and Persian. During the preceding reign of George V, Indian coinage sometimes featured Indian scripts alongside English characters. Usually this was Urdu or Persian script, which for instance appeared on quarter, half and one rupee coins from both the Bombay and Calcutta mints throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century. Smaller denominations such as the one, two, four and eight anna coins often carried four scripts, Urdu, Devanagari, Tamil and Bengali, in addition to English. The first Indian rupee coins to appear during the reign of George VI, no doubt to the chagrin of the editors of the Āj and The Leader, continued to carry only English and Urdu inscriptions, while in 1944, a one pice coin bearing both Devanagari and Urdu script, in addition to English, was issued. The last British Indian rupee, half-rupee and quarter rupee coins minted in 1947 also carried both Devanagari and Urdu writing, both scripts appearing on opposite sides of the image of a lion.¹³³

¹³² Ibid.
¹³³ See K. N. Sharif, Hundred Years of Indian Coinage (Bangalore: Libra Publishing House, 1979), 107-99.
The Language of All India Radio

The contest between Hindi and Urdu spilled over into other avenues and arenas of public culture, beyond the world of print or even that of the mint. The new medium of radio was to become one such highly contested battleground. Although the private Indian Broadcasting Company operated out of Calcutta and Bombay for several years from 1927 before going bankrupt, the government-owned Indian Broadcasting Service began transmissions in 1930, and was renamed All India Radio in 1936.134 This early period and the subsequent decade was a time when the producers and directors of this new form

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of media struggled to identify the appropriate language in which to broadcast. In part this was due to the “hovering” influence of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the belief expounded by its long-time director, (Lord) John Reith, that each language possesses a single standard of clarity and aesthetic perfection, and that it was the business of broadcasting to exemplify that standard.

A central figure in this process was Ahmad Shah Bukhari, Professor of English at Lahore University and a noted writer of Urdu, who began in 1935 as Delhi Station Director and was Director General of All India Radio from 1939 until 1947, when he was unceremoniously dumped by senior Congress leader Vallabhai Patel on the eve of Partition. In 1940, Bukhari appointed two well-known and loved writers of Hindi and Urdu respectively, S.H. Vatsyayan (“Āgaya”) and Chaudhuri Hassan Hasrat, to the task of compiling a lexicon of approximately one thousand words of Hindustani. This lexicon was to be the definitive guide in translating news reports from English into Hindustani for broadcast. Lelyveld describes the approach taken to the compilation of this lexicon:

The procedure was to list English words that appeared in the initial news copy from which the vernacular translations were prepared. The Hindi poet prepared a list of Hindi equivalents, the Urdu writer set down Urdu counterparts; then the two sat down and worked out a compromise based on what they considered to be the most common, most precise and if possible, most neutral. Instead of a Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian word for ‘submarine’, for example, they proposed dubakni, an unmarked word that refers to a kind of kingfisher. That was their triumph, but often they had to suggest that the announcer use two words, one Hindi and one Urdu, or that they distribute the vocabulary more or less fairly between the two: official titles in Urdu; north, south, east and west in Hindi. It was a language no one had ever spoken, and the lexicon, some eight thousand words, took five years to complete.

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135 David Lelyveld, ”Transmitters and Culture: The Colonial Roots of Indian Broadcasting,” *South Asia Research* 10, no. 1 (1990); Lelyveld, ”Talking the National Language: Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani in Indian Broadcasting and Cinema.” Bukhari’s dismissal for essentially ideological reasons by Patel represents a key victory in the Hindi-wallahs campaign to appropriate state machinery for its purposes.

136 Ibid.

137 Lelyveld, ”Transmitters and Culture: The Colonial Roots of Indian Broadcasting,” 49.

138 Ibid., 50. Such self-conscious efforts to thus create a Hindustani register were keenly mocked in the Hindi press. For one particularly savage caricature, see *deśdūt*, November 11, 1940. (A clipping is kept in
The very existence of “spoken Hindustani” was rejected at a special meeting of the Hindi Sāhitya Sangh (“Hindi Literature Association”) of the United Provinces held in Nainital in June, 1940. The Sangh published a resolution stating that it was a matter of “interminable suffering” (āpār dukh) that the Radio Department of the Indian Government was “openly murdering Hindi in the name of Hindustani” (khullamkhullā hatya). The resolution insisted that the Sangh was not opposed to the Urdu language or its literature, or the use of “simple Hindi” by “the common people,” granting that “in a continent like Bhāratvarṣ numerous distinct languages will flourish” and that “Indian culture is necessarily defined by the synergic accretion of this diversity.”

Nonetheless, it complained that the staff of the radio cared not “one scintilla for the eighty percent majority of Hindi-speaking people it purported to serve,” as evidenced by the use in its radio news of “a language replete with some sixty percent of words of Persian, Arabic or other foreign origin” which it intended to “falsely persuade the Hindi people that its name is Hindustani.” The Sangh offered the Radio Department

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139 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 1 Serial 8A. This Sangh was a provincial branch of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.
140 Ibid. Copies of the resolution were forwarded to: “1. All India Radio, New Delhi, 2. All India Radio, Lucknow, 3. All daily, weekly and monthly Hindi newspapers, 4. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 5. Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Kashi, 6. Hindi Sahitya Sabha, Dilli, 7. Major legislatures of Hindi.”
141 Ibid. (bhāratvarṣa jaise mahādeś me bhinn bhinn bhāṣāoṁ kā phalanā phālā na anivārya hai aur unkī samanvita abhivyadhi par sampāṁ bhāratiya sanskrīti kī unnati avalambita hai). Bhāratvarṣ, it must be noted, is a concept drawn from Hindu mythology invoking a sacred geography of the Indian subcontinent. See: Goswami, Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space. (See in particular, Chapter 5, “Space, Time, and Sovereignty in Puranic-Itihas.”)
142 Ibid. (kintu dukh to is bāṁ ka hai kī reidiyo kī sthāpaṁ kī janaṁ kii lāṁbārth hūṁ hai uskā 80 pratiśhat bhāṁ hindī-bhāṣā-bhāṣā hai aur phir bī reidiyo ke adhikārīgaṁ is bahumat kī leśamatra bhi cintā nahiṁ karte… reidiyo ke samācāroṁ tathā bhāṣāoṁ meṁ jis bhāṣā kā prayog kīya jātā hai vah 60 pratiśhat fārsīarbī
voluntary assistance from its own membership in delivering its programming in the “form of simple, literary Hindi.”

The U. P. Hindi Sāhitya Sangh’s Nainital resolution was part of a broader push to pressure the management of All India Radio to rethink its language policies. The militant tone adopted by this campaign is evinced in a document setting forth proposals for the establishment of a “Radio Committee of Action” to be orchestrated under the “joint auspices of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan of Allahabad and the Nagri Pracharini Sabha of Kashi” (Benares). This committee’s members would carry on the “agitation in a regular organized and systematic way relentlessly and unceasingly” until its demands were accepted. “Facts and figures” compiled by this committee, whose duties would include “actual listening-in” and the collection of data from All-India Radio’s print journals, *The Indian Listener* (English) and *Sarang* (Hindi), it was understood, would comprise “the best weapon in the armoury of the committee.” In the event that All India Radio was adamant, and demands to replace Hindustani with Hindi were not accepted, the public would be called upon to raise a boycott; “even Satyagraha may be advocated.” In addition to contacting listeners, organizing public meetings and conferences, publishing newsletters, pamphlets, and posters, as well as articles in existing newspapers and journals, preparing petitions, leading deputations, etc., it was also resolved to “enlist the active co-operation of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Arya

*dūre videśī šabdoň se paripūrn hoñī hai aur use hindustāninī kā nām denā hindī janatā ko jhūṭh hī bahakāne kā prayatna karnā hai*.

143 Ibid. (…kāryakram ki bhāṣā ko saral sāhityak hindī kā rūp pradrāñ karre. yadi rediyo ke adhikārīgn caheñge to “hindī sāhitya sañgh” unke liye aise hindī-seviyoň ka sahayog prāpt kar sakegā jo is kāry meñ ucit sahāyatā deñge.)

144 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya 1928-1960, Serial 24. The following quotations in this paragraph are all taken from this source. Although the document is undated, references to A. S. Bokhari as Director-General of Broadcasting in Delhi, and to the likelihood of wartime propaganda being more effective if it were carried out in Hindi, and not ‘Hindustani,’ indicate that it was prepared sometime between 1939 and 1945, certainly prior to 1947.
Samaj, and other religious, social, political, literary and educational organizations of the Hindus…” Indeed, the communal nature of the call for action was barely concealed, with repeated complaints against the predominance of Muslim employees on the All India Radio staff: “The writers in the permanent or semi-permanent employ of A. I. R. for writing ‘Hindustani’ programmes are all Urdu writers (in fact Muslims). Muslim phraseology and manners [are] exclusively adopted in women’s and children’s and other similar programmes.”

Meanwhile, an increasingly disaffected Muslim League voted in 1943 to reduce the A. I. R. budget in protest of what it perceived as excessive concessions to Sanskritized Hindi. Ultimately, in the face of such concerted opposition from supporters of both Hindi and Urdu, “Hindustani was given up as a lost cause” by All-India Radio and entirely separate broadcasts were made in both Hindi and Urdu. After Partition, with the Muslim League and Bukhari out of the way, a new lexicon was drawn up, this time “virtually ignoring Urdu” but seeking instead “as many cognates [usually derived from Sanskrit] as possible with the other languages of India.” In 1956, All India Radio was officially renamed Ākāśvānī, a Sanskritic neologism literally meaning “voice of the sky.”

Gandhi and the Hindi-Urdu Controversy

The ultimate triumph of Sanskritized Hindi over Urdu or a more inclusive form of Hindustani, pyrrhic though it may have proved in many senses, was, of course, contrary

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147 Ibid., 55.
to the stated ideals and goals of the Mahatma with regard to the national language.

Although he referred to it variously over a thirty-year period between 1918 and 1948 as “Hindi,” “Hindi-Hindustani,” even “Hindi-Urdu,” before finally settling on (or returning to) “Hindustani,” what Gandhi meant by these names seems to have remained fairly consistent – “the language of Northern India spoken and understood by the largest number of Indians and that could be written in both Nagri and Persian scripts. Or, as he was to formulate it in 1942, “Hindi + Urdu = Hindustani.” Largely at Gandhi’s insistence, though ironically in affirmation of a proposal moved by Purushottam Das Tandon of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, the Indian National Congress amended its constitution in 1925 to read: “The proceedings of the Congress should be conducted as far as possible in Hindustani.” As Kavita Datla has recently remarked, “choosing ‘Hindustani’ as opposed to ‘Hindi’ or ‘Urdu’ or ‘Hindi-Urdu’ to identify a common all-India language was most likely an attempt to avert the controversies that had come to characterize the relationship between the two languages.” As would also become clearer over time, the likes of both Gandhi and Tandon within the Congress understood Urdu as falling within the category of a larger linguistic formulation, as one style (śailī) of what they knew as Hindi, and/or Hindustani.

Gandhi’s commitment to some form of the North Indian vernacular as the best possible candidate for an Indian rāstrabhāsa (national language) is all the more convincing given that he was not a native speaker. It was while in South Africa that

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148 Harijan, February 8, 1942.  
149 Quoted in Robert D. King, Nehru and the Language Politics of India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.  
Gandhi discovered that neither his native Gujarati nor his laboriously acquired English were as effective as “what he variously referred to as Hindi or Hindustani,” in communicating with his fellow Indians, many of whom “knew it no better than he did.” According to David Lelyveld, he probably initially acquired a rudimentary knowledge of colloquial Hindustani during a stay of several months in Bombay after returning from London in 1892, although there are also scattered references to his childhood exposure to the north Indian literature of Tulsidas and Surdas (in Awadhi and Braj respectively). Gandhi first developed his ideas regarding the need for Indians to replace English with an indigenous language as a means of inter-regional discourse in *Hind Swaraj*, written in Gujarati in 1909. Soon after returning to India from South Africa in 1915, he elaborated his thoughts on the importance of replacing English with a common Indian language in a series of public speeches. One of the earliest of these was before the Nāgari Prachārini Sabha at Benares, soon followed in 1916 by an address at the inauguration of the Benares Hindu University, in which he “denounced the language that it was delivered in, English, and called upon Indians to speak Indian languages.” Two years later, in 1918, in his presidential speech at the eighth session of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan at Indore, Gandhi reiterated what would essentially remain his position on Hindi-Urdu until his death in 1948.

I have often said that Hindi is that language which is spoken in the North by both Hindus and Muslims and is written in either the Nagari or the Persian script. This Hindi is neither too Sanskritized, nor is it too Persianized. The sweetness which I find in the village Hindi is found neither in the speech of the Muslims of Lucknow, nor in that of the Hindi pandits of Prayag. The language which is easily understood by the masses is the best. All can easily follow the village Hindi. The source of the river of language lives in the

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152 Ibid.
Himalayas of the people. It will always be so. The Ganga arising from the Himalayas will continue to flow forever. It is the same with the village Hindi which will flow on for ever, while the Sanskritized Hindi and Persianized Hindi will dry up and fade away as does the rivulet springing from a small hillock.\textsuperscript{155}

While these sentiments are ostensibly inclusive and pluralist, it is easy to see how such a populist appeal would, in time, alienate elites in both the “Persianizing” and the “Sanskritizing” camps, both those who were guarded about retaining customary and official privileges and those eager to wrest them away from the old order. It is also notable that the metaphor employed by Gandhi here, of the eternality of the Ganga, would resonate far more deeply with a Hindu sensibility than a Muslim one.\textsuperscript{156} This, and the fact that three of his earliest public forays into the realm of linguistic nationalist politics were made at meetings of organizations with historical associations with the movement to displace Urdu with Hindi in the Nagari script, very likely contributed to lasting suspicions in certain quarters regarding Gandhi’s motives towards Urdu and the Persian script.\textsuperscript{157}

Indeed, Gandhi made little secret about his ultimate preference for Devanagari as the ideal candidate for an all-India script. From as early as the 1918 speech to the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, Gandhi endorsed the use of both Nāgari and Persian scripts, arguing that government officials should be required to know both. Yet, in what must have seemed an ominous portent to those with an affective attachment to, or a financial and


\textsuperscript{156} Even where he explicitly advocates a syncretic fusion of linguistic cultures in this speech Gandhi appeals to Hindu sensibilities. “A harmonious blend of the two [Hindi and Urdu] will be as beautiful as the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna and last forever.” Ibid., 14. Later, in a letter dated November 9, 1944 to secretary of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha Anand Kausalyayan, Gandhi would write, “The Hindi style and the Urdu style are like the Ganga and the Yamuna. Hindustani is like the Saraswati. It is concealed and yet not concealed. The Sabha should endeavour to make it clearly discernible.” \textit{CW}, Vol. 78, “Note to Anand Kausalyayan, November 9, 1944,” 282-283.

political stake in the preservation of Urdu and the Persian script, he was quick to add, “In
the end, the script which is the easier of the two will prevail.”

Gandhi frankly acknowledged that his advocacy of Urdu and the Persian script was a
concession to India’s Muslims, for whom he understood it to have religious and cultural
significance. In order to forge a unified national culture, it was desirable for Hindus to
learn the Urdu language and script, just as Muslims were enjoined to embrace Hindi and
Devanagari. “Hindus will have to learn some Persian words, while Muslims will have to
learn some Sanskrit words. This exchange will enrich and strengthen the Islamic
language and provide a very fruitful means for bringing Hindus and Muslims closer
together.”

While arguing that knowledge of the Persian script was necessary for the
development of a truly national culture capable of bridging the Hindu-Muslim communal
divide, Gandhi was less concerned about the maintenance of the great diversity of
regional scripts. Although he supported the elevation of the major regional vernacular
languages to official status in provincial governments, he also advocated their adoption of
the Devanagari script. This would not only facilitate the propagation of a common
national language and culture, but would greatly assist Indians in learning regional
languages other than their own, unlocking the diverse literary treasures of their larger
national heritage. As he put it in 1935,

Learning sister languages becomes incredibly simple and easy [through Devanagari].
‘Gitanjali’, written in the Bengali script, is a sealed book to everyone except the Bengalis.

\footnote{Ibid., 14-15.}
\footnote{For instance, see “Hindi or Hindustani” Harijan May 9, 1936, in which Gandhi wrote, “No Indian
who wishes to know the Muslim mind or to know all about Islam as it is being interpreted through the
Indian medium can afford to ignore Urdu literature.” As will be discussed further below, this emphasis was
especially annoying to ardent supporters of Urdu such as Maulvi Abdul Haq, who regarded it not primarily
as a Muslim language, but as an Indian one.}
\footnote{Gandhi, Our Language Problem, 14. Emphasis added.}
It is almost an open book when written in the Devanagari script. There is in it a vast number of words derived from Sanskrit and easily understood by the people of the other provinces.\textsuperscript{161}

While on tour in Orissa the previous year he had mused, “Oriya is very much like Bengali and would not be difficult to understand, if it was written in Devanagari or even Bengali characters. One sometimes wishes one had the despotic power to compel all the provinces by a stroke of the pen to adopt the Devanagari script.”\textsuperscript{162} In giving the convocation address at the Karnataka branch of the Hindi Prachar Sabha in Bangalore in 1936, Gandhi again expounded on the suitability of Devanagari as the national script,

> Even when I was in South Africa, I thought that all the languages derived from Sanskrit should have Devanagari script, and I am sure that even the Dravidian languages could be easily learnt through Devanagari script. I have tried to learn Tamil and Telugu through the Tamil and Telugu scripts, as also Kannada and Malayalam, for a few days, through their respective scripts. I tell you I was frightfully upset over having to learn four scripts when I could see that if the four languages had a common script - Devanagari - I should learn them in no time. What a terrible strain it is on those like me who are anxious to learn the four languages? As between the speakers of the four South Indian vernaculars, does it need any argument to show that Devanagari would be the most convenient script for the speaker of one to learn the other three?\textsuperscript{163}

Gandhi anticipated accusations of inconsistency in asking Indians to learn the Urdu script while abandoning their own regional scripts for Devanagari. “But my inconsistency is not quite foolish. There is Hindu-Muslim friction at the present moment. It is wise and necessary for the educated Hindus and Muslims to show mutual respect to the utmost extent possible.”\textsuperscript{164}

Gandhi delighted in the resolution of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan at Indore in 1935 to appoint a committee for the reform of the Devanagari script (the \textit{Lipi Sudhār}

\textsuperscript{161} “Two Good Resolutions,” \textit{Harijan}, May 4, 1935, 92.
\textsuperscript{162} “Fugitive Notes,” \textit{Harijan}, May 18, 1934, 111.
\textsuperscript{164} Quoted in Brock, \textit{Mahatma Gandhi as a Linguistic Nationalist}, 39.
This committee, chaired by Kaka Kalelkar and including eminent linguists Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Dr. Baburam Saksena, was charged with “making such changes and additions… as may be necessary to make it easier to write and more perfect than it is so as to represent the sounds not expressed by existing letters.” One of the changes proposed by the committee was a reduction in the number of symbols required for depicting vowels. In its traditional form, Devanagari employs at least eleven primary vowel symbols, with several more depicting sounds appearing in Sanskrit but absent in modern forms of Hindi. The Lipi Sudhār Samiti proposed that all of these be replaced by the first symbol of the syllabary, अ, which could be modified to represent the full range of vowel sounds via the addition of the already extant range of secondary vowel symbols traditionally employed in conjunction with consonants. While this simplification certainly reduced the overall number of symbols needing to be learned, it arguably did little for the script’s aesthetic appeal. While Gandhi himself and several of his close associates in the Hindi and Hindustani Prachar movements, such as Kaka Kalelkar and Srimannarayan Agarwal, faithfully adopted this method in their own handwriting and in at least some of the typed and printed Hindi and Hindustani propaganda that was produced in the following decade, the reformed script appears not to have caught on widely. For a

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166 Ibid. See also, Saksena, Gandhiji’s Solution of the Language Problem of India, 12.
167 According to Kaka Kalelkar’s biographer, the proposals of the Lipi Sudhar Samiti, which came to be known as “Kaka’s Reforms” were popular in Maharasthra and Gujarat, accepted by the Orissa Government, partially supported by the governments of Assam, C. P. and Sindh, but rejected by Gandhi’s own lieutenants in the South. Despite a standing committee of the Sammelan initially approving “Kaka’s Reforms,” the Varanasi session of the Sammelan ruled in 1939 that they were not to be introduced in U. P., though it had no objection if they were taken up in other parts of India. See Madho Prasad, Gandhian Patriarch: Political and Spiritual Biography of Kaka Kalelkar (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965), 300.

The 1946 Literature (Adabi) Board of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha (discussed below) which included Kalelkar, Tarachand and Baburam Saksena among others, approved a version of this reformed script which continued to use the “Kaka’s Reforms.” See Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 5. The Sabha’s Literature Board also proposed to drop several Sanskrit characters which it evidently deemed as surplus to
nationalist leader so adept at the deployment of symbols, Gandhi seems to have been curiously inattentive to the affective power of scripts and the traditions they embodied.

Gandhi was certainly not alone in advocating Devanagari as the national script of India. Although objecting strongly to the “linguistic monstrosity” of the “so-called Hindusthani” promoted by the Wardha scheme, V. D. Savarkar, mastermind of the Hindu Mahasabha (a Hindu nationalist political organization founded in 1915), also regarded Nāgari as an ideal vehicle for building (Hindu) national consciousness. He too had been involved in moves to reform the script “with a little touch here and there… so as to render it as suitable to mechanical printing as the Roman script.”168 Speaking at the twenty-first session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1939, Savarkar commented,

> It is more or less common knowledge that if Bengali or Gujarati is printed in Nagari it is more or less understood by readers in other provinces. To have only one common language throughout Hindusthan at a stroke is impracticable and unwise. But to have the Nagari script as the only common script throughout Hindudom is more feasible.169

Savarkar strongly recommended that an immediate step towards popularizing the national script would be for the Hindu papers in all of the provinces to publish at least a few columns written in provincial languages in the Nagari script. He also lambasted as anti-national Jawaharlal Nehru and others who, inspired by the secular reforms of Turkish nationalist Kemal Ataturk, momentarily advocated the use of Roman script as a possible solution to the language question. In the same breath he attacked the “Mahommaden

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169 Ibid., 86.
zealots who want the Urdu script,” with its “very Arabian style.” Despite the substantial differences between Gandhi and Savarkar, it is not difficult to see how proponents of Urdu would have been unsettled by their shared enthusiasm for Devanagari, perhaps conflating their ideological motivations.

In 1936, the Ākhil Bhāratiya Sāhitya Parishad (All-India Literature Conference) was established as an off-shoot of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan at the instigation of K. M. Munshi, with the aim of bringing together litterateurs from throughout India to combine and consolidate efforts toward establishing a common inter-provincial or national language. The inaugural meeting was held in Nagpur on April 24. Gandhi was asked to preside over this Parishad, and although he agreed, he privately claimed to do so reluctantly, having learned that it was not to be the informal gathering he had expected but one with three to four hundred invitees. In any case, his involvement was to prove critical, even disastrous, in the troubled history of Hindi and Urdu. In the course of discussion over what was to be designated the language of the proceedings, Gandhi’s insistence on the name “Hindi-Hindustani” earned the distrust, if not enmity, of Maulvi Abdul Haq, who was later celebrated, particularly in Pakistan, as Baba-i Urdu (“father of Urdu,” or as Harish Trivedi has more aptly rendered it, “Grand old man of Urdu”).

According to articles he would publish in his journal Urdu and numerous speeches made in the ensuing years, Haq claimed to have proposed that the language of the Parishad should be called Hindustani, citing the policy of the Indian National Congress as

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170 Ibid., 87.
171 K. M. Munshi was an advocate of “pure” (Sanskritic) Hindi who would later propose the successful amendment in the Constituent Assembly that Hindi in Devanagari script only should be named National Language.
laid out in its constitution.\textsuperscript{174} Gandhi, on the other hand, was initially in favor of the name Hindi.

When the pitch of the dialogue rose, Gandhiji tried another trick and proposed a new name: Hindi-Hindustani. I enquired, “What do you mean by Hindi?” He replied, “That language which is in the books but not in common parlance.” Then I asked, “What do you mean by Hindustani?” He answered, “That language which is in the common parlance but not in the books.” Then I asked, “What then is this new thing you call Hindi-Hindustani?” He answered, “That language which some time in the future will become Hindustani.” I said, “Hindustani is already here. Why wait half-a-century for its materializing.” Now he snapped at me, saying, “I cannot disown Hindi.” I retorted, “If you cannot disown Hindi, why should we give up Urdu?” To this he reacted with words least expected of him. He said, “Muslims can hold on to Urdu. It is a language of religious value for them. It is written in the script of the Qur’an. It was propagated by Muslim kings.” After this statement from him, I resigned from the Working Committee of the Parishad.”\textsuperscript{175}

Kavita Datla refers to Haq’s companion Akhtar Husain Raipuri as saying that “this encounter was so transformative for Abdul Haq that on returning to Aurangabad from Nagpur he removed the symbols of Gandhian nationalism, the chakr and khadi, from his house.”\textsuperscript{176} According to Raipuri, in Datla’s words, “Abdul Haq was basically a Gandhian before this encounter happened.”\textsuperscript{177} The extent of Haq’s disillusionment with Gandhi and the Congress after the Nagpur Parishad is also evident in another quote from his writings in the journal \textit{Urdu}, in which he speculated on Gandhi’s reasoning for retreating at this moment from the use of the term Hindustani:

… the time has come when, to say nothing of Urdu, he is not even prepared to write or hear the word Hindustani by itself. Not once but repeatedly in his speech he said that if the word ‘Hindustani’ were used alone it would be taken to mean Urdu, but this hadn’t struck him its seems when the National Congress itself passed a resolution with the word ‘Hindustani’ alone… On reflection it appears that the cause of all this departure and deviation, chopping and changing, and tricks and wiles is the hapless politics of our country. So long as Mahatma Gandhi and his followers hoped to be able to arrive at a

\textsuperscript{174} Kavita Datla, “Urdu Language Politics in Hyderabad.”
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Kavita Datla, “Urdu Language Politics in Hyderabad.”
political agreement with the Muslims, they kept chanting, ‘Hindustani, Hindustani’, which proved to be a good lullaby for putting us to sleep. But when they could no longer entertain such a hope, or when they no longer felt the need for such an agreement, they cast off their cloak of deception and came out in their true colours.¹⁷⁸

Interestingly, aside from Abdul Haq, the only other advocate of Hindustani at the Parishad brave enough to speak out publicly against Gandhi’s position was the writer Premchand, who was of course himself an ardent Gandhian, and less than a year from the end of his all-too-brief life. Premchand later wrote to the Maulvi in an effort to placate him, reasoning that although the Parishad had voted for ‘Hindi-Hindustani,’ the narrow margin of fifteen for Hindustani to twenty-five against, in an assembly dominated by ‘Hindi-wallahs’ (there were only three representatives of Urdu in attendance), amounted to a “victory in defeat.”¹⁷⁹

One of those who probably voted for Hindustani was Jawaharlal Nehru, who in September 1936 sent a long and thoughtful letter in English to Bihari Congressman Syed Mahmud describing his unease at what he viewed as the trivial preoccupation with the question of naming the language.¹⁸⁰ Nehru wrote that he had attended the conference with hopes that Indian writers in the various languages would consider the many problems that Europeans had then to face, with the “fierce tussle that is going on between progress and reaction,” or with the India’s real problems of “poverty and unemployment.” Nonetheless, he agreed with Syed that the communal conflict that was coalescing around the language issue was of serious concern, and addressed the matter as he saw it in considerable detail. Nehru reiterated his support for the Congress notion of Hindustani and to throwing open the way to both scripts everywhere, to “permit the use of either or

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 357.
both as the people choose.” Unsurprisingly, he also defended Gandhi’s integrity as unimpeachable, and speaking of the Parishad, tried to explain where he thought Gandhi was coming from in terms of his formulation of “Hindi-Hindustani.”

Nehru pointed out that the meeting was not only one between writers of Hindi and Urdu of northern India, but also writers of other languages from the south and west who were “suspicious of the attempts made on behalf of Hindustani to overshadow them.”

Nehru’s intimation was that, for many, Sanskrit-derived vocabulary was more familiar in many cases than equivalent terms drawn from Persian or Arabic. “They could think vaguely in terms of Hindi, but the word Hindustani seemed more foreign to them. This was, I believe felt by Gandhiji and he made it clear that he would like the southern writers to accept the word Hindustani but they would require some further contacts with use before they would gladly do so. Therefore, he said, for the present the uncouth phrase “Hindi yani Hindustani” may be used.”

Interestingly, Nehru uses the Urdu yani here, which could just as well be translated as “Hindi, that is to say, Hindustani” or “Hindi, in other words, Hindustani,” rather than the more commonly found, “Hindi-Hindustani.” Even the Sanskrit-derived “Hindi athava Hindustani,” which is occasionally used to denote Gandhi’s formulation, has more of the previous connotation than that which is implied by the hyphenated English rendering.

In the storm that followed the Nagpur Parishad, sections of the Urdu press poured scorn on Gandhi, accusing him and others such as Nehru and Rajendra Prasad of a “deep conspiracy to crush Urdu.” Gandhi in turn made numerous attempts to clarify and defend the position he had taken, both in a series of columns published in his weekly

181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
newspaper, Harijan, and, notably, at the Madras session of the Bharatiya Sāhitya Parishad in 1937. Immediately following Nagpur, in May 1936, Gandhi published a two part column entitled “Hindi or Hindustani” along with a letter from an anonymous Muslim friend which gives an eloquent summation of the concerns of Muslims and proponents of Urdu. Although he attempts to address each of his correspondent’s major points, Gandhi often seems to miss the point. For instance, the correspondent, while sympathetic to the aim of the Parishad to evolve a common inter-regional language, objects to the tendency of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan and its operatives to employ excessively Sanskritic vocabulary. To illustrate he asks why the Parishad employed the exclusive Hindu signifier “Bharatiya,” rather than the more inclusive “Hindustani.”

If Bharat means anything at all it means the India of the Aryans, in which not only the Mussalmans and their contribution to Indian life but centuries of development and change have no place. Does this not suggest exclusiveness as well as retrogression? Again, in the Hindi circulars sent to us, there are not more than two or three words of the spoken language, pure Sanskrit forms like निम्िललखित being used for the ordinary Hindi िीच़े ललि़े हुए, so that it is quite unintelligible to me, though I know the Nagari script quite well.

Gandhi accepts the critique of “writers of the North who write a language which they call Hindi but which every few persons even of the North would understand,” though, reasonably enough, urges Muslims to learn new terms from Sanskrit, just as he feels that Hindus should learn some Persian and Arabic-derived vocabulary. He stands resolutely by “Bharatiya,” insisting that “the Hindus all over India” and “even the majority of the Mussalmans of the North would understand it,” failing to register his correspondent’s point that the Mussalmans of the North understood its connotations all too well.

A year on, at the Madras meeting of the Bharatiya Sāhitya Parishad, Gandhi continued to defend the stance he had taken in Nagpur:

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183 Harijan, “Hindi or Hindustani,” May 9, 1936.
184 Ibid.
Yakub Hussain Saheb asked me why I insisted so much on ‘Hindi-Hindustani’ and was not content with having simple ‘Hindustani’ as the common language. I must take you through the genesis of the whole thing. It was as early as 1918 that as President of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan I suggested to the Hindi-speaking world to broaden their definition of Hindi to include Urdu. When I presided over the Sammelan once again in 1935 I had the word Hindi properly defined as a language that was spoken both by Hindus and Mussalmans and written in Devnagari or Urdu script. My object in doing so was to include in Hindi the high-flown Urdu of Maulana Shibli and the high-flown Hindi of Pandit Shyamsunderdas. Then came the Bharatiya Sāhitya Parishad, also an off-shoot of the Sammelan. At my suggestion the name Hindi-Hindustani was adopted in the place of Hindi. Abdul Haq Saheb stoutly opposed me there. I could not accept his suggestion. I should have done violence to myself and to the Sammelan if I had given up the word ‘Hindi’ which was the word of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan and which I had persuaded them to define so as to include Urdu. We must remember that the word Hindi is not of Hindu coinage, it was coined after the Muslim advent to describe the language which Hindus of the North spoke and studied. So many Mussalman writers of note have described their language as Hindi. And why now this quarrel over words when Hindi is defined to include the variations spoken and written by Hindus and Mussalmans?

One might characterize such protestations over the correctness of his position as truculent. Nonetheless, in his various writings and actions in the twelve months or so following the Parishad there is a discernible note of remorse, if not repentance, and an eagerness to maintain an ongoing dialogue, even if consensus were to prove impossible. Following the Madras Parishad, Gandhi wrote a note to Nehru requesting that he “write on the Hindi-Urdu topic at early date,” no doubt recognizing that as a “Kashmiri Pundit” from an Urdu background with secular credentials, the future Prime Minister was well-positioned to ameliorate the precarious situation. The result was a pamphlet entitled *The Question of Language*, which was also run in the *Bombay Chronicle*. After its publication, Sarojini Naidu wrote to Nehru saying,

> Your language pamphlet is a miracle worker. You should see the radiant satisfaction it has produced among the most disgruntled. Old Maulvi Abdul Haq whose opinion counts

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for much in Urdu literary circles, to whom I had sent a copy, has since been in conference with Rajendra Babu and has returned with glowing satisfaction.\textsuperscript{188}

After corresponding with Zakir Husain, Gandhi had wired Rajendra Prasad asking him to “seek out to Maulvi Abdul Haq Saheb.”\textsuperscript{189} He also endorsed the joint statement subsequently issued by Abdul Haq and Rajendra Prasad at a meeting of the Bihar Committee of Urdu in Patna on August 28, 1937. The statement read,

\begin{quote}
We were anxious to remove the misunderstandings which have been unfortunately created in connection with the Urdu-Hindi-Hindustani controversy… We are agreed that Hindustani should be the common language of India and should be written in both Urdu and Nagri characters, which should be recognized for all official and educational purposes. By ‘Hindustani’ we mean the largest common factor of the language spoken in North India, and we believe that common usage should be the criterion for the selection and inclusion of words in its vocabulary…”\textsuperscript{190}
\end{quote}

In the above-mentioned columns “Hindi or Hindustani,” published in Harijan immediately following the first Parishad at Nagpur, Gandhi went to great lengths to defend Purushottam Das Tandon and the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan against allegations that they were partisans of Hindi to the detriment of Urdu. Eventually, in light of resolutions passed by the Sammelan itself, Gandhi recognized that such a position was untenable. Having failed to convince Tandon of the importance of propagating the national language in both Devanagari and Persian scripts, he finally resigned from the Sammelan in 1945. In the meantime, he had come to adopt a position far more in keeping with the one argued by Abdul Haq at Nagpur in 1936, and in 1942 launched a new organization for the promotion of the national language, the Hindustānī Prachār


\textsuperscript{189} \textit{CW}, Vol. 66, “Letter to Zakir Husain, August 27, 1937,” 76. Zakir Husain, long-time rector of the Urdu-medium Jām‘iya Milliyya University at Delhi, had recently come to prominence through his participation in the development of the ‘Wardha scheme’ for basic education, and after independence would serve as India’s third President.

\textsuperscript{190} Quoted in Dittmer, \textit{Die Indischen Muslims Und Die Hindi-Urdu Kontroverse in Den United Provinces}, 163-64.
Sabhā. The background to the formation of this organization is a major concern of the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Culture War: Defining राष्ट्रभाषा

This chapter examines the struggle for dominance within the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan that took place between the mid-1930s and the early 1940s, eventually resulting in Gandhi’s departure and the establishment of a new organization, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha in 1942. The stakes in this contest were high: the winners would assume great authority to define India’s राष्ट्रभाषा (“national language”) and to command much of the machinery that had been developed over several decades for its propagation. While the bifurcation between Hindi and Urdu was to continue to have profound implications for the subcontinent at large and was reflected in the ever-widening rift between Congress and the Muslim League, the contest between Hindi and Hindustani was fought primarily between senior members within the Congress itself. At the same time, the alliance discussed below between those Congressmen who supported Hindi and members of the openly Hindu nationalist party, the Hindu Mahasabha, is particularly instructive.

The work of promoting some form of the north Indian vernacular as राष्ट्रभाषा had been carried out in southern India since 1918 by the Daksina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha (“South Indian Hindi Propagation Society”) from its headquarters in Madras. This organization was inaugurated by Annie Besant (British socialist, theosophist and supporter of Indian independence), while Gandhi remained its President from 1918 until his death in 1948. In 1936 at the Nagpur session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, a new organization was established, also at Gandhi’s prompting, to carry out the promotion of Rashtrabhasha in other “non-Hindi-speaking” regions of India, including what is today

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Maharashtra, Gujarat, Orissa, Assam, and parts of Madhya Pradesh.\textsuperscript{192} The 
*Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti* (“National Language Promotion Committee”) was to be 
based at Wardha in central India, with Rajendra Prasad, who had also presided over the 
Nagpur Sammelan, as its President. Yet another branch of the Sammelan, the *Prachar 
Samiti*, was to be responsible for “popularizing Hindi literature in Hindi-knowing 
provinces.”\textsuperscript{193} As Rajendra Prasad himself admitted in his autobiography, although he 
was president, the policies of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti were laid down by 
Gandhi in conjunction with prominent members of the Sammelan, such as Purushottam 
Das Tandon, with fundraising largely the responsibility of wealthy industrialist, Jamnalal 
Bajaj.\textsuperscript{194} Another active member of the Samiti was Gandhi’s close associate Kaka 
Kalelkar, who served as its Vice-President until 1940.\textsuperscript{195}

As we have seen, Gandhi initially defended his 1936 formulation of Hindi-
Hindustani, citing the historical importance of the term Hindi for the Hindi Sahitya 
Sammelan, the organization that had done the most to promote an all-India common 
language. After the 1937 joint statement by Abdul Haq and Rajendra Prasad, however, 
Gandhi gradually retreated from insisting on the word Hindi and began again to simply 
use the term Hindustani when referring to the national language. In a piece entitled 
“Hindustani, Hindi and Urdu” published in October 1939, for instance, Gandhi returned 
to the terminology used in the Congress constitution, arguing that “the real competition is 
not between Hindi and Urdu but between Hindustani and English … For the purpose of

Sahitya Parishad was held at Nagpur in 1936 discussed in the previous chapter was held to coincide with this meeting of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 425.

\textsuperscript{195} Vishnu Prabhakar, *Kākā Kālelkar* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Sahitya Academy, 1985), 55.
crystallizing Hindustani, Hindi and Urdu may be regarded as feeders. A Congressman must therefore wish well to both and keep in touch with both in so far as he can.”

A little later in December of that year, Gandhi again wrote on the topic reassuring “a Muslim friend who calls himself an old Congress worker” that despite his concern that “a majority of Congressmen have, in contravention of the Congress resolution, been using the word ‘Hindi,’” Gandhi whole-heartedly agreed that “Rashtrabhasha has only one name, *i.e.* Hindustani.”

But even as Gandhi made such efforts to retain the goodwill of the ‘Urdu-wallahs’ and the Muslim community in general, and to include contributions from Urdu in his definition of Rāṣṭrabhāṣā, he encountered a stern reaction from self-professed lovers of Hindi (*Hindi Premi*). Opposition to Gandhi’s reorientation soon manifested itself in a struggle for influence over the policies and leadership of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. The twenty-seventh session of the Sammelan in 1938 issued a series of resolutions that marked a stark contrast with Gandhi’s philosophy of national language. It announced its “total opposition” (*ghor virodhi*) to the recent decree of the Princely State of Alwar (in contemporary Rajasthan) that Urdu would be mandated as the official language of state business from 1940, and demanded that in Hindi-speaking areas, which it listed as Bihar, Mahakoshal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajputana, Dilli, the United Provinces and the Punjab, Hindi should be made the medium (*samast*) of legal, administrative and other forms of government work. It also repeated calls for the Radio department to reform its language policies, claiming that it promoted the use of foreign words (*videśi shabd*) which were

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197 Ibid.
198 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1938, File 6, Serial 9a (1-56).
very difficult for the Indian people (bhāratiya janata) to comprehend. It also sought to add an element of standardization to the Devanagari script, advocating the removal of diacritical symbols used to differentiate sounds which had entered Northern Indian languages primarily from Persian and Arabic.

Words coming into Hindi from Persian and other languages such as कंग्रेस-फायदा [“paper-benefit”] that are written with the use of a dot underneath [to indicate sounds not occurring in the Devanagari syllabary] have distorted and rendered unintelligible the natural form of the language. Therefore in the opinion of the Sammelan the practice of writing such words with a dot underneath should be discontinued, and a form adopted according to natural evolution and popular usage.

In one sense, this measure may well have been in keeping with the script reforms advocated by Gandhi to simplify Devanagari in order to facilitate its uptake in non-Hindi-speaking regions. On the other hand, in seeking to erase the visibility of the Persian and Arabic heritage of a fairly large proportion of Hindi’s spoken lexicon, it clearly contradicted the principle recently enunciated by Gandhi that the national language, Hindustani, should draw upon both Hindi and Urdu traditions.

The 1940 Sammelan held in Poona (now Pune, Maharashtra) generated considerable controversy, even before its commencement. Kaka Kalelkar, himself a Maharashtran, wrote to Purushottam Das Tandon in April 1940, warning him of the various dangers of

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199 Although not explicit the resolution’s objection to “foreign words” seems to refer to those of Persian and Arabic origin in the language of the radio broadcasts.

200 Hindī meñ farsī ādī bhāṣāoñ se āe kāgaż-fāydā ādī sābdōñ ke nice bindī lagā kar likhnā bhāṣā ke svarāp ko bīgārnā tathā kliṣṭātā bādhānā hai; īsī Sammelanā kī rāy meñ aise sābdōñ ke nice bindī lagā kar likhne kī prathā chor deñ căhie aur lok vyavhār ke anusār tathā sambhav tadbhav rūpoñ ko hī grahaṇ karnā căhie.

Shahid Amin, in conversation with Alok Rai on the politics of the candra bindu has remarked, “…this whole issue of the adamant position adopted by the Hindi alphabet, where every dot that is put below a letter is seen as a mark of excrescence or a pock mark, a concession to foreign Farsi things, while with every dot that’s put on top, the chandrabindu, the more Sanskritic you get… I have written a little bit in Hindi and every time it comes back from the printer all the bindīs have systematically been taken off. Once I said very provocatively, “Hindī meñ bindī lagānē kē liyē kyā mujhē Pākistān jānē parēgā?” [Will I have to go to Pakistan to have the bindī printed?!” Alok Rai and Shahid Amin, "A Debate between Alok Rai and Shahid Amin Regarding Hindi," Annual of Urdu Studies 20(2005).
holding the Sammelan in Maharashtra. According to Kalelkar, there were numerous opponents of Congress among the state’s intelligentsia, and many of the controversies that plagued the Sammelan had also arisen there. Prominent Congress leader and chairman of the regional Maharashtra Rashtra Pracha Prachar Samiti (“Committee for the Promotion of National Language”), Shankar Rao Deo, had taken responsibility for organizing the welcoming committee of the annual meeting. Kalelkar explained in his letter to Tandon that he had advised against Deo holding the Sammelan in Poona. Deo had chosen, however, not to heed Kalelkar’s recommendation of Nashik as a preferable location. It had been decided that Bala Saheb Kher, another senior Congress leader (who would later become the first Chief Minister of Bombay State), would be nominated chair of the welcoming committee. According to Kalelkar, however, at the last possible moment that nominations could be made, several of V. D. Savarkar’s Hindu Mahasabha-ites were made members of the Sammelan and two or three names were put forward in opposition to Kher. Shankar Rao, perhaps fearing the loss of face that would be incurred by Kher in an election defeat, withdrew Kher’s name and announced that under the changed circumstances, he and the Maharashtra Rashtra Pracha Prachar Samiti were no longer able to collaborate with the welcoming committee.

Kalelkar speculated that the Hindu Mahasabha would insist that Savarkar be made the chairman and assured Tandon that in such an event he himself would certainly withdraw.

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201 Kaka Kalelkar to Purushottom Das Tandon, April 17, 1940, PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 29.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid. See also: Prabhakar, Kaka Kalelkar, 54-55.
204 See also, Sampurnanand Important Correspondence, Serial 27, Kalelkar to Sampurnanand, August 12, 1940. Kalelkar also wrote privately to Sampurnanand, explaining the circumstances of Shankar Rao Deo’s resignation and warning him of the controversy brewing in Pune ahead of the forthcoming Sammelan.
from the Sammelan. Furthermore, he warned Tandon that the conflict between Hindi and Hindustani was destroying all the work that been done by the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, and that while the struggle against the Englishman and the English language was being dropped, Hindu-Muslim conflict was increasing throughout the land. The promotion of śudh (“pure”) Hindi was, from Kalelkar’s point of view, the work of the Hindu Mahasabha.

In June 1940 Kalelkar also wrote to Gandhi to express similar concerns, noting that each of the previous three annual sessions of the Sammelan had seen efforts to reinterpret the 1918 Indore definition of Rashtrabhasha. “Shri Tandonji has said to me that even he does not like the [Congress] interpretation [of Rashtrabhasha], and now he is in Poona entreating Narasimha Kelkar [President of the Hindu Mahasabha] and his Sabha to take up the promotion of Hindi as the national language as a matter of importance to Hindu culture and society.” Kalelkar urged Gandhi to try to convince Tandon that this was not consistent with Congress policy or ideology.

But Kalelkar was not only concerned about the growing influence of the Mahasabha within the Sammelan. He also expressed concerns (to Gandhi as well as to Tandon directly) about the overweening supervision to which the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti was subjected by Tandon and the Sammelan from Allahabad, suggesting that he and the regional branches of the Samiti would be able to better undertake the work of the Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad if given greater independence (svatantra). He was also clearly

205 Ultimately, Kalelkar’s worst fears, that Savarkar would take charge of the Sammelan, were not realized. However, but the chairmanship was taken up by Vaiṣampāyan, whom Kalelkar believed had staged the last minute campaign to stack the vote. Vaiṣampāyan later sought Tandon’s assistance in recovering a donation 4000 rupees that had purportedly been made to the Sammelan Welcoming Committee for the annual conference before Shankar Rao Deo had withdrawn his cooperation. See PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 59, Tandon to Gandhi, December 12, 1940.

206 This definition recognized Urdu in Persian script as a form of Hindi.

207 PD Tandon Papers, File 13a, Serial 445, Kalelkar to Gandhi, June 24, 1940.
disturbed by the divergence in the naming of the Rashtrabhasha between Congress and the Sammelan. In the August 1940 edition of Sabki Bolī, the journal of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, Kalelkar argued that the Sammelan should not be afraid of the word “Hindustani,” if it remained true to the definition of Hindi adopted at the Indore meeting.

Although a meeting of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti at Wardha in October, 1940 established that its members were free to participate in any project that adopted the name ‘Hindustani’, it was also clarified that as a branch of the Sammelan, the Samiti itself was to use the word ‘Hindi.’ Evidently dissatisfied with this decision, Kalelkar submitted his resignation to the President of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, sometime during the same month, shortly ahead of the Poona Sammelan in December of that year.208 In an article published widely in November, entitled “‘Hindi’ aur ‘Hindustāni’ ke Sambandh men Sammelan ke Nīti” (“Policies of the Sammelan with regard to ‘Hindi’ and “Hindustani”), Tandon emphasized that the business of the Sammelan and its Samiti had always been and would always remain the propagation of pure (śudh) ‘Hindi.’209 At a meeting of the working committee of the Samiti held at Wardha in November 1940, Gandhi reportedly convinced the remaining members that they ought not to follow Kaka Saheb’s example in resigning from the Samiti. He also urged them to be sure to attend the forthcoming meeting in Poona.210 Clearly, Gandhi was anxious to preserve congenial relations within the Hindi-Hindustani world for as long as possible.

208 PD Tandon Papers, File 13a, Serial 461 (NAI microfilm accession number 365), Kalelkar to Prasad, undated. See also Prabha, Kaka Kalelkar, 55.
209 PD Tandon Papers, File 3, Serial 60. In a striking example of how efficient the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was at mobilizing print media, Tandon’s article appeared independently in the form of a pamphlet, in addition to publication in numerous journals and newspapers such as Sudhā, Sāptāhik Āj, Vicār, Jāgrti, Hindi Svarājī and Desātā.
210 PD Tandon Papers, File 13a, Serial 460, Agrawal to Tandon, November, 1940.
As it happened, it was not members of the Hindu Mahasabha who sparked the greatest controversy at the Poona Sammelan, but senior Congressmen associated with the Hindi and Devanagari movement, such as Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon, and even Gandhi himself.211 Although at the time of the conference he was serving a stint in a British prison, an essay written by Sampurnanand entitled, “Voice of the Indian Nation” was read out to the gathered assembly.212 In Sampurnanand’s mind, the voice of the Indian Nation could be nothing other than Hindi. His keynote address rehearsed the now well-known critique of the language of All India Radio, complaining that “the Radio announcer never says namaskar to the listeners; he greets them with adabarz,” and lamented that “one has to listen to talks laden with Arabic and Persian words even on the occasion of Hindu festivals.”213 In short, it appeared to Sampurnanand that All India Radio had “come into being only to mutilate Hindi and to caricature that culture which that language symbolizes.”214 He urged listeners to organize and congratulated those who had formed a listeners’ association in Lucknow and begun to publish a journal entitled Ākāśvānī.

While Sampurnanand insisted that he wasn’t opposed to the natural absorption of words “imported from abroad” into Hindi, noting that this process had been ongoing since “the days of Chandvardai and Prithviraj,” he argued that an unwillingness to assimilate to an indigenous form was what distinguished Urdu from Hindi:

211 Sampurnanand (1891-1969), was a teacher in “national” schools who vowed not to take Government employment until Independence, and a Congress politician who rose to the position of Education Minister in the Congress Government in 1937-9, and again in 1946, later becoming Chief Minister of U. P. and Governor of Rajasthan. He was a member of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan from 1918, and the All India congress Committee from 1922. See: Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism, 426.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
Their [foreign words] importation will not change the character of the language [Hindi]. They will lose their foreign character and be shaped according to the genius of the language. All living languages act in this manner. We, similarly, adopt words from Sanskrit; they become Hindi words. A glaring proof of this is that they are subjected to the laws not of Sanskrit but of Hindi grammar. Orthodox writers of Urdu, however, insist on salatin, mumatik, and khavatin as the plural forms of sultan, mulk and khatun. These words are not willing to forget their foreign descent and are proud of their origin. It is this pride of origin that drives them into the Urdu fold. Otherwise verbs, pronouns, prefixes and all those words that form the vital part of a language are the same in Hindi and Urdu. We can never recognize an artificial language in Hindi or Hindustani for it can never become the language of the people. It is useless for us. I repeat that I do not object to the use of Arabic and Persian words. It is not possible that today all at once there should be complete similarity in speech of a Brahman versed in the Vedas and that of a Hafiz. But the differences that are natural do us no harm. We are opposed to that artificial language this is unnecessarily laden with Arabic and Persian words. I believe that if we have words from Persian or Sanskrit to denote the same sense, our vocabulary would increase and it will give an added charm to our literature. In English there are words like query, question, interrogation and interpellation having the same connotation. They give different nuances of the same meaning according to usage. There is no harm in our adopting the same procedure in Hindi too.215

Sampurnanand’s claim that “Hindi is the voice of the nation and nobody can throttle the voice of the nation,” was taken as a direct provocation by Muslim proponents of Urdu, who argued that his address revealed the Hindu bias of the Congress agenda.216 A jointly signed letter by four Muslim correspondents of an Allahabad newspaper refuted Sampurnanand’s [Hindu] nationalist reading of the language question. It argued that while “the Muslim form of the greeting is ‘Assalam-o-alaikum’ and the Hindu form of greeting is ‘Namaskar,’” Urdu was a language common to both Hindus and Muslims. “Adab-arz,” the correspondents insisted, “is a pure and simple Indian form of greeting used by Hindus and Musalmans alike.” Gandhi, as an unofficial leader of the Congress, was found guilty by association.

Nationalist Indians (Hindus, Muslims and others) may dispassionately consider over the matters and let the public know whether Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of “Indian Nation” will ever materialise [sic] when his followers are tactfully trying to demolish every

215 Ibid.
216 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 64, “Congress Nationalism Exposed: Hindi the Voice of the Nation” clipping from unknown publication, December 28, 1940.
existing symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity, the corner stone of the so-called Indian Nation.\textsuperscript{217}

Certainly, sections of the Hindi press were eager to rush to Sampurnanand’s defense. Noting that many Muslims and Congress supporters had become “sulky” (रुस्त) in response to Sampurnanand’s Poona keynote, the editor of Varanasi daily 睫 (“Today”) declaimed on that Sampurnanand had “merely poured snow on burning fire,” and that if he was guilty of some great offence (महाप्रद्ध), then the editor was proud to say most vehemently that in this regard he was the greatest offender of all.\textsuperscript{218} Going even further than Sampurnanand, 睫 asserted that “The language of the nation can be only that language whose origins are of that nation, and whose repertoire of words similarly ought to be representative of the culture of that country.”\textsuperscript{219} The editorial concluded with a metaphor and a warning: “Supporters of Urdu-Hindustani should remember that in springtime only the Cuckoo can sing in mango trees of India – the Bulbul cannot. Even the harsh rule of Congress cannot change this truth – this reality. To realize their goal will only postpone the day of independence.”\textsuperscript{220}

Even Gandhi in his speech at the Poona Sammelan made a subtle adjustment to his position on the question of scripts, which, if noticed, could hardly have reassured partisans of Urdu. Whereas he had earlier simply said that the Rashtrabhasha could be

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} अज, January 8, 1941, NAI, PD Tandon Papers, File 13a, Serial 444.
\textsuperscript{219} “राष्ट्र की भाषा वही हो सकती है जिसका मूल रुस्त्री हो और जिसके हंसदार में अधिक शब्द आसे होने काहीये जो देश की योग्यता के द्योतक होने”
\textsuperscript{220} “उर्दू-हिंदुस्तानी के हिंदू आधार होने को यद रक्तना काहीये कि भाषा के अंदर वो वर्षों पर वास्त के में कोकिल ही कुहक सकती है, बुलबुल चाँदक नहीं सकती.” The Bulbul or Nightingale is a stock image in Urdu poetry borrowing heavily from Persian literary tradition. The implication here is that the Cuckoo, as a native of India is welcome whereas in the context of a new national beginning the foreign Bulbul must return to its place of origin. For more on the metaphorical usages of Cuckoos and Bulbuls, and Persian influences in South Asian cultural tradition more generally, see Muhammad Aslam Sayed, "How Could Urdu Be the Envoy of Persian (Rashk-I-Farsi)\textsuperscript{2} The Role of Persian in South Asian Culture and Literature," in \textit{Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order}, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 279-310.
\end{flushright}
written in both Nagari and Persian scripts, he now said it was “written primarily in the Nagari script and occasionally in the Farsi script.”\textsuperscript{221} It seems probable that this small prevarication, conscious or otherwise, was a concession to an audience in all likelihood dominated by a pro-Nagari sentiment.

Purushottam Das Tandon’s speech at Poona also raised the ire of the Urdu-wallahs, who reportedly seized on his comments to demonstrate that Congress was indeed attempting to do away with their language and script.\textsuperscript{222} Tandon demurred that his speech in Hindi had been misrepresented in the widely published English language translations which had suggested he viewed Urdu as a foreign language needing “to be abandoned because its roots were not in the soil.”\textsuperscript{223} He assured the Urdu newspapers and Muslim leaders who had described him as an “opponent of Urdu” that, “whatever linguistic knowledge I possess would not have permitted me to make the mistake of saying that Urdu was imported from the outside. That was said about Persian.”\textsuperscript{224} Tandon’s conception of Urdu was that it was simply one style of Hindi with a preponderance of Persian and Arabic vocabulary. This style was, in his view, ineligible to fulfill the role of an all-India lingua franca because it lacked an affinity with India’s major regional languages, an affinity that Hindi possessed due to its greater proportion of shared, Sanskrit-derived vocabulary. Despite his protestations, Tandon’s was a view unlikely to convince the protectors of Urdu that he was anything less than their enemy.

William Gould has argued that the cultural nationalism of Congressmen such as Sampurnanand and Purshottam Das Tandon played a key role in the growing

\textsuperscript{221} Prabhakar, \textit{Kaka Kalelkar}, 55-56. In place of, “नागरी और फारसी दोनों लिपियों में लिखी जाती है,” Gandhi now said, “मुख्यतः नागरी लिपि में आई और कहीं कहीं फारसी लिपि में लिखी जाती है.”

\textsuperscript{222} PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 112.

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
estrangement between Hindus and Muslims in the decades leading up to Partition. He points out that while the Congress has been typically thought of as “the predominant vehicle of ‘secular nationalism’ in India,” it in fact contained a very ambivalent spectrum of approaches to religious politics, and its difficulties in effectively opposing communal politics can be partly explained by the subtle and complicated ways in which Congress spokespersons have historically imagined the idea of a ‘Hindu nation.’” Often, Hindu cultural nationalism cut across conventional lines of political orientation. For instance, both Sampurnanand and Tandon were associated with socialist politics, while other stalwart advocates of Hindi such as Madan Mohan Malaviya, who founded the Benares Hindu University and popularized the Sanskritic national motto satyam evam jayate (“Truth forever victorious”), were associated with the Congress right wing. Not only did many Congressmen of varying political hues interpret and espouse Indian nationalism according to a Hindu worldview and via distinctly Hindu idioms, but, as Gould shows, they often forged alliances with explicitly religious organizations such as the Arya Samaj in the name of political mobilization. In the case of left-leaning and socialist Congressmen like Tandon and Sampurmanand, such alliances were not altogether ideologically inconsistent, with many of the activities of the Arya Samaj and similar religious reform movements centering upon social work and the “uplift” of the “backward” classes. Furthermore, the cause of Hindi and Devanagari, which it was claimed would give the masses greater access to the courts and public office, was readily allied to political rhetoric that aspired to a more egalitarian future and the erosion of old privileges. Unfortunately, from the point of view of communal harmony, these privileges

225 Gould, Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India.
were often associated with a predominantly Muslim elite and its knowledge of Urdu and
the Persian script. As we have seen, despite serious setbacks, both Urdu and the Persian
script continued to enjoy state patronage well into the 1940s.

According to Gould, Sampurnanand, Tandon and others of their ilk often “did not
appear to consciously consider the possibility that, by being attached to a discourse of
Hindu nationalism, their political activities might be associated with religious
antagonism.”\(^\text{227}\) However generous an assessment this may be in the case of Tandon and
Sampurnanand, it certainly appears that many Congressmen, even those like Gandhi who
worked consciously and conspicuously to promote Hindu-Muslim unity, were often
suspected by Muslims of purveying a ‘Hindu Raj’ in place of a British one.\(^\text{228}\) Gould’s
analysis of “Congress radicals,” like Sampurnanand and Tandon, can be usefully
extended to Gandhi and others who promoted Hindustani as a common language capable
of deepening inter-provincial and inter-communal discourse, while decolonizing the
Indian mind of untoward British influence. Those who, like Gandhi, believed in the
importance of a national language as both symbol and instrument of a common culture,
also came to this project as the products of cultural systems with particular trajectories.
Just as Muslims were an overall minority within the ranks of the Congress, so too only a
handful of Muslims were closely associated with Gandhi’s efforts to innovate and
propagate Hindustani. While other religious communities were also represented among
the workers of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, the majority were Hindu. Unsurprisingly,

\(^{227}\) Ibid., 646.
\(^{228}\) Sampurnanand himself, while not explicitly owning to any communal bias within the Congress,
frankly admitted many years later that it was in part the arrogance and self-confidence of Congress
politicians in the context of their massive electoral majority in the U. P. in 1937 that led to the failure of the
Congress alliance with the Muslim League. The failure of this alliance was, of course, but one portent of
the partition that would follow a decade on. See Hari Dev Sharma, "Oral History Interview with Dr.
Sampurnanand," in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Oral History Project (New Delhi: Nehru
most were also from relatively privileged middle-class (or better) socio-economic backgrounds. These facts necessarily shaped the ways which the Hindustani Prachar Sabha carried out its project of propagating Hindustani.

**Rajendra Prasad – Champion of Hindustani?**

A key figure in the movement to promote Hindustani was Rajendra Prasad, who was born into a middle-class family in Bihar in 1888, and served as India’s first President for 12 years after independence. As we have seen, Prasad had served as the President of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad in 1935, and was asked by Gandhi to seek out and reach an understanding with Abdul Haq after the debacle of the latter meeting. In many ways, Prasad was an ideal figure to broker such a rapprochement. As a founding member of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1910, Prasad was highly respected among the Hindi literati and more broadly as a senior leader of the nationalist movement. In the latter regard his credentials were impeccable; he had abandoned a potentially lucrative legal career in 1916 in order to follow Gandhi, initially in a civil disobedience campaign on behalf of exploited indigo workers in Bihar, and afterward in the wider nationalist movement. But Prasad, like many other youths of his generation, particularly those of his own kayastha caste, received his earliest education in the Urdu medium from a village Maulvi and was also well versed in the Persian language.²²⁹ Indeed, the *maktab* or village school of Prasad’s youth was held on the verandah of the Maulvi’s house, which happened to adjoin his father’s house.

And yet, despite being so well placed to serve as a mediator between the fatally divergent public spheres of Hindi and Urdu, and having been remembered as such in

much of the historiography, Rajendra Prasad seems not to have fulfilled the potential that he may have had in this capacity.\textsuperscript{230} Despite the accord struck at the Bihar Urdu conference, for example, Abdul Haq apparently continued to give voice to his dissatisfaction with the Gandhian approach to the national language.\textsuperscript{231} Following Gould’s analysis of the cultural nationalism of other Congress figures, it seems reasonable to venture that Prasad’s failure in this respect was at least partly the result of the ways in which a particularly Hindu sensibility informed his overall outlook. This is not by any means to suggest that Prasad was a Hindu nationalist. On the contrary, the point here is to recognize how the worldview of more moderate and apparently secularist nationalist leaders could also be conditioned by a sense of Hindu cultural identity in ways that, to some extent at least, may have preempted possibilities for inter-communal amity.

As the first President of the Indian Republic, “Dr. Rajendra Prasad” holds a revered place in Indian nationalist historiography. At the time of his election to that office, “a typical newspaper comment” on his Presidential qualities read:

In him, almost like Abraham Lincoln, a tenacity which scarcely can falter in the cause which he judges to be right, is not merely free from bitterness towards his antagonists, but is actually bound up with a deep-seated kindliness towards them. His personal life and his ways of living are his greatest assets. In the midst of bitter political controversies

\textsuperscript{230} For a typically positive rendering of Prasad’s role in the controversy, see: Jyotirindra Das Gupta, \textit{Language Conflict and National Development; Group Politics and National Language Policy in India} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 112.

\textsuperscript{231} Zainul Abidin Ahmad, ed. \textit{National Language for India: A Symposium} (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941), 83, 88. In his contribution to this volume, Haq apportioned most of the responsibility for the language controversy upon reformist Hindu organizations like the Arya Samaj and their “vigorous campaign for the propagation of Sanskrit in order to revive Vedic culture,” as well as “the avowed policy of Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, Kaka Kalelkar and their followers to make increasing use of Sanskrit words on the ground that the language would be easily understood by the people of Southern India…” By 1947, Haq had apparently not revised his opinions and reiterated these arguments in the course of an angry letter to Gandhi which was composed in an Urdu replete with Persian and Arabic loan words. See: Abdul Haq, \textit{Maktubat-E Abdul Haq} (Karachi: Maktabah-i uslub, 1963), 409-24.

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which tend to cloud issues and project misunderstandings from facts to persons, he has always been regarded as a man above reproach.\textsuperscript{232}

Widely described as “the gentleman of Indian politics,” Gandhi apparently dubbed him \textit{ajātashatru} (“one who has no enemies”).\textsuperscript{233} Other estimations of his character and capacities for leadership have been less effulgent in their praise. Writing of his nomination to the Congress Presidency in 1939, after the resignation of Subhas Chandra Bose due to illness, Tariq Ali described Prasad as “a party functionary, devoid of talent.”\textsuperscript{234} Almost as disparaging is the more detailed portrait drawn by Bimanesh Chatterjee, who served Prasad as Military Secretary for the first five years of his term as President of the Republic.\textsuperscript{235} Although the memoirs of disgruntled civil servants with axes to grind are perhaps best taken with a grain of salt, there are elements of Chatterjee’s description of Prasad that are especially relevant for our purposes.\textsuperscript{236} For one thing, according to Chatterjee, Prasad “had an inflexible faith in Hindu traditions and religious practices and was a staunch believer in astrology, mysticism, and the occult sciences.”\textsuperscript{237} One of the ways in which this propensity first became apparent to Chatterjee was when he was informed of Prasad’s wishes that his installation as President should be conducted in such a way that,

\begin{quote}
the general public should be provided unrestricted opportunity of witnessing the event from close quarters. For that, perhaps some improvised arrangements may have to be
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid. Note that \textit{Ajātashatru} is also an epithet of Yudhishthira, righteous king of the Mahabharata epic, renowned for upholding \textit{dharma}.
\textsuperscript{234} Tariq Ali, \textit{The Nehrus and the Gandhis} (London: Picador, 1985), 64. In one sign of Gandhi’s waning influence over the Congress, Bose won the election in 1939 despite his candidacy being opposed by Gandhi.
\textsuperscript{235} Bimanesh Chatterjee, \textit{The Presidential Predicament: Rajendra Prasad Remembered} (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press, 1974). The office of Military Secretary, a legacy of the colonial period, was essentially a civil post involving the organization of the Presidential household with regard to official functions such as reception of dignitaries and other diplomatic engagements.
\textsuperscript{236} Chatterjee eventually tendered his resignation
\textsuperscript{237} Chatterjee, \textit{The Presidential Predicament: Rajendra Prasad Remembered}, 5.
made in the open air, preferably on one side of the Kingsway [now Rajpath], where the oathtaking can take place under a well-decorated shamiana. The formalities should be more or less on the lines of the ancient enthronement ceremony, in which the yagna, prayerful rituals and benedictory messages were integral parts of the programme. Of course, the clergy and holy men of different faiths can also offer their good wishes.  

Prime Minister Nehru did not however accede to the President’s wishes in this matter, as the arrangements for the signing-in ceremony had, rather fortuitously from the point of view of India’s secular credentials, already been completed. Nonetheless, Nehru apparently noted to the Military Secretary, “We are not going to have a kingdom. It is going to be a democratic republic only.” With regards to his domestic arrangements in Rashtrapati Bhavan (the “Presidential Palace”), Prasad informed Chatterjee that as members of his family were strictly orthodox they would not require the services of the Comptroller of the house but would instead see to their own catering needs. When Chatterjee expressed some concern about whether non-Hindu staff would have access to the Presidential residence, Prasad replied that “ordinarily” this would not present any difficulties.

Unsurprisingly, the question of national language also appears regularly in Chatterjee’s remembrances. His own lack of enthusiasm for speaking Hindi appears to have been a major source of tension between himself and the President. It is perhaps noteworthy that, in Chatterjee’s account at least, Prasad never used the term Hindustani, but was content with trying to enforce the usage of Hindi by staff within the Presidential household. A final episode recounted by Chatterjee reveals much about the location of Prasad’s sympathies. In 1951, Purushottam Das Tandon resigned as Congress President in the culmination of a struggle of political wills with Prime Minister Nehru. Much to his

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238 Ibid., 7-8.  
239 Ibid.  
240 Ibid. Emphasis added.
bemusement, Chatterjee was instructed to convey a note of sympathy to Tandon from the President. Upon fulfilling this “minor errand,” which he evidently felt was below his station, Chatterjee dutifully endured “a long discourse” by Tandon “on the need for a single language to effect the integration of the vast multilingual peoples of the country.” Evidently, by 1951, Ajātashatru had reconciled himself with Rajärshi.

In the wake of controversies generated in Poona in 1940, however, relations must have been somewhat more strained. In 1941, followers of Gandhi mounted a campaign to have Rajendra Prasad installed once more as President of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, which was to be held at Abohar in the Punjab, in what was a clear attempt to steer the organization away from the uncompromising influence of Tandon and others. Jamnalal Bajaj issued a press release calling on voters to lend their support to Prasad’s candidacy arguing “it is high time the Sammelan decided upon a uniform and steady policy with regard to the controversy now raging over the Hindi Urdu question.” The statement plainly asked,

Do we still accept the definition of Rashtrabhasha Hindi which we accepted at the Indore Sammelan – namely that Hindi is the National Language of India which is used and understood by the town and village folk of Northern India both Hindus and Musalmans in which no attempt at boycotting words of Sanskrit Arabic and Persian origin and which is written in either the Nagari or Urdu script?

In order to implement this step which we took at Indore we formed the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti at the Nagpur session under the Presidentship of Dr. Rajendrababu. We know that a party has come into existence which desires to stultify this policy. This happened, to our great regret, at the Poona session of the Sammelan. We believe, therefore, that if at this juncture the helm of the Sammelan is placed in the hands of Dr. Rajendrababu he will be able to guide us aright…

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242 A contraction of two Sanskrit words, rājā (“king”) and rṣi (“sage”), Rājārṣi was the honorific title customarily bestowed upon Tandon after his many years of service to the nationalist cause.
243 Rajendra Prasad Personal Papers, 2H/41 HSS, Serial 46.
Although nowhere in his statement does Jamnalal Bajaj use the word ‘Hindustani,’ the term is nonetheless the elephant in the room. In fact, the statement reads very much like one of the manifestos that would be produced by the Hindustani Prachar Sabha early in the following year.

The “party that had come into existence at Poona” was indeed carried forth at Abohar. Dr. Rajendrababu was duly passed over for the Sammelan Presidency. The successful candidate was Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University, Dr. Amarnath Jha, an ardent supporter of Sanskritized Hindi in Devanagari script.\(^{244}\) Jha was also a skeptic of Hindustani, reportedly referring to it at different times as a “monstrous hybrid” and a “funny language.”\(^{245}\) In his address to the Abohar Sammelan, he offered a host of arguments against it.\(^{246}\) Jha averred that Hindustani would do harm to both Hindi and Urdu by further provoking the conflict between the two. Both languages would be better left to “follow their own lines of development.” Hindustani, laden with Arabic and Persian words, would also be difficult for people in the non-Hindi speaking regions of India to learn. Jha also believed that Hindustani was an “unsuitable vehicle for scientific and philosophical thought.” Under Jha’s presidency at Abohar the Sammelan passed a resolution once and for all clarifying its position on the language question: the national language was Hindi and it was to be written in the Devanagari script.\(^{247}\)

\(^{244}\) For instance, in his 1937 article “Hindi ke kuch bhule hue shabda,” (“Some Forgotten Hindi Words”), Jha cautioned against the use of unnecessarily difficult Sanskrit loan words, but nonetheless offered a “wish list” (śicē detī) of forgotten Hindi vocabulary, drawn mainly from the early-nineteenth dictionaries prepared by East India Company servants, that, in many instances, would replace common expressions drawing on Persian and/or Arabic. To give a few examples; adenc for duśmanī, bakāra for musāfīr, pulhānā for rāzi karnā, polī for bevakuuf, kane for nazdīk.

\(^{245}\) Tara Chand, “Hindi and Urdu,” Letter to the Editor, The Leader (Allahabad), April 12, 1942.


\(^{247}\) RP Papers, 1H-42, Serial 2. See also: Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism, 362-64.
Formation of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha

Members of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti assembled at Wardha to discuss their response to the Abohar resolution designating Hindi in Devanagari script as the only suitable national language. At this meeting they prepared their own draft resolution, in which they announced, in English, that they were in favor of

the popularization of the name Hindusthani for the Common Traditional Language for which differences in vocabulary and script now goes by two different names of Hindi and Urdu. A knowledge of both Nagri and Urdu scripts…will facilitate the reading of literature in either script, and the natural evolution of a common style and vocabulary in course of time. We feel this policy will enable us to overcome the difficulties that have arisen in the work of formation of national language. If the Sammelan can find its way to allow us to work on these lines we shall be glad to be reappointed at the ensuing elections. Otherwise we would like to be relieved. We are writing this, as we feel there should be a clear understanding of the position in view of the resolution passed by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan at Abohar on the 28th of December 1941.248

This was effectively an ultimatum which may yet have brought about a softening in the Sammelan’s policies towards Hindustani and the Urdu script. Once again, however, Gandhi’s intercession forestalled any severance between the RPS and the HSS. In the course of correspondence between Gandhi and Tandon over the following months it was decided that despite their differences of opinion, there should be no official obstacles preventing members of the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti from also participating in the activities of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha.249

The prospect of Gandhi forming a new organization for the promotion of a national language defined not as Hindi but Hindustani was evidently of great concern to members of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. In February 1942, Sammelan secretary Bhagirath Prasad Dikshit wrote to Rajendra Prasad beseeching him to use his influence to convince Gandhi to give up his insistence on the name Hindustani and to dissuade him from establishing a

248 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 2R/42, Item 3.
new organization. According to Dikshit’s understanding, Gandhi had merely succumbed to Kalelkar’s point of view, and might be brought around though the influence of a personality such as Prasad. Dikshit appealed to Prasad in the name of Hindi, asking him to render it this great service (mahān upkār) so that what had begun as a backward literature (sāhitya pahile hī pichḍa huā) might continue to progress (unnati).

Prasad replied to Dikshit demurring that there was nothing much he could say to change Gandhi’s position, and rejecting the notion that Gandhi was particularly susceptible to either his own or Kaka’s influence. Rather, in Prasad’s view, Gandhi had arrived at his own position regarding the need for a new organization following the announcement of the Abohar resolution of the Sammelan. Nonetheless, the following day, Prasad proceeded to pen a letter to Kalelkar in which he expressed reservations about the advisability of establishing a new national organization for the promotion of Hindustani, asking that his views on the matter be conveyed to Gandhi. While assuring Kalelkar that he would work with all his strength (śaktī) to fulfill Gandhi’s instructions, in the event that he decide to go ahead with the new organization, Prasad argued that at the present time such an organization was unlikely to attract sympathy or cooperation from the Hindi-wallahs, much less the Urdu-wallahs.

Until now we have received support from the Hindi-wallahs in the work of promoting the national language. The Urdu-wallahs have given only opposition and ridicule. A new organization now will not receive sympathy or support from among the Hindi supporters. There is no difference in the disposition of the Urdu-wallahs and nor will there be. Their current opposition will continue, and in this [new organization] also they will perceive a secret agenda and strategy. In such circumstances this organization will face difficulties.

250 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 4H/42, Serial 1. “Sambhavataḥ āp kā kahanā mān kar mahātmā ji āgraḥ tyāg denge.”
251 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 4H/42
252 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1H/42, Serial 3.
253 Ibid.
Furthermore, Prasad also expressed serious doubts about what would be one of the central tenets of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha - that knowledge of both Urdu and Devanagari scripts was to be promoted as widely as possible, certainly among those undertaking national work. Prasad also expressed concern that the consequence of asking people to take up the difficult task of learning both scripts might well be considered too great a burden, and that ultimately interest in learning either language would be dropped. This, he feared, would be especially the case for those who knew neither Hindi nor Urdu. Further echoing the standard Sammelan argument for a Sanskritized Hindi he added, “We also cannot forget that it is easier for people of [non-Hindi-speaking] provinces to make a Sanskritic Hindi their own, and that for them a Perso-Arabic Hindi will be very difficult.”

Dikshit’s appeal to consider the literary progress of Hindi appears to have struck a strong chord with Prasad. In his ruminations to Kalelkar, Rajendra-babu contended, following a somewhat vague logic, that the divergence between Hindi and Urdu was such that the best way of cultivating a “language of the middle” (bīc kā bhāṣā) would be to allow space to those “who know Hindi to develop a literature in Hindi” and those knowing Urdu to do the same. Somehow, in Prasad’s view, the lively literature that would result from such a hands-off approach would “promote itself,” whereas a new organization at this point in time would “result only in opposition and a powerful fear” (keval virodh aur bahut apabhaya). The work of compiling dictionaries and grammars for the national language could, in Prasad’s view, be undertaken by the Bhāratiya Bhāṣā

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254 As Gandhi put it plainly in his second speech at the All-India Hindustani Prachar Sabha conference in 1945, “I want to explain to you what the Hindustani Prachar Sabha is. Its aim is to make as many people as possible learn Hindi and Urdu styles and the Devanagari and the Urdu scripts.” CW, Vol. 79, “Speech at All-India Hindustani Prachar Conference-II, Wardha, February 27, 1945,” 176.

255 Ibid.
Sangh, hence obviating the need for a new organization.\textsuperscript{256} In a telling postscript to his letter, Prasad indicated, without offering any explanation as to why, that if the organization was to be established after all, he preferred “Uttar Hindustān” to “Shumālī Hind.”\textsuperscript{257} The former is essentially a Sanskrit-derived Hindi expression for Northern India, while the latter is the Urdu equivalent.

It is not clear to what extent Kalelkar conveyed Prasad’s reservations to the Mahatma, or how much, if at all, Prasad subsequently revised his personal feelings on these matters. What is known is that when the Hindustani Prachar Sabha first met in Wardha in April 1942 it elected Rajendra Prasad as its chairman (sabhāpati), a position that he would continue to hold for many years.\textsuperscript{258} The reticence displayed by Prasad in his letter to Kalelkar however, clearly foreshadows the equivocal position that he would later take in 1948 when presiding over the Constituent Assembly that turned its back on Hindustani and the Urdu script. Further evidence - for example the style of Hindi he tended to employ in his own correspondence and other writings - also suggests that in his capacity as sabhāpati in the intervening years, Prasad harbored an instinctive preference for a Sanskritic Hindi that was informed, to some degree, by the Hindu cultural sensibility that we have seen revealed in Chatterjee’s memoir. In this regard, as will be discussed below, Prasad was perhaps not at all alone within the ranks of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha.

\textsuperscript{256} This is one of the only references to the Bhāratiya Bhāṣā Sangh that I have encountered. It is possible that Prasad is referring to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad. Interestingly, also in April 1942, yet another organization, the Bharatiya Hindi Parishad (or “Hindi Scholars Academy”) was established in Allahabad. According to a report in The Leader this new enterprise, “an academy consisting of University teachers and other scholars interested in Hindi teaching and research,” was to have nothing to do with the spread of Devanagari script or Hindi language since this work was already being done by other Hindi Associations. Rather, it was to take up publication of literature “connected with other branches of Hindi Studies and Research.” In his inaugural address, Pandit Amarnath Jha called for “reciprocity amongst scholars of Hindi and Urdu… and expressed his regret that Urdu scholars were not giving attention to the study of Hindi language and literature.” See “Hindi Scholars Academy” The Leader April 5, 1942.

\textsuperscript{257} This was indeed the wording adopted in the draft constitution of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha shortly thereafter. See below, and Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1H-42, Serial 3.

\textsuperscript{258} Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1H-42, Serial 3.
Furthermore, it is at least possible that the fatalism evinced in Prasad’s letter regarding the unlikelihood of Hindustani transcending the enmity of the Hindi-Urdu divide also informed, to some degree, his day-to-day involvement in the orchestration of the Sabha’s activities. Another factor that cannot have helped the organization overcome the suspicions and hostilities Prasad feared it may engender, was that, as noted above, the majority of the Sabha’s officers were Hindu, while only a slim minority was of a Muslim background.

**The Language of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha**

There is some evidence that the underrepresentation of Urdu specialists, and Muslims more generally, was from the outset a matter of concern for some members of the Sabha. In April, ahead of the organization’s second meeting, Pandit Sundarlal wrote to Rajendra Prasad to inform him that Abdul Haq had not received an invitation to participate.\(^{259}\) Haq had evidently written to both Sundarlal and Tarachand to say that he had not received an invitation. Sundarlal shared Tarachand’s opinion that the Sabha would be unsuccessful in its aim of marrying Hindi and Urdu without Haq’s participation and advice (*salāḥ*). It is not known whether Prasad was willing or able to accede to Sundarlal’s request to postpone the meeting until after the third of May when Haq would have been able to attend, or indeed if Haq participated in any of the activities of Sabha in 1942. It is also unclear whether Haq’s letters to Tarachand and Sundarlal expressed genuine disappointment at his apparent exclusion, or if he was continuing to nurse earlier

\(^{259}\) Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1H/42, Serial 5. Sundarlal, President of the *Kayasth Pathshala* in Allahabad, was a Congressman and member of the Hindustani Academy. He had very recently been the subject of “a deliberate and unprovoked attack” by “four young Hindus” who were said to be members of the Hindu Mahasabha, following a public address he had made on the subject of Hindu-Muslim unity in Lahore. See *The Leader* (Allahabad), March 19, 1942.
grievances. Gandhi himself appears to have been eager to include the head of the Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu in the Sabha. Indeed, on May 25, and again on July 28 1942, Gandhi wrote directly to Haq inviting him to join the Sabha and requesting his assistance.\(^{260}\)

Bhai Saheb [“Dear Brother”],

I am sending you herewith a copy of the constitution of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha. You will find some mistakes of Urdu. I do not have anyone proficient in Urdu. I am looking for such a person. Can you help? The person must know Hindi as well. I have left it with you whether or not you will join the Sabha. I remain hopeful that you will come when you find the right occasion. You will see from the constitution that all the posts on the executive committee have not been filled in the hope that an opportunity will certainly come for you to be included.

And now I come to the main purpose of this letter. In Hindustani Prachar our first step should be to hold an examination for beginners. We have decided to hold such an examination on November 22. Does your Anjuman hold any examination which even those who know no Urdu can take? If so we shall prepare candidates for such an examination provided you open examination centres wherever candidates are available. If you are no equipped to do this can you send some instructions? Can you suggest some books? Will you agree to be the examiner or will you send some names from your office? We shall be obliged for any help you can give.\(^{261}\)

It would be fascinating to know how Haq responded to this missive, if at all. Although it appears that Haq did not join the Sabha at this point, Gandhi did not give up hope that he could enlist his aid. The latter would later write to Sundarlal in 1944 that “even though there are Muslim members in the Sabha, Abdul Haq ought to be there.”\(^{262}\) Haq eventually attended an all-India conference of the Sabha in 1945, although he appears to have arrived only during the second day of the proceedings.\(^{263}\)

As we have seen, the objective (hetu/maqsad) of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha was to promote the use of Hindustani in both Devanagari and Urdu scripts as the national


\(^{261}\) Ibid.


language of India – a language “capable of performing the work of all-Indian social, political, commercial and other such purposes as well as becoming the language of spoken conversation.”\textsuperscript{264} In order to do so it set itself an agenda that more or less mirrored the functions that had been ascribed to the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, particularly in training and examining \textit{Prachāraks}, or teachers and activists capable of promoting the spread of the national language. It was to conduct its own examinations in various locations around the country and to authorize and provide assistance to other organizations offering exams. It also charged itself with preparing a “dictionary in which all can be confident,” a Hindustani grammar, reference books, textbooks for the teaching of Hindustani in schools, the publication of “easy books in Hindustani” and “a book of current Hindustani expressions/idioms,” as well as offering support to schools, libraries, reading rooms and other such institutions that supported the spread of Hindustani.\textsuperscript{265} Moreover, it was to “lobby provincial governments, city and district boards and national education organizations to make Hindustani a compulsory subject.”

But how exactly did this new organization define Hindustani and its role as national language? In the preamble to its constitution, the Sabha consciously invoked the formula of the long-standing Congress definition.

It is known among people engaged in the work of promoting the national language that the language given the name “Hindustani” by Congress is a combination of Hindi and Urdu in a simple form. This is the language spoken and understood in northern India, and which is also understood and used by many in other parts of India. Its literary forms Hindi and Urdu are diverging from each other. It is a matter of necessity that they be brought closer together, and that in those areas where different languages are spoken Hindustani is spread as the national language.\textsuperscript{266}

\textsuperscript{264} Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1H/42, Serial 4.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid.
In composing official documents such as this, the officers of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, much like the staff writers of All India Radio, were confronted with a choice of which vocabulary to favor – “Hindi” or “Urdu.” This problem was most acute when higher orders of language or more specialized terminology were called for. The solution arrived upon by the HPS seems often to have been to use a “Hindi” word when employing Devanagari script but to give its “Urdu” equivalent in parenthesis. Thus, in the above excerpt, the Hindi adjective sāhityak (“literary”) is followed by the Urdu adabī in parentheses. Certain publications, such as a membership application form produced in 1942, were dutifully printed in both scripts with Devanagari on one side of the page and Urdu script on the other. In its Devanagari incarnation the application form led with predominantly Hindi vocabulary, with Urdu alternatives in parentheses, while this procedure was reversed on the other side. Thus the Devanagari side announced itself as the “sabhāsad āvedan patr (sabhāsad dārkhvāst khat)” or “membership application form,” while the reverse read, “sabhāsad dārkhvāst khat (sabhāsad āvedan patr).” Such an ecumenical approach was clearly far more inclusive than that espoused by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan or the Anjuman-e Tariqqi-e Urdu. Nonetheless, it might be noticed that the word common to both formulations, sabhāsad (“membership”), like the word sabhā (society) itself, is of Sanskritic origin - a choice that no doubt reflects the cultural orientation of the Hindu majority within the group. While several instances of publications featuring both scripts have survived in the archives, numerous others also exist indicating that space was not always made for the Urdu script. For example, the blue-ink stenciled copies of a one-page announcement of the agenda of a forthcoming
meeting of the working committee (*karya samiti*) in July 1945 were in Devanagari only.\(^{267}\)

Certainly, personal correspondence between key members of the Sabha such as Rajendra Prasad, M. K. Gandhi, Kaka Kalelkar, Shrimannarayan Agrawal and others, seems to have been conducted almost exclusively in Devanagari script, or occasionally in English. As one would expect, these various individuals displayed a range of proficiencies in employing the simple form of Hindustani that they idealized as worthy of cultivation as the national language. Ironically, Maharashtrian Kaka Kalelkar, who as we have seen was at the forefront of precipitating the break with the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, was himself widely regarded as an especially eloquent exponent of *ṭheth* ("pure" or "genuine") Hindi. As one contemporary observed,

> Indeed, the chaste and classical prose in Hindi that Kakasaheb writes is so totally acceptable and admired by the purists of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, that they often twit him: “Kakasaheb, if what you write is Hindustani (mixture of Hindi and Urdu), we are in complete agreement with you!”\(^{268}\)

Another of Kalelkar’s biographers also notes that despite taking up Gandhi’s directive to promote Hindustani, Kalelkar continued to write in a Sanskrit form of Hindi.\(^{269}\) Despite his proficiencies in Urdu and Persian, Rajendra Prasad also seems to have employed a fairly high register of Hindi in his personal and professional correspondence. While not averse to employing occasional words of Arabic or Persian origin, Prasad certainly tended towards a more Sanskrit register. Of those mentioned above, Shrimannarayan Agrawal, who was the principal of a *swadeshi* business college in Wardha in addition to serving as the secretary of the Sabha, seems to have found the use of a “mixed register”

\(^{269}\) Prabhakar, *Kaka Kalelkar*, 53-54. “yahāṅ yah batā dena bhī āvaśyak hai ki gāndhī ji ke ādeś par unhoṅ ne Hindustāṅī ke prakār kā būḍā uṭhāyā to thā lekin likhte ve sanskritiṅhit hindī hī rahe.”
most natural. His easy style of Hindustani borrowed freely from both Hindi and Urdu expressions, with his letters as likely to employ words and phrases such as *ke mutābiq,* for example, as they were *ke anusār,* the former being a common Arabic-derived Urdu phrase meaning “according to,” the latter its Sanskritic equivalent. Perin Captain, a Bombay Parsi and the granddaughter of Naoroji Dadabhai, on the other hand, was another founding member for whom Hindustani was probably not exactly a “mother tongue,” but who nonetheless appears to have most diligently and successfully aspired towards employing a readily understood mixed language in her work as the secretary of the Bombay branch of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha.

Gandhi himself freely admitted that his own proficiency in Hindustani, be it in Devanagari or Urdu, left considerable room for improvement. As late as April 1946 Gandhi admitted in the *Harijan* that although he believed that “a correct mixture of Hindi and Urdu” was “the National language”, he had “not yet been able to prove this” in his “own writings or speech.” Rather than be demoralized by this admission, Gandhi in fact found a degree of consolation, arguing that it was perhaps as well that “the attempt to create a national language has come into the hands of an inadеpt,” since “after all the general mass of people” belonged to this category.

That this “Hindustani” was so irregularly employed in its written form, even by those ostensibly committed to its promotion as national language, indicates that it was, at least in the early 1940s, as much an aspirational ideal as a living reality. The important point

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270 As noted above, the Agrawal merchant caste, which operated throughout Northern India and beyond, is often credited with contributing to the spread of Hindustani as a language of commerce and the bazaar.
271 See for example, the eclectic but very simple and clear Hindustani of her 1946 report in Rajendra Prasad Papers, 17S/46-47, Serial 6.
272 “Hindustani,” *Harijan* April 7, 1946.
273 Ibid.
here is that this evaluation properly applies to Hindustani as a written language. Its advocates ardently believed that as a spoken language Hindustani was by far the most widely understood in India. Given that the vast majority of Indians were illiterate in 1942, it necessarily followed that even a potentially common language of India would be one in which a literary form had yet to fully develop. Thus Gandhi had included the promotion of literacy in Hindustani as part of his fourteen-point “constructive program,” and the agenda for “Basic Education” that came to be known as the Wardha scheme. As we have seen however, the Wardha scheme was opposed on ideological and cultural grounds by various parties including those who claimed to represent Muslim interests. Perhaps the Hindustani Prachar Sabha may have played a greater role in reconciling these interests were it not for the tumult that erupted soon after its first meetings in 1942. In August, in response to Congress demands that the British immediately “Quit India,” Congress leaders, including most of the founding members of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, were rounded up and imprisoned. Effectively, the work of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha was suspended until the end of World War II. Tellingly, among the books which Gandhi is reported to have taken with him to Yeravda prison was his Urdu primer.274

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274 “Mahatmaji’s Arrest,” *Harijan* August 16, 1946.
Chapter 5: Independence, Partition and the Demise of Hindustani

After leaving prison in 1944 Gandhi began a correspondence with Purushottam Das Tandon that would finally result in the Mahatma’s resignation from the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan the following year.\textsuperscript{275} Gandhi opened the dialogue by informing Tandon that he had been receiving letters in Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati all asking him how he could remain a member of both the Sammelan and the Sabha when their policies regarding the national language were at such odds. In the course of several letters Gandhi mounted a last-ditch effort to convert Tandon to his point of view regarding the national language, extending once more an invitation to join the Hindustani Prachar Sabha. Tandon replied that try as he might he could not help but regard Gandhi’s “new program” as impractical. He demurred that it had been demonstrated to him that speakers of Bengali, Marathi, Oriya and other regional languages would not accept Gandhi’s program, and also expressed skepticism about the likelihood of Urdu writers being won over. Intriguingly, at one point in the exchange, Gandhi refers to Tandon’s prior refusal to become a member of the Sabha until Maulvi Abdul Haq of the Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu also consented to join the organization. Although Tandon responded that while he had indeed refused to become a member and he claimed to have no recollection of making any reference to Abdul Haq Saheb, it is clear that Gandhi at least understood himself to be occupying the middle ground between these two partisans of Hindi and Urdu.\textsuperscript{276}

\textsuperscript{275} PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, File 1, Serial 20. This correspondence was published in pamphlet form in May 1945, and on August 15 in the \textit{Am\textit{ī}t B\textit{ā}z\textit{ā}r Patrik\textit{ā}} at the behest of Hindustani Prachar Sabha secretary, Shrimannaryan Agrawal. It has also been published in various places subsequently. For the complete correspondence in the original Hindi see Gopalaprasad Vyas, ed. \textit{Gandhi Hindi Darshan} (New Delhi: Dilli Pradeshik Hindi Sahitya Sammelan,1970), 226-31. For a partial English translation see Gandhi, \textit{Thoughts on National Language}, 131-39.

\textsuperscript{276} It is possible that Gandhi had confused Tara Chand’s conditional acceptance of membership in the Sabha with that of Tandon. See CW, Vol. 76, “Letter to Abdul Haq, May 25, 1942,” 151, in which Gandhi
Tandon readily accepted that Urdu and Hindi were two styles of the same language, and was eager to build on perceived common ground with Gandhi that these two styles needed to be brought together in the national interest. But he was convinced that differences in their literary forms were insurmountable given a commitment to both scripts.

We are seeing from experience in everyday work that we have one language which can be written in two scripts, but in weighty and literary work, the philosophy of one language and two scripts won’t apply. A lasting comingling of these languages will come about when we develop one script for the country. This work is of great necessity, and it is clearly important from a national point of view.\(^{277}\)

Despite their differences of opinion, Tandon was extremely reluctant to see the Mahatma withdraw from the Sammelan, and tried to insist that there was no obstacle to an individual remaining a member of both organizations. Although he appears to have given his consent to the publication of their correspondence, in a note on Gandhi’s resignation, Tandon seems to have been at least slightly annoyed with HPS Secretary Shrimannaryan Agrawal for having prompted the public airing of this dirty linen.\(^{278}\) Certainly, Tandon’s note makes every effort to minimize the differences between himself and the Mahatma, while clarifying that his original proposal for “Hindustani” to be adopted as the language of Congress proceedings at Kanpur in 1925 had always been intended to refer to “Hindi.” Although Gandhi’s departure from the Sammelan was clearly unwelcome and something of a public relations disaster for Tandon, it appears to have had little impact other than hardening his views on the national language. The Sammelan continued to work on behalf of Hindi in the Devanagari script until and beyond its victory in the Constituent Assembly.

\(^{277}\) PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, File 1, Serial 20.
\(^{278}\) PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, File 2, Serial 100.

writes to Abdul Haq saying, “Dr. Tara Chand has agreed to join the Association provided Abdul Haq also joins it.”
Between 1945 and 1947, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha seems to have begun to gather some pace towards realizing its objective of promoting Hindustani in both scripts as the national language. As noted above, an All-India gathering of the Sabha held in Wardha during February 1945 was even attended by Maulvi Abdul Haq. Although, as also noted above, he apparently arrived in Wardha only the second day of the conference, his attendance is an indication that the rift produced a decade earlier between Haq and Gandhi at the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad had been significantly, if not completely, healed. A report in January 1947 by Bombay secretary Perin Captain was able to boast that since changing its name from the Hindi Prachar Samiti to the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, Bombay, on the occasion of Gandhi’s birthday in October 1945, the branch had published three books in both scripts and expanded its operations from ten to twenty-two chapters in the city of Bombay and its surrounding suburbs, with a corresponding increase in the number of students sitting for exams. In an ominous sign of things to come, however, the report also noted that a succession of riots in October 1946 had prevented several hundred students from completing their exams as scheduled. Of 800 students who had signed up only 500 were able to attend their exams, with some 79 per cent of these being unable to stay on and complete their work. Despite this setback, the secretary reported hopefully that classes had recommenced in the wake of these

281 It is likely that the riots referred to in this report were part of a wider phenomenon of Hindu-Muslim violence that began in Calcutta and spread to various parts of the country following M. A. Jinnah and the Muslim League’s call for a “Direct Action Day” on August 26 in response to the prospect of a Congress-dominated central government. See Gyanendra Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23. See also: Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947 (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 433. Sarkar mentions that 320 people were killed in sporadic violence in Bombay beginning in September, 1946.
disturbances, and that with the support of local businesses and newspapers, municipal school boards, Urdu scholars and many other local well-wishers, the work of promoting Hindustani was generally on the increase.

But aside from dramatic obstacles such as communal riots coming in the way of the promotion of Hindustani, there was also the more general problem of organizational inertia. The task of producing and authorizing official dictionaries and textbooks seems to have been particularly time consuming and problematic. As early as 1942, one V.N. Verma had written to Gandhi to complain of the “favouritism, dishonesty and selfishness brewing among the members of the Hindustani Committee” which had been appointed by the Congress ministry in Bihar to prescribe textbooks, and whose Presidents had included luminaries such Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, and Dr. Sachidananda Sinha. Verma alleged that members of the committee from both the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Jamia Millia had been guilty of selecting inferior works published by their own institutions, and that in certain instances the language of prescribed books failed to meet the required standards of Hindustani. For instance, Verma complained:

The book on Indian History which was considered as the best, both with regard to the facts and language, was set aside and the book of Sahitya Sammelan was approved by the force of the members of that Institution. It is known that the members could not get its Urdu edition to see even. The book was neither circulated among the members of the expert committee, nor were the reports of the subject and language committees invited… The language of the book on English History which was approved by the Hindustani Committee and has been approved now is mixed and twofold. The Hindi edition of the book has been printed in two different ways. One is similar to the Urdu edition and the other is quite different from it. The language of Hindi and Urdu editions are different and not the same (i.e. Hindustani). The language of both the editions should have been the

283 Rajendra Prasad Personal Papers, File 3C/41, Serial 4. Possibly, the author of this letter was Vṛṇḍāvanālāl Varmā (1889-1973), a lawyer and writer whose works of historical fiction set in central India, according to Orsini, made him one of the most popular and original historical novelists working in Hindi. See: Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, 448-49. Azad was a senior Congress leader while Sinha was the Vice-Chancellor of Patna University.
same. The comparative study of the two editions of the books (Hindi and Urdu) available in the market can very well justify the correctness of my statement.  

While the Hindustani Committee was not formally associated with the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, its membership overlapped at the highest level. Several years after Verma submitted his letter of complaint, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha itself continued to grapple with the work of authorizing and prescribing appropriate texts. Despite its ubiquity as a spoken language, this was a reminder that in its literary form Hindustani remained underdeveloped, and that the task of its enrichment would take time.

Admittedly, as we have seen, many working members of the Sabha were imprisoned by the British during the early years of the organization. When the Literature (Adabi) Board (also sometimes described as the sahityā samiti) of the Sabha met in Allahabad in February, 1946 it was still occupied with the basic work of formulating dictionaries and standard texts. It was reported, somewhat optimistically, at this meeting that the work of compiling a concise English-Hindustani dictionary was well underway and due for completion by the end of June. Approximately 60 of the 250 pages of definitions had already been completed with the help of reference works such as Dr. Phelan’s New Oxford English Dictionary, Apte’s English-Sanskrit Dictionary, Maulvi Abdul Haq’s Standard English-Urdu Dictionary, and Rai Bhadari’s English-Hindi Dictionary.

Whether or not work on this dictionary was completed according to the promised schedule is not known, but this seems doubtful given that over six months later in September 1946 the Harijan began publishing weekly installments of a Hindustani lexicon in both scripts by Sabha member Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. For over a year the newspaper published several columns in each of its weekly editions entitled “English into

\[284\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[285\text{ Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 5.}\]
Hindustani,” until in October 1947 it announced that with Kaur having taken up “more onerous duties” (as a minister in the independent Indian Parliament) since August 15, it would no longer be possible for her to maintain “her labour of love” or for the paper to publish the lexicon “with the same regularity as before.” 286 Had the Hindustani Prachar Sabha already published its Concise English-Hindustani dictionary, it seems unlikely that the Harijan would have thus been forced to slow down the rate of publication of its own lexicon, or to depend so heavily on Kaur for its composition in the first place. The Literature Board seems also to have been making fairly slow progress in terms of realizing its goal of producing Hindustani readers for children aged eleven to fifteen, and in compiling a general anthology of Hindustani literature, though it promised to have hand-written manuscripts ready for publication by the end of March, 1947. 287

Five days after the Literature Board met in Allahabad, a general meeting of the Sabha at Wardha finally established the parameters of the organization’s educational program and system of examinations. 288 It was determined that the Sabha at Wardha would be responsible only for the fourth and final level of examination, and the conference of a degree called the hindustani ratna (or “Hindustani jewel”). Earlier levels of examination were, as much as possible, to be the responsibility of regional offices of the Sabha. Administration of the hindustani ratna examination was delegated to Kaka Kalelkar, Shrimannarayan Agrawal and Amritlal Nanawati. 289 The examination paper itself was to cover five topics: “Hindustani prose” (gadya), “Hindustani poetry” (padya), “Language and Grammar” (bhāṣā aur vyākaran), “Essay and Interpretation/Translation” (nibāṇḍh

286 “Re: English into Hindustani,” Harijan October 12, 1947.
287 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 5.
289 Nanawati, a close associate of Gandhi, worked on his newspaper Harijan, and later as secretary of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha.
aur anuvād) and “Language examination” (zabāni imtahān). Kaka Kalelkar and Shrimannaryan Agrawal would be assisted by Dr. Tarachand, Śri Sudarśan, Śri Satyanārāyaṇa, and Śri Raihānā Tyabhī in selecting the books upon which this examination was to be based, while the final decision on the syllabus would be made by the Sabha’s working committee.

The meeting also decided that a prachārak training school, the Hindustānī Prachār Madārsa, would be established at Wardha for select students from throughout India, with Kalelkar and Agrawal again primarily responsible for its organization. The educational program of the Madarsa was to cover eight broad subject areas:

1. Hindustani literature (adab) – its history (tārīkh) and advanced learning (ǔṅcā gyāṅ)
2. Hindustani language (bhāṣā) – the birth (janam) and development (vikās), formation (banāvat) and principles (kāyade)
3. Knowledge (gyān) of Hindi and Urdu – language (zabān) and literature (adab)
4. Teaching methodology (paḍhāne kā tariḳā)
5. The history of the civilization of Hindustan (Hindustān kī sabhyatā kī tārīkh)
6. The Indian national question (Hindustān ke qaumī savāl)
7. The art of translation (anuvād-kalā)
8. General knowledge (māmū ī jānkārī) of the languages (bhāṣāoṅ) of India and their literature (sāhitya)

The degree (sanad) of prachārak was to be awarded to students who successfully graduated from the Madarsa. It is curious that while the language employed in the initial outline of the Ratna curriculum (with the sole exception of the phrase zabāni imtahān for “language exam”) tends mostly towards a Sanskritic Hindi, more of an effort has been made here to strike a balance in terms of including some Persian and Arabic-derived vocabulary. The very choice of the term “Madarsa” for the institution is an obvious indication of the inclusive intentions of its founders.

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290 It is notable that except for zabāni imtahān, the language of all of these subject headings is decidedly Sanskritic in derivation. The language used in the outline of the subsequent Prachārak examination, discussed...
A year later, in February of 1947, the working committee (kāryasamiti) of the Sabha met again in New Delhi. The details of the Hindustani Ratna degree and its syllabus had by this time been further refined, and interestingly it was decided to change the name from the Sanskritic Ratna to the Arabic-derived Qābil, meaning “able,” “worthy,” or “qualified.”

Specific texts had now been assigned to the various portions of the syllabus outlined above, and at least two anthologies - one of Hindustani prose and one of poetry - had been published by the Sabha. Despite these advances, however, the publishing aims of the organization seem to have remained largely unfulfilled.

Coordination between the national headquarters at Wardha and the provincial chapters also appears to have been limited. As late as April 1947, the Examinations secretary of the Gujarati Hindustani Prachar Samitiit, Giriraj Kishore, would note that “no information has been received as to when this examination [“Hindustani Kabil”] will be held, what are its rules and regulations, and what are the text-books prescribed for this examination.”

A public appeal for funds made in the name of Sabha chairman Rajendra Prasad in January 1948 (just days before the death of the Mahatma), referred to the need for at least 50,000 rupees to establish a press with which to publish “all kinds of literature in both Devanagari and Urdu scripts,” in addition to a shortfall of another 50,000 rupees to cover the Sabha’s annual expenditure.

The working committee of February 1947 also issued a resolution calling on provincial governments throughout India to support the spread of Hindustani in

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291 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 11. The intention here may also have been to distinguish the HPS degree from that of ratna offered by the HSS, a degree intended to be equivalent to the B. A.

292 “Hindustani Examination Results,” Harijan April 13, 1947. Kishore’s comments indicate that there was a serious lapse in communication between the headquarters of the Sabha and its regional branches, since the minutes of the working committee meeting held at Wardha on March 23, 1947 clearly state that the decision had been taken to hold the first Qabil examinations at Wardha during the second week of November, 1947. See Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 11.

293 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 2H/48, Serial 1.
anticipation of independence. It requested that provincial authorities make education in both scripts compulsory in government schools, and provide incentives for students to embrace the study of Hindustani by providing stipends and scholarships, and by making knowledge of Hindustani in both scripts a requirement for holding public office. While the organizational capacity of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, though not without its problems, was gradually gathering pace by the beginning of 1947, the much older and more established Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and its affiliated institutions clearly had a considerable head-start in the realm of lobbying provincial governments and mobilizing political support. Perin Captain seems to be referring to the work of the Sammelan among others in letters she wrote to Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Azad shortly after the Delhi meeting of the working committee of February 1947, in which she warned that “there is definitely a move here among a certain section to sabotage the Hindustani work.” Captain practically begged Azad as Union Education Minister, member of the Congress Working Committee, and the Constituent Assembly, to “officially lay down a definite policy regarding the National language,” adding that “interested parties” were bent on “changing the definition of Hindustani.” She also enclosed a copy of a Hindustani Prachar Sabha pamphlet, pointing him to page two for a “clear definition of what the Nationalist means by Hindustani – the Nation’s language.”

294 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 11.
It seems unlikely that Azad was in a position to give Perin Captain a satisfactory answer, although he was certainly in the minority of staunch advocates of Hindustani in the Constituent Assembly, which had begun the work of crafting the constitution of independent India in December 1946. Rizwan Qaiser has recently shown that while Azad maintained a senior position in the Congress and was known for an abiding commitment to secularism and the rights of Indian Muslims, he became increasingly alienated from much of the broader Muslim constituency and as well as from many Hindus within the Congress organization who were often impatient with Muslim concerns.\(^{297}\) Almost a decade earlier in the late 1930s, Azad had repeatedly conveyed the concerns of Muslims regarding the national language to others in the Congress leadership. For instance, he pointed out that despite its official policy of conducting its business in Hindustani in both scripts, Congress publications in many instances appeared only in Nagari with Urdu nowhere to be seen, with the effect that many Muslims were turning their backs on the party.\(^{298}\) Despite such protests it seems as though Azad was only occasionally successful in correcting such lapses. In 1947, Azad resigned from the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly in protest over its decision to adopt Hindi in Devanagari script alone as the national language.\(^{299}\) Again however, this principled stand seems to have had little effect on the final outcome.

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\(^{298}\) Ibid., 190-91.

Granville Austin’s political history of the framing of the Indian constitution remains an essential work on that topic. In it he attempts to dispel certain myths which have nonetheless persisted concerning the way in which Hindi came to be pronounced the official language of India by the Constituent Assembly. One of these is the popularly held belief that the decision to make Hindi in Devanagari script the official national language was carried by a single vote. Austin explains that this misconception appears to stem at least partially from the false recollections of two of the framers of the constitution, B.R. Ambedkar and Seth Govind Das, both of whom perpetuated the legend that Hindi prevailed upon Hindustani by a single vote in their respective memoirs. It was in fact the choice of “international” numerals rather than traditional Devanagari ones which was won by a single vote - Austin speculates that this may have been the source of their error. The decision in favor of Hindi in Devanagari was in fact ultimately made by an overwhelming majority of the Assembly as the result of a lengthy process of debate and compromise.

As Austin tells it, the question of language had threatened to become a divisive one since the earliest days of the Assembly. Unwillingness on the part of Congress leaders to let this contentious issue divide the Congress party or the Assembly itself seems to have been a major reason for its lengthy deferral. The initial Rules Committee decision of December 14, 1946, that Assembly business should be “transacted in Hindustani (Hindi or Urdu) or English,” provoked two contradictory amendments, one from Seth Govind Das, “a Hindi extremist” from the Central Provinces, and the other from K. Santhanam of Madras. Govind Das essentially insisted upon Hindustani as the language of proceedings,

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301 Ibid., 299-300.
objecting to any primary use of English in the framing of the national constitution. “I want to tell my brethren from Madras,” he said, “that if after twenty-five years of efforts on the part of Mahatma Gandhi they have not been able to understand Hindustani, the blame lies at their door.”

At the opposite extreme, Santhanam moved that “all motions and amendments in the Assembly be tabled in English and that English be spoken on the floor of the House whether or not the member knew Hindustani.” Ultimately the unamended rule was passed by a large majority, but the conflict that emerged during this preliminary meeting was to set the tone of much of the subsequent deliberations on the issue.

By the fourth session of the Constituent Assembly in July 1947, the language controversy had, according to Granville Austin, fallen “under the shadow of Partition,” with the Assembly witnessing “an attack, led by the Hindi-wallahs, on Hindustani, English, and the provincial languages.” In the words of K. Santhanam, “If there had been no partition, Hindustani would without doubt have been the national language, but the anger against Muslims turned against Urdu.”

In a rare turn of events, at a Congress Assembly Party meeting held on the evening of July 17, the rank and file rejected the line taken by the Congress leadership, and a vote of sixty three to thirty two determined that Hindi, not Hindustani, “should be the national language of India.” Meanwhile, the same meeting designated Devanagari as the national script by an even more emphatic margin of sixty-three to eighteen. The Congress leadership, however, delayed bringing

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302 Ibid., 275.
303 Ibid.
304 Ibid., 276.
305 Ibid., 277.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid.
the subject of language before the Assembly proper for another six months. According to Austin this was because it feared that “the enmities aroused … might endanger other aspects of the Assembly’s work.”

The Hindustani Prachar Sabha responded with predictable dismay to the announcement of the change in Congress policy. The Bombay branch issued a double-sided one-page memorandum printed in both Devanagari and Urdu scripts addressed to “the President of the Constituent Assembly, the President of the Indian National Congress, Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the Constituent Assembly.” It registered its great surprise that the Assembly had designated Hindi in Devanagari script as the national language when, as recently as April 12, K. M. Munshi had confirmed at a Hindustani Conference convened by the Prime Minister of Bombay that a Committee appointed by the Assembly had decided to adhere to the policy of the Indian National Congress in effect since 1925. Writing on behalf of the Bombay Sabha, Perin Captain believed that “it would be a disastrous blow to the cause of national unity and harmony if leading Congressmen were to take a narrow and communal point of view.” The memorandum continued,

Are we to understand that this decision was taken because of the partition of the Country and because it is anticipated that Urdu will be the National Language of Pakistan? Congress leaders have expressed the hope that very soon the seceding parts will return to India. Measures such as the adoption of Hindi as the National Language of India will not help bring about this happy consummation. We are of the opinion that in Pakistan Hindustani written in Devanagari or Urdu script should also be the National Language.

308 Ibid., 278.
309 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9H/46-47, Serial 22.
310 K. M. Munshi, it will be remembered, was involved in the attempt to establish the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad in 1936. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, he gave his name to what became known as the Munshi-Ayyanger formula through which a compromise was reached on the question of national language. According to this compromise, the term “national language” was dropped in favor of “official language of the union of India” and English was given this status alongside Hindi for a minimum of fifteen years. For further details, see: Austin, The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation, 295. Shortly after
Even if Urdu should become the National Language of Pakistan, would two wrongs make a right?

Apparently dumbfounded, the pamphlet concluded with the final disbelieving thought that “this decision is all the more amazing at a moment when the Muslim League Members of the Constituent Assembly have promised to stand fast by the National Flag of Free India and have vowed to uphold its honour.”

Evidently, at least some senior Congress members were unmoved by Captain’s impassioned plea. In a personal letter to Sampurnanand (then Minister for Education, U. P.) in June, 1947, K. M. Munshi presciently wrote, “I wish we could muster up sufficient courage to have only one National Language Hindi written in Devanagari script. If you can induce Pantji to support the idea, I am sure we would carry it out.” Elsewhere in his letter, Munshi reflected on his preferences for the revised nomenclature of Indian territories. He felt that while U. P. might be called “Aryavarta” this referent had been associated with “the whole of Bharat as a holy land.” Noting that another option which might be more appropriate was “Hind,” Munshi suggested that “If you want a name with a better association Madhyadesh would be the better name.” Most revealingly, Munshi confessed, “I would like to have Bharat for the whole country. I hate the word Hindustan.”

In the August 3 issue of the Harijan Gandhi printed a personal letter from the Bombay Sabha secretary Perin Captain in which she again poured out her feelings on the subject and sought the Mahatma’s guidance.

311 Sampurnanand Papers, “Important Correspondence,” File 55. Pant-ji here refers to Govind Ballabh Pant, Chief Minister of the United Provinces 1937-39 and the first Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh after independence in 1947. As a member of the Constituent Assembly As Union Home Minister between 1955 and 1961 Pant would oversee the reorganization of Indian states along linguistic lines, as well as implementing various measures to establish Hindi as an official administrative at the center and in several states.
It was with shame, disgust and sorrow that I heard on Delhi radio that our own group of men wished to dethrone our national language for which we have been struggling all these years. The deepest cut is that Congressmen of standing should be so blinded by prevailing passions as to break the very thing which all Congressmen have cherished and worked for. One would have thought that at least some statesmanship might have remained amongst our so-called higher leaders. Please write to me fully what you like:

(1) Our Hindustani Committee to do, (2) our honest and self-sacrificing Hindustani Pracharaks to do, and (3) last but not least, those of our countrymen – Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, Christians and Jews, who have accepted and love Hindustani as understood by the Congress resolution, to do.312

Naturally, Gandhi endorsed the sentiments of the grand-daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, and by way of advice, simply insisted that,

Every member of the Hindustani Committee is to live up to his creed, that is to say, he or she should himself or herself master both the scripts and be familiar with a mixture of the two forms, Hindi and Urdu. This will happen when both are diligently studied in their simple forms. And when this first requisite is fulfilled, he or she must try to induce others to acquire this knowledge.313

In the same issue of the Harijan a summary of “Gandhiji’s Speeches” included a section entitled “National Language” in which he was reported to have reiterated his commitment to Hindustani, saying that he would stick to it even if he had to stand alone. After all, “he knew many Hindus, leave alone the Muslims, who did not understand Sanskritized Hindi, nor could they write in the Devanagari script.”314

In October, as the suffering imposed by Partition on thousands of lives continued to make itself painfully evident, Kaka Kalelkar attempted to turn a brave face to the situation, seeing in propagation of the national language an opportunity for refugees from what was now Pakistan to rehabilitate themselves from hatred. In a Harijan piece entitled “Opportunities for Punjabis” Kalelkar suggested that refugees from West Pakistan who generally knew only Urdu could “serve the country and incidentally themselves” by teaching the Urdu script in Gujarat, Bombay, Bihar, Maharashtra, the Central Province or

313 Ibid.
the U. P., while in provinces further south they would be able to help not only with the
script but with proper pronunciation.315 “Some may even add an honest rupee to their
income,” Kalelkar mused optimistically.

Despite this sober optimism, the tide had definitely turned against Hindustani. In the
following week’s issue of the Harijan Gandhi was reported to have been hurt by the news
that henceforth the official language of the U. P. was to be Hindi in Devanagari.316 Two
weeks later, Gandhi was again defending his rationale against the misgivings of a
longtime supporter, Raihanabehn Tyabjee, who had written “a well-argued letter…
favouring Hindustani as the inter-provincial language written exclusively in the
nagari.”317 Responding to Tyabjee’s concern that maintaining both scripts “would be
construed to be in pursuance with the policy of appeasement,” Gandhi answered a
commonly cited complaint of his critics more broadly.

Though the word has come to have a bad odour about it, I would submit that
appeasement can be a praiseworthy duty, as it can also be a blameworthy gesture. Thus,
for instance, it can conceivably be a duty on the part of a brother to walk with his brother
towards the North while he alone would have gone to the South. But it would certainly be
criminal for him, a confirmed teetotaller, to drink spirituous liquors with his drunken
brother in order to appease him. He would then harm both himself and his brother. I must
not recite the Kalma in order to appease or flatter my Muslim brother, as he must not
recite the Gayatri in order to appease and flatter me. It would be another matter if both of
us recite either at will because we believe the two incantations as one in essence. I hold
that it is so. Hence it is that in the daily recital of the Ashram prayers, among the eleven
observances occurs equal respect for all the accepted religions in the world. The upshot
of this argument is that the policy of appeasement is not always bad. It may even be a
duty at times.318

Less than three months after writing these words, Gandhi was gunned down by Nathuram
Godse, a member of the Hindu Mahasabha from Maharashtra, who later testified on trial

316 “Hindi or Hindustani?” Harijan, October 26, 1947.
317 “Hindustani Written in Nagari Only,” Harijan, November 9, 1947. It will be remembered that
Raihana Tyabjee was a member of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha who earlier in 1947 had been appointed to
the committee responsible for determining the reading lists for the Hindustani Qabil examinations. See
page 100.
318 Ibid.
that he believed Gandhi’s *ahimsa* would result in the “emasculcation of the Hindu Community and thus make the community incapable of resisting the aggression or inroads of other communities, especially the Muslims.” Right up until his death on January 30, 1948, Gandhi continued to actively advocate for Hindustani in both scripts, no doubt holding out some hope that he would be able to influence the decision of the Constituent Assembly.

Although, as we have seen, the Congress leadership delayed resolution of the language question in the Assembly for well over a year, when the draft constitution was finally released in February 1948, “it established that the language of Parliament was English or Hindi and that these languages could be used in Provincial Assemblies as alternatives to the provincial languages.” As Austin explains, “it is not clear why the members of the Drafting Committee changed Hindustani to Hindi without the official sanction of the Assembly. According to the committee’s own account of the process, it did so after being informed by [K. M.] Munshi of ‘the Congress Party’s resolution for the changing of the words “Hindustani (Hindi or Urdu)” to Hindi’… One presumes that the Oligarchy had agreed to the change, and that it again did so to postpone conflict.” The oligarchy referred to consisted of the senior Congress leadership of Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, and Maulana Azad. While Austin’s presumption that the “Oligarchy” deferred the issue to preserve a semblance of consensus is no doubt largely accurate, it nonetheless surprising given that at least three of the four Oligarchs mentioned here were ostensibly supporters of the Gandhian conception of

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320 Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, 278.
321 Ibid.
322 Ibid., 20.
Hindustani, with Nehru certainly no enthusiast of chaste Hindi, Prasad the Chairman of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, and Azad having resigned from the Drafting Committee in protest over the wording of the language provision. How was it that these leaders allowed the long-standing Congress policy to be abandoned?

As Granville Austin puts it, 1948 “was a busy year for the Hindi-wallahs,” who in addition to making their case in the Constituent Assembly appear to have set themselves to the work of lobbying within the ranks of the Congress organization. When the constitution of the Congress itself was redrafted during the beginning of that year it was worded to uphold the organization’s long-standing language policies. P. D. Tandon however, objected to the use of the name Hindustani as designating the language of Congress proceedings, and instead proposed Hindi. The All India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay in April “passed over the language provision as too controversial.” When the draft was passed at the Jaipur Congress in December, all references to language were simply removed. Again, as Austin has it, “Evidently the high command had again temporized in the interests of party unity.”

Debate in the Constituent Assembly over the language issue could not be avoided forever. Between February and November 1948, “Hindi extremists” moved twenty-nine amendments seeking to revise articles or add new provisions to the draft concerning the language of Parliament and provincial legislatures. These moves were invariably met with counter amendments from those supporting Hindustani or even Urdu, and those (invariably from the South) who wanted to retain English. Eventually the Assembly

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323 Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, 278.
324 Ibid., 280.
325 Ibid., 280.
326 Ibid., 279.
would settle on what Austin aptly describes as a “half-hearted compromise,” with which none of the parties were wholly satisfied.\footnote{This compromise gave Hindi in the Devanagari script the status of “official language of the Union,” but guaranteed that English would continue in the same role for a minimum of fifteen years.}

At the same time however, the Hindi-wallahs were also active outside the Assembly during 1948 in their efforts to ensure a desirable outcome in these debates. Rajendra Prasad was subjected to a concerted campaign of letter writing throughout this period. For example, in July 1948, Udayanärayan Tiwārī, Secretary of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan forwarded to Prasad a petition collected by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banares, along with an editorial from the daily newspaper Bhārat. Tiwari urged Prasad to give grave consideration (gambhīrtā se vicār) to the extremely important matter (mahatwapūrṇ viṣay) raised in his enclosures. The petition called upon the government to install Hindi and the Devanagari script as the official national language as quickly as possible so that it might continue to foster a revival of Indian culture. Based on the evidence presented above, it is likely that Rajendra Prasad would have harbored great sympathy for much of the sentiment expressed by the petition. The Bhārat editorial however was evidently unsure of Prasad’s support for Hindi and wary of his association with Hindustani. It accused Nehru and other senior Congress leaders of having disregarded popular opinion in wanting to force Hindustani upon the people, and argued that “Rajendra Babu” himself, in holding both the Presidency of the Constituent Assembly and the Chairmanship of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, was subject to a conflict of interests.\footnote{Indeed, Prasad found himself in an awkward position when as chair of a meeting of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha held in March 1948, he was required to sign a letter composed by that body and addressed to the President of the Constituent Assembly (i. e. himself) objecting to the language provisions of the Ambedkar Committee’s draft constitution. See Rajendra Prasad Papers, 2H/48, Serial 5.} Moreover, it held that it was highly inappropriate that meetings of
the Sabha in Delhi had been held in the very living quarters of Rajendra Prasad. The
*Bhārat* demanded Prasad’s immediate resignation from the chairmanship of the Sabha
until the final resolution of the language question in the Assembly.

Although Prasad did not bow to these demands and continued to occupy both offices,
it seems likely that such lobbying by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Nagari
Pracharini Samiti successfully forestalled more vigorous support from Prasad for
Hindustani in the Constituent Assembly. Certainly, other members of the Sabha seem to
have been somewhat frustrated by Prasad’s inattention to the cause of Hindustani during
this period, though their respect for him apparently prevented them from directly
expressing as much.

One issue that reflects this type of tension first emerged early in 1947 when the
Congress Working Committee established the Constructive Working Committee
(*racnātmak kārya samiti*) to oversee and coordinate the work of various developmental
organizations such as the All India Village Industries Organization (*akhil bhārat
grāmodhosangh*), the All India Home-spinning Society (*akhil bhārat carkhā sangh*), and
the Indian Education Society (*Hindustani talimi sangh*). Then secretary of the Hindustani
Prachar Sabha, Shrimannaryan Agrawal, wrote to Rajendra Prasad in March 1947 to
inform him that all those present at a recent meeting of the Sabha felt that they should
have a representative on the board of this new coordinating body. “Therefore I am
drawing your attention to this matter. Please would you act on this matter as is
appropriate in your capacity as Chairman of our organization?”329

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329 Rajendra Prasad Papers 9H/46-47, Serial 17. The original Hindi reads, “*isī liye maīn āpkā dhyān is or khīnc rahā hūn. āp hamārī sabhā ke adhyakṣ ke nāte is sambandh meṁ ucit karen.*”
reiterated this request in February 1948. It is unclear what action, if any, Prasad took on behalf of the Sabha in response to these requests but it seems he failed to move those on the Congress Working Committee who had overlooked the propagation of Hindustani as being an important part of the constructive program. At a well-attended general meeting of the Sabha in Sevagram near Wardha on March 11, presided over by Prasad himself, it was noted that “according to the new Constitution passed by the All India Congress Committee at its Delhi meeting on February 22, 1948, the name of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha does not appear on the list of approved organizations for carrying out its constructive work.” The Sabha respectfully requested that the Congress Committee include its name on that list of constructive organizations.

At the same meeting, the question arose of government funding and the establishment of a Delhi office of the Sabha. The idealism evinced in the ensuing discussion suggests that politically, certain members of the Sabha were somewhat naive, at least in comparison to their more aggressive counterparts in the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Union Education Minister Maulana Azad suggested that they need only submit a proposal to the government in order to secure necessary funds for work of Hindustani Prachar, and to establish an office in the capital. Kaka Kalelkar, who had recently been elected to the position of Vice-Chairman (upasabhāpati) made vacant by Gandhi’s death, explained, “Bapu also contemplated this. He said we shouldn’t go to the government to ask for help. If the government gives of its own accord, that’s another matter.” Azad responded, “Bapu’s statement is correct in one way, but the government should be informed [of the need for financial assistance]. The government is yours - it will certainly help!”

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The tone of this discussion is in stark contrast to a submission in pursuance of a grant-in-aid made on behalf of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan to Azad in his capacity as “Member for Education, Government of India” in September 1947. This submission, which followed up on talks between the minister and Sammelan representative Maulichandra Sharma about two months earlier, unequivocally presented the Sammelan as “the premier and most representative Hindi institution in the country,” noting that the Government of India had already recognized this two years earlier when it “invited the Sammelan as the representative of the Hindi world, to send its nominees to the committee which was appointed to go into the question of the language of broadcasts by the All India Broadcasting Department.” The bulk of the submission consisted of a reasonably concise, three-page summary of the Sammelan’s illustrious thirty-seven year history. “Now that the country has a national government,” and in view of its position as “the greatest institution of the most important language of the Indian Union,” the Sammelan made what it regarded as a “moderate request” for a non-recurring grant of Rs. seven lakhs and a recurring annual grant of Rs. 50,000. The Ministry of Education duly responded with a non-recurring grant of Rs. five lakhs and a recurring annual grant of Rs. 40,000 per annum for three years, subject to the Sammelan contributing an equal amount, and acquiring the necessary land for the establishment of offices and a cultural center in Delhi.

While the Hindustani Prachar Sabha only began to seriously consider establishing an office in Delhi in March 1948 then, the well-oiled lobbying apparatus of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan had already made its move on the Centre. But if there were signs that

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331 P. D. Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 130.
332 P. D. Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, File 3, Serial 140.
Gandhi’s disciple Kaka Kalelkar would be unequal to the task of politically maneuvering in favor of Hindustani during the crucial period of debate in Constituent Assembly between February and November, P. D. Tandon, consciously or otherwise, engineered circumstances such that the new upasabhāpati (“vice-Chairman”) would be too preoccupied with other important national work to have any substantial effect on the constitutional deliberations. He did so with the full assistance of sabhāpati Rajendra-Babu.

śīghralipi: 333 Kalelkar is Sidelined

In June 1948, in spite of all that had occurred in the preceding year, Kalelkar wrote to Prasad with considerable hope and enthusiasm for the cause of Hindustani. He had recently arrived in Delhi hoping to meet with Prasad, only to discover that the latter was no longer in the city. 334 Prasad had retreated to the cooler climes of Dehradun on account of Delhi’s oppressive summer heat and his own poor health. Kalelkar reported that Amritlal Nanavati, the new Sabha secretary, had submitted an application for funds to the Education Ministry and that Maulana Saheb was prepared to give a considerable grant for the establishment of a Delhi office. In a postscript in which he may well have been endeavoring to convince himself as much as anyone else, Kalelkar reflected that he believed that there was yet an opportunity to evolve a style of Hindustani that would be acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims. “If only we try a little the Muslims will come around,” he hoped. 335 Kalelkar offered to travel to Dehradun if necessary and asked Prasad to inform him if would return to Delhi before the next sitting of the Constituent

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333 śīghralipi or “rapid-script” is another Sanskritic neologism for shorthand or stenography.  
334 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 2H/48, Serial 8.  
335 Ibid.
Assembly in the second week of July in order that a meeting of the Sabha might be scheduled.

Prasad assured Kalelkar that there was no need for him to travel to Dehradun and that he would be back by the end of the month, or as soon as the clouds arrived and the first rains came. Instead, Prasad announced that he would like Kalelkar to chair the Hindi Stenography and Typewriting Committee, the formation of which had been called for in the Constituent Assembly. Kalelkar had been nominated as chairman by none other than P. D. Tandon, who, as Prasad explained, was unfortunately unavailable to serve on the committee until July and “as speed is of essence” had thus put forward Kalelkar’s name.

The problem of establishing suitable, and if possible standardized, systems of shorthand and Devanagari typewriting was particularly urgent from the point of view of the Hindi-wallahs who, unlike many of their counterparts in southern India, were eager to see the replacement of English in national administration as soon as possible. While desirable from a nationalist point of view, the practicalities of replacing English were in fact rather daunting. In 1938, educationalist K. G. Mashruwala, had observed unhappily in the Harijan that Congress ministries and their offices often resorted to English because it was the only medium in which their stenographers were capable of taking dictation. Mashruwala acknowledged that this was “a formidable difficulty for so many,” himself included, but admonished his countrymen that “to give up the mother tongue for want of suitable stenography” would be like “losing a kingdom for want of a horse-shoe nail.” In 1946, Harijan editor Pyarelal complained of the need to transcribe Hindustani and Gujarati copy into Roman script simply in order to have it sent by telegraph from one

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336 Rajendra Prasad Papers, 2H/48, Serial 11.
office to another, “I spent the whole of the morning at this thankless task… When will our news agencies begin to transmit press messages in Rashtrabhasha over the wires?” There were clearly important technical and technological dimensions to the problems of linguistic decolonization, in addition to various cultural and political ones. Developing a *vidyullipi* or telegraphic code for the Nagari script was another of the tasks placed before Kalelkar’s “Hindi Shorthand and Hindi Typewriter Standardization Committee” by the Constituent Assembly in 1948.

In fact, as early as 1938, Kaka Kalelkar, Shrimannarayan Agrawal, P. D. Tandon and linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee had participated in a *śighralipi sammelan* (“Shorthand Conference”) in Wardha under the presidency of industrialist Seth Jamnalal Bajaj in order to “examine the various systems of Hindustani shorthand and standardize or evolve one efficient system which may be suitable for other modern Indian languages as with necessary modifications.” The conference circulated a questionnaire among innovators and teachers of the various methods of stenography currently employed, asking for submissions from “all those who have not yet informed us of their systems either adapted for Hindustani or for some modern Indian Language.” Ten years later, when Rajendra Prasad as President of the Constituent Assembly, at the prompting of P. D. Tandon, called on Kalelkar to return to this project in the context of the looming challenges of independence, the resolution of the problem was apparently no closer. In his report which was eventually published in 1951, Kalelkar hesitated to recommend a single system of

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338. “And So It All Came Out,” *Harijan* February 17, 1946.
shorthand suitable for all-India standardization. Instead, he submitted four systems as being worthy of government recognition and suggested that all might be “allowed to grow in an atmosphere of healthy emulation,” while recommending that the Union Government also appoint a board of grammarians and scholars of phonetics in order to “exhaustively examine the nature of all Indian languages from the viewpoint of the needs of a Shorthand system.” Rather than impose a single nation-wide system in the interests of standardization, the committee instead suggested that the above-mentioned Board might be responsible for conducting all-India examinations for testing students of Hindustani shorthand in order to ensure universally high standards of accuracy.

The second problem considered by the Kalelkar committee was the design of a standardized Devanagari keyboard that could be retrofitted to the “thousands if not lacs” (lākhs, i.e. “hundreds of thousands”) of English typewriters that were “likely to become superfluous with the introduction of Devanagari as the script of the Union and some of the states.” The complexities of such a project were manifold, but included the fact that the Devanagari script features some 52 basic characters as opposed to the 26 of the Roman alphabet and that the arrangement of these characters is rather less linear than that of the Roman script for which standard typewriters were designed. Making allowances for these differences without sacrificing speed and accuracy were the challenges taken up by the committee. Although a fundamental principle of the committee was that “the basic character of the script should not be radically altered,” it was determined that reconciling the desired values of uniformity, beauty, speed and accuracy without placing “heavy

341 Report of the Finalising Committee of the Hindustani Shorthand and Hindi Typewriter Standardisation Committee. It is telling that even now
342 Ibid., 29-30.
343 Ibid.
344 Ibid., 32.
psychological strain on the mind of the typist” necessitated some modifications to the script. For example, the report proposed the introduction of a new character to distinguish the “short i” vowel from “long” counterpart, both of which were now to be typed after the preceding consonant. 345 All of the Committee’s proposed changes were ratified by a joint meeting with the Devanagari Script Reform Committee, which had been appointed by the Government of the United Provinces in the hopes that the changes would thereby more readily find popular acceptance. 346 Furthermore, since it was anticipated that the “Hindi Standard Typewriter” would be used in the offices of state governments in non-Hindi speaking areas, the committee also recommended the inclusion of several characters to represent those “certain sounds for which there are no appropriate symbols in the Nagari script.” 347 Thus the “Hindi Standard Typewriter” was designed to facilitate the adoption not only of Hindi as an official language throughout the Union, but of Devanagari as a national script in which all Indian languages might be represented.

In this respect at least, Kalelkar’s work continued to advance Gandhi’s long held advocacy of Devanagari, but it is striking that nowhere in his report is there any mention of any corresponding need for a “standard Urdu typewriter.” In his discussion of stenography, Kalelkar continued to pay lip service to the term “Hindustani,” and yet he had completely accepted the term “Hindi” when discussing his committee’s parallel work on the typewriter, as per the terms of reference provided by the brief of the Constituent Assembly. Certainly, by the time of the publication of Kalelkar’s report in 1951 the constitution had been signed into law and Hindi in Devanagari had become (along with English for at least fifteen years) the official language of the Indian Union. And yet,

345 Ibid.
346 Ibid., 16.
347 Ibid., 34.
despite this *fait accompli*, Kalelkar’s acquiescence to the use of the term marks a serious retreat from the position one might have expected from Gandhi’s lieutenant. It is difficult not to surmise that P. D. Tandon had executed something of a political master stroke in having Kalelkar nominated to this particular post. In effect, Kalelkar - after Prasad the senior-most figure in the Hindustani Prachar Sabha - had been co-opted to cause of Hindi and the Devanagari script at a crucial moment in the struggle for the national language.
Chapter 6: Conclusion: An Authentic Constitution?

The previous chapter examined the dissipation of support for the cause of Hindustani as an unmarked national language in both scripts after Gandhi’s death on January 30, 1948. Surprisingly, support for Hindustani ebbed, not only within the wider Congress organization, but even among senior members of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha itself. This capitulation, it has been argued here, was the result, in no small way, of a distinctly Hindu cultural bias on the part of at least some of these leaders. By way of conclusion, the remainder of this thesis examines the question of what was to become the authoritative language of the constitution itself - an aspect of the framing of the constitution that further demonstrates a lack of commitment to Hindustani on the part of senior Congress leadership. At the same time, this question also points to the essentially elitist underpinnings of arguments that were deployed against the use of Hindustani as the national language.

While the drafting of the constitution was initially undertaken in English, in May 1947 President Rajendra Prasad raised the possibility in the Constituent Assembly of a translation in an Indian language being adopted as the original or authoritative version. According to Austin, Prasad “pursued the idea through the summer, apparently only thinking in terms of a Hindi translation.” On November 1, 1947, a Hindi translation committee met for the first time with Prasad in attendance. As we have seen in the previous chapter, debate on the language question in the Assembly was deferred until as late as August, 1948. Prasad’s eagerness to oversee work on the Hindi translation under such circumstances, at the apparent expense of promoting the cause of Hindustani,

348 Austin, The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation, 282.
349 Ibid., 282.
constitutes further evidence that his original reticence to promote Hindustani in both scripts continued to guide his action.

At some time subsequently, a separate committee appears to have begun work on an Urdu translation of the draft constitution. In the cover letter to a Hindustani translation submitted to the Assembly in October 1948, Pandit Sunderlal explained that he had been instructed by Gandhi shortly before his death to make contact with the President of the Constituent Assembly “and also with the members of the Hindi and Urdu committees, and to make an attempt for the production of one common Hindustani translation of the Draft Constitution instead of two separate Hindi and Urdu translations.”\(^\text{350}\) Sunderlal went to some pains in his letter to record the sequence of events involved in his efforts to gain permission from the President for this undertaking. His initial attempt to gain an interview with Prasad in Wardha was unsuccessful, whereupon Gandhi directed him to write to the President “along the lines indicated by him.” This was done, Sunderlal informed the Assembly in his letter, shortly before Gandhiji’s passing away. Almost six months later, on July 23, 1948, at a general meeting of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha with Dr. Rajendra Prasad as its chair, a committee consisting of Sunderlal, Kaka Kalelkar, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru [related by marriage to Jawaharlal] and Shri M. Satyanaraian was appointed to collaborate on the task of producing a Hindustani translation. The actual task of authorship was delegated to Dr. Suryakanta (formerly of the Oriental College, Lahore) and Dr. Yadu Vanshi of All India Radio, with the “linguistic scholarship” of Kaka Kalelkar and Tara Chand being of “particular value to the translators.”

\(^{350}\) RP Papers. File 1T/48, Serial 27. All quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are taken from Sunderlal’s
With so many members of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha involved in the effort to quickly produce a Hindustani rendition of the constitution, Prasad’s apparent lack of enthusiasm for the project is at best curious. His casual betrayal of the mission of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha is evinced in a letter Prasad wrote to Jugal Kishore Khanna, secretary of the Constituent Assembly at the end of August, 1948. Prasad requested a report from Khanna comparing “the extent of the differences between the Hindustani version and the other [Hindi and Urdu] versions” that had already been printed. He mused, “… if it is only question of some of the words being changed here and there, it may not be worthwhile printing it separately.” As we have seen, despite Prasad’s lack of enthusiasm, a Hindustani translation of the draft constitution was evidently printed after all.

In the remainder of his prefatory letter to this translation, Sunderlal made a compelling case for the capacity of the language of the common man to articulate the nuances required of the nation’s founding document. It is worth quoting this argument at some length:

This translation of the Draft Constitution of India has been done in the language spoken by the vast majority of people on this side of the Vindhyas and therefore given the name of Hindustani – the language of Hindustan. There is bound to be some difference in vocabulary between the language of ordinary common talk, the language of literature, the language of law and the language of science, but there is no fundamental difference between them and the translators do not consider it impossible that a work of law should be written in the language of the people. They do not admit that drafting the Constitution or in translating it, we have per force to fall back on the vocabulary and grammatical formation of Sanskrit, Arabic or any other language. On the other hand they believe that the stock of words of the Hindustani language is so large and the rules of the grammar so comprehensive that not only can works of law, in original or in translation, be written successfully in the Hindustani language but also works on technical and scientific subjects.

The English language is a good illustration of the soundness of this principle. In it there is no essential difference between the language of literature, science, law or poetry with the

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351 RP Papers, 1T/48, Serial 22.
exception of a few technical terms peculiar to each branch of knowledge. In the language of law particularly the vocabulary is with very few exceptions that of the ordinary speech of the common people and books have been written in English on such abstruse subjects as the Atomic bomb and Relativity which do not require the help of a dictionary to be completely understood. Anybody with an ordinary knowledge of English will have very little difficulty understanding the language of say, Macaulay’s History of England or his Indian Penal Code.

Most of the technical terms in works on law or constitution are ordinary words which are given a specialized meaning for legal purposes and fine distinctions are made between them. For example in this very draft we have assent, consent, agree, approve, declaration and proclamation; punishment and penalty etc. Making fine distinctions in meaning is certainly the work of lawyers and constitutional experts but no where in the world is the language of law as such different from the language of ordinary speech or needs to be so. By saying ‘primo’ for first or ‘pater’ for father or ‘mater’ for mother we can make the language more difficult but not more legal or constitutional. The same is true of Hindustani. ‘Pehla’, ‘doosra’, ‘teesra’ are as correct and legal as ‘prathama’, ‘dvitiya’ ‘tritiya’ or ‘uakem’, ‘doam’ and ‘some’.

Sunderlal’s arguments undermined one of the fundamental claims of Sanskritized Hindi to the mantle of national language: that colloquial Hindustani was bereft of the sophisticated higher orders of vocabulary and thus ineligible to assume the role. At the same time, Sunderlal advanced a more cosmopolitan and inclusive vision of Indian culture, explicitly invoking Gandhi’s support in this regard, and resting the legitimacy of Hindustani on the democratic principle of “widest intelligibility.”

As we have seen, however, another of the supporting planks in the argument for Sanskritic Hindi in Devanagari alone was that it was a Sanksritic element that the various languages of southern India held in common with those of the north. These arguments were put forcefully to the members of the Constituent Assembly in a presumably well-coordinated barrage of missives from all over India. Refuting the legitimacy of Sunderlal’s Hindustani translation of the draft constitution, B. S. Audhulia of Jubbulpore, C. P., argued in an open letter to the Assembly in 1949 that only by adopting Sanskrit-
derived vocabulary could Hindi attain the desired property of “widest intelligibility.”

He implored advocates of Hindustani to realize “that our countrymen will only accept that language which will freely go to Sanskrit which is the mother of the main languages of this country.”

In an even more emphatic statement in support of Hindi and Devanagari, R. Sundarkrishnamachari, Principal of the Madras Hindi Vidyapith (College), and G. Vaidyanath Shankar, Organiser of the Devanagari Dal (Army) and the Bharatiya Devanagari Parishad (Madras), enunciated fourteen points in their own “Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly Regarding the National Language and Script for India.” The memorandum emphasized what it regarded as the inherent difficulty in learning Urdu script for people of the south, claiming it was “absolutely unscientific, defective, and not easily learnt,” and moreover that it was “absolutely non-Indian.” It offered as evidence of a lack of affinity in the people of the South for Urdu and Hindustani the failure of the Dakshina Bharat Hindustani (formerly Hindi) Prachar Sabha to attract students for the study of Urdu, “in spite of the intense and elaborate propaganda for Urdu by the Sabha with all its vast resources.” By contrast, the memorandum argued, “thanks to its common kinship and flexibility, Hindi in Devanagari script, is only a loving sister to the Provincial Languages and would only enrich their growth and get enriched by them, thereby developing inter-provincial unity.”

To be sure, the Constituent Assembly also received submissions in support of Hindustani. The All-India Jamiat Ulamai Hind, for instance, appealed to the Assembly.

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353 Ibid. Note that the rhetoric in this and the following example persist in employing filial metaphors of various sorts, describing languages as mothers or sisters, in what Asha Sarangi describes as “the feminization of language.” See above.
354 PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, Miscellaneous, Serial 50.
“and others entrusted with shaping of the Destiny of the country to accept Hindustani, simple and pure, unburdened with difficult Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian words in both Deonagari and Urdu scripts as the national and official language of the Country.”\textsuperscript{355} It recalled the long-established policy of the Indian National Congress and invoked Gandhi as the “Father of the Nation” who had regarded Hindustani as “the cornerstone of Hindu-Muslim unity.”\textsuperscript{356} Perin Captain, as honorary secretary of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, also called on the Constituent Assembly in the weeks preceding the final debates on the language question. Captain urged the Assembly to recall Gandhi’s definition of \textit{rāṣṭrabhāṣā}, sending each member a pamphlet containing reproductions of his own handwritten thoughts on the subject, which read, “Rashtra Bhasha for me means Hindi + Urdu = Hindustani[.]. My advice will be amalgamate the two and follow the larger method i[.] e[.] of Hindi + Urdu amalgamation[.]”\textsuperscript{357} The front page of the pamphlet carried a portrait of the Mahatma in a contemplative, somewhat forlorn posture.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{portrait_gandhi}
\caption{Portrait of M. K. Gandhi, cover of pamphlet addressed to Members of Constituent Assembly by Perin Captain, August 1, 1949. Copyright: NAI.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{355} PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, Miscellaneous, Serial 563.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{357} PD Tandon Papers, Hindi Sahitya, Miscellaneous, Serial 562. Ironically, the pamphlet included text in English and Hindustani in (Gandhi’s all but illegible) Devanagari script, but not a ligature of the Persian script.
The one member of the Constituent Assembly, indeed the one member of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, who might have been expected to hold fast to Gandhi’s vision of the national language was Rajendra Prasad. To be fair, Prasad, with Nehru, according to Austin, appears to have done much to resist the onslaught of the group that Austin describes as “the extremists” - those Hindi-wallahs who would have insisted on a narrower definition of Hindi as the national language, purging to an even greater extent any traces of Urdu, and who would have removed or reduced the grace period for English (that was ultimately set at a minimum of fifteen years). Indeed, Prasad’s resistance to this lobby no doubt helped to ensure the inclusion of article 351 in the final draft of the constitution, the “directive for development of the Hindi language,” which reads:

It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.

This concession to the notion of a “composite culture” and the “genius, forms, style and expressions of Hindustani” was evidently enough to allow erstwhile supporters of Hindustani in both scripts to support the revised definition of the national language.

As the lengthy process of finalizing the constitution approached completion towards the middle of 1949, the question remained as to which language should provide the authoritative version of this seminal document. Correspondence between President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on this question reveals two very different points of view. Prasad wrote to Nehru reminding him of his desire “to have our

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358 Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, 292.
Constitution in our own language.” Although it would be necessary to give the English draft authoritative status, at least initially, Prasad wondered if with regard to the Indian version we may give it also authority by subject to this limitation that in the case of conflict the English version will be treated as the authoritative version for the first say ten or fifteen years. We might also make the Indian [sic] version liable to amendment by an easier process so as to bring it into conformity with the English version within this period and after that the Indian version might be made the authoritative version or at least of equal authority with the English version.\[360\\]

Prasad expressed confidence that within the course of ten to fifteen years “the Indian version” would become “crystallized” and that the language of this translation would become “current in our political parlance.” He cited the positive experience of another former British colony, Ireland, as providing a precedent for the approach he had outlined.

In Ireland I have noticed that they have had many amendments to the Irish version without corresponding amendments of the constitution in English which indicates that there also the question of language has presented similar problems and the solution has been the same as that I have suggested above.

The Prime Minister responded immediately, dismissing the proposal on grounds of impracticality. No doubt impatient with the already drawn-out process and weary altogether of the vexing question of the national language, Nehru averred,

As regards the adoption of a Hindi version of the Constitution, I confess, I rather doubt the feasibility of the proposal you make… Apart from delaying the consideration of the English draft, I am sure this consideration of the Hindi translation will be no simple matter and will give rise to fierce argument at every step and in almost every word. It will thus tend to raise passions which will be reflected in the consideration of the English version and delay matters there. I am completely at sea because I do not understand it at all [i.e. Nehru confessed to being unable to comprehend the Sanskritized Hindi translation of the Constitution].

I think it is inevitable that the English Constitution should be considered the authoritative one. Many years after, the Hindi version may have equal or greater authority. You mention the case of Ireland. I might inform you that I had a talk about this with the Prime Minister of Ireland and he told me that they found it very difficult to carry on with Gaelic and were reverting more and more to English. In fact they had always used far more English than Gaelic. During my stay in Dublin, I visited the Dail. Every speech and

360 RP Papers PSF, File 15, Serial 11. The following quotations in this paragraph, including those from Nehru, are drawn from this file.
question was in English as well as the answer. Formally by law they have named their country now Ireland and not Eire.

According to Austin, Prasad persisted in his efforts to have the Hindi version accorded equal or greater authority than the English, bringing the matter to the Steering Committee of the Assembly, despite Nehru’s opposition. After the committee deferred making a decision on the matter, “the issue never again assumed serious proportions in the Assembly.”

Austin credits Prasad with having approached his role as President of the Constituent Assembly with an admirable spirit of moderation and compromise, noting that with his sensitivity to “both Muslims and other Hindustani speakers, he advocated first Hindustani and then broad, inclusive Hindi.” While he had accepted that technical terms could be drawn from Sanskrit, he had not objected to the incorporation of English words. His “adamant stand” on the issue of the authoritative version of the constitution was, according to Austin, somewhat out of character, and apparently stemmed from his depth of conviction that Indian independence would be incomplete without independence from the English language.

A less generous evaluation of Prasad’s performance would, in light of the evidence presented in this thesis, conclude that the position of compromise on the national language to which Prasad retreated in the Constituent Assembly was not all that far from the one he personally favored. Prasad’s willingness to abandon the Urdu script as an integral component of the national language was after all strongly implied in his letter to Kaka Kalelkar regarding the formation of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha some years earlier. Prasad’s casual usage of the term “Indian language” in his correspondence to

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361 Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, 286.
Nehru, when he was clearing referring to Hindi, suggests that for Prasad at least, this
language, as much if not more than Hindustani, was truly the national language of India.

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This thesis has attempted to understand how and why the avowedly secular Congress
came to enshrine as the official language of independent India a language and script that
had become marked as those of a particular religious community. It has concluded that in
making this fateful decision Congress succumbed not only to the influence of overtly
Hindu-nationalist sentiments espoused openly by extreme advocates inside and outside
of the Congress fold, but to the more subtle cultural orientations of some of its ostensibly
more moderate and secular-minded senior leaders. In abandoning the name “Hindustani”
and with it the Urdu script, Congress leaders such as Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal
Nehru compromised with Hindu nationalists in an effort preserve what they evidently
believed was a necessary national consensus. Had he survived his assassin’s bullets, it
seems hardly likely that Gandhi would have given his blessing to this compromise, since,
as this thesis has shown, he devoted substantial energy to the promotion of Hindustani as
a common language in both scripts in the final decade of his life. As this thesis has also
shown however, Gandhi himself contributed to the Hindi-Urdu controversy that had
begun so much earlier. Gandhi’s initial promotion of Hindi (and “Hindi-Hindustani”) and
his admiration of the Devanagari script, in the context of his deployment of Hindu
symbols and ideas in his articulation of anti-colonial nationalism, all contributed to
enduring Muslim suspicions that his subsequent advocacy of the Urdu script was little
more than a ploy.
The extent to which these issues have continued to provoke Hindu-Muslim tensions in post-colonial India is difficult to quantify, and at any rate remains beyond the scope of this work. Nonetheless it is hoped that in its own small way the history presented here might contribute to greater understandings of the role of cultural nationalisms in the South Asian context. As Arvind Rajagopal has shown, the electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (with its explicit advocacy of the politics of Hindutva) at the end of the twentieth century immediately followed a period in which a Congress government had increasingly appealed to Hindu sentiment in an attempt to arrest its own declining electoral fortunes.\footnote{Arvind Rajagopal, \textit{Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India} (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).} Most notably, such appeals included state-sponsored serializations of the Hindu epics the Ramayana and Mahabharata on Doordarshan, India’s national television broadcaster. Rajagopal rightly describes these broadcasts as having “violated a Nehruvian taboo, of a secular and non-partisan status of government institutions.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.} At a pivotal moment in Indian history, these broadcasts were enormously influential in representing India to itself as a Hindu nation. The privileging of Hindi in Devanagari script in the constitution was another such moment, also presided over by the Congress.
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