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Making a Difference: Hindi, 1880–1930

Liberal and progressive anti-communalism in India is, in a sense, concerned with devising intellectual strategies for the *management* of difference—and strategies of great subtlety have been aired in the recent past. The assertions and ascriptions of difference that are my object happen along several axes—religion, caste, region, language, gender, class—and serve diverse political purposes. It is hardly surprising that these assertions and ascriptions have a great potential for conflict. That, indeed, is why they are made in the first place, as part of a struggle to collar or seize some legitimate share of the social product. There are other kinds of claims to difference—the right to wear head scarves, or to study a wider mix of authors in school syllabi—that can be accommodated with relatively greater ease within the late-capitalist ideology of "pluralism." This might be because, and to the extent that, they do not impinge on questions of social order, and so do not pose urgent problems of "management" in the way that my kind, necessarily, do. The proposed strategies are procedural and constitutional; some take recourse to the idea of "negotiation" across thresholds of radical cultural difference, while others seek to undermine the appearance of radical cultural difference by shifting attention to the underlying internal rationalities which might, patiently, subtend superficial and apparent difference—somewhat in the way that the land both supports and ignores the flags and boundaries over which men fight.[1] These strategies are, in an obvious sense, products of a moment of acute difficulty. Because the earlier liberal faith in the erosion—if not erasure—of difference seems to be stuck firmly in the mud:

[1]See, in this context, Rajeev Bhargava, "Giving Secularism Its Due;" Akeel Bilgrami, "Two Concepts of Secularism;" and Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," all in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 9 July 1994.

it seems unlikely that the ark of universal reason will float again, even though—*and perhaps even because*—the flood of universal reason appears all set to engulf the world.

However, my concern here is not primarily with the *management* of difference, but rather with a particular example of the *production* of difference—and with such clues as the latter might hold for the former. My sample for this inquiry is the process of the making of modern Hindi in the period 1880–1930—the insertion of a tragic wedge into the common language of north India, and the resultant production—"differentiation"—of two mutilated half-languages, each of which is a travesty of that great lingua franca. I am aware that what I am describing as the production of difference might well be just the obverse of what is more commonly described as the making of identities. But I would like to leave the matter open for the moment, and entertain the possibility that there might be contexts in which one or the other—difference or identity/similarity—should be accorded analytical primacy.

The phenomenon of (the often bloody politics of) difference often prompts people to think in terms of some sort of conspiracy, generally by (or at the behest of) cynically manipulative ruling élites. Familiar in this kind of context are references to "divide and rule," with its implicit assumption of a prior and possible harmony. However, it is well to remember that the principle of "divide et impera" applies as much to modern democracies as it did to Roman emperors.

Alternatively, on the rebound from *subverted harmony*, explanation is sought in the notion of primordial identities and differences. Though as almost everybody knows, these claims of primordiality are in fact fake, jumped-up claims, and the phenomena that are sought to be explained thus—the identities and the differences—are unmistakably modern. In trying to speak about the production of difference, I am trying to finesse something between "subverted harmony" and "primordial difference."

Let me confess quickly that it is not my intention to try and develop a general theory of difference. Indeed, I would be disinclined to believe in the possibility of such a general theory. In fact, my emphasis on the *production* of difference is intended to draw attention to the particularity of the differences that jostle for attention in the political marketplace.

In turning to the process of contention that produced modern Hindi, I am immediately overcome by a great sense of difficulty. At least some of this might be, in a way, a subset of the more general problem that the politicization of the Hindi-Urdu linguistic domain brings out: i.e., that the language one uses is, perforce, a language that one shares with other

users, that words mean what one wants them to mean *and* what others want them to mean. Thus, I write out of a conviction that there is but one, common language of north India, which is variously described as Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani. In the course of history, some of which I seek to address below, particular ends of the linguistic spectrum have been sought to be hived off and infected with, on the one hand, Sanskritic, and on the other, Perso-Arabic influences. These latter processes have led to the emergence of two identifiable styles or registers, which I identify as "Hindi" and "Urdu." The substrate middle language which supports these stylistic variants I wish to identify as *Hindi* because the implicit suggestion of the fertile plains of Hind which were the site of the prolonged process of cultural mixing that produced that substrate language is more evocative to me than the narrower military associations of the name *Urdu*. Furthermore, the name *Hindi* for this language, used, it needs to be said, by Hindus and Muslims alike, is older than the nasty controversies that engulfed this domain towards the end of the last century. To call it *Hindi,* therefore, is, to my mind, to lay claim to that older cultural legacy. I am aware, however, that this substrate language has been, and is, described as Hindustani and as Urdu—which would also be fine with me, provided that these are always distinguished from what either would become when endowed with scare quotes: thus, Urdu becomes "Urdu," the barbarous Perso-Arabicized lingo of the mullah. As for "Hindustani"—i.e. with scare quotes—it is the embattled variant that Gandhi suggested could be written in either script and which left the pedants on either side—the pandits and the mullahs, committed to "Hindi" or to "Urdu"—either dissatisfied, each side seeing it as merely a Trojan horse of the other; or, occasionally, in moments of cultural confidence, greedy to annex it by infecting the middle domain with *their* kind of extremism. Thus, consider the fate, in this kind of force field, of the formulation "Hindī *yā* Hindustānī," which was offered as a compromise solution. In the embattled context that I am still nerving myself up to essay, the *yā* could mean either that Hindi was *the same as* Hindustani—in which case the mullah was up in arms, because the Hindi could easily become "Hindi"—or that Hindustani was an *alternative to,* i.e. *other than* Hindi—in which case, to the pandit, who was equally suspicious, Hindustani—and even Gandhi's "Hindustani"—was only another name for Urdu, or even "Urdu." The terminological difficulty is acute, and it has led one exasperated scholar to propose that the contested middle language be called *Hirdu;* but I have no doubt that the other side would call this a biased compromise, and propose the alternative *Urdi!*

However, facetious suggestions apart, there is little consolation in the fact that this terminological slipperiness in some sense imitates the intimate and raking difficulty which the Hindi-Urdu tussle of the early twentieth century created, and still creates all round. The fact that the difference happens in a shared linguistic domain does not render the difference superfluous, or transcendable through some mere terminological compromise. For all I know, such nebulous difference might make the resultant politics even more vicious. Because the language that one uses, and in some sense possesses at the same time as being possessed by it, is at each and every moment also owned by and available and malleable to the interference of often hostile others. Thus, for all the fussy precision that I might endeavor to bring to my use of the terms, carefully distinguishing Hindi from "Hindi," I suspect that the difficulty won't simply go away. But it just might consent to lying down and being stroked, as it were.

Despite this sense of difficulty I feel, and despite the ingrained intractability of this material, however, I find myself returning to this territory again and again. It is almost as if, amid all this sordidness, there is something valuable that has been mislaid, some cultural secret that we must recover if we are ever to find our way out of the present, ever-deepening abyss.

In stressing the process of the production of this linguistic "difference" in the late nineteenth century, I do not wish to imply a prior, Arcadian harmony. Thus, I am aware that the history of the two great communities of modern India shows evidence of contention and conflict long before the greater traumas of our time. But, and this much is incontestable, language itself was not a site of communal differentiation. Thus, we have the spectacle of Dr. Ballantyne in Banaras in 1847, trying to rouse his students to a *communal* awareness of language, to take pride in "the culture of … the only language which your mothers and sisters understand."[2] His students did not understand what he was on about: "If the purity of Hindi is to consist in its exclusion of Mussalman words, we shall require to study Persian and Arabic in order to ascertain which of the words we are in the habit of issuing every day is Arabic or Persian, and which is Hindi."[3] The pedants of Fort William, rendering traditional

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[2]As quoted inChristopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 90.

[3]*Ibid.*

materials into printable prose, did play around with stylistic variations—deleting foreign expressions, using a preponderantly Sanskritic vocabulary, etc.—but there is no evidence to suggest that these literary sports had anything like a "communal" edge or agenda. The language of *Sang^{h}āsan Battīsī* cheerfully reflects the glorious confusion of the common tongue of north India, drawing freely not only from the classical founts of Sanskrit and Arabic and Persian, but also from the hybrid descendants of a whole range of Prakrits and other linguistic influences.

There is a great danger of reading this history retrospectively. Then, it seems entirely plausible to take the *Daryā-e Laṭāfat*, an eccentric late-eighteenth-century attempt to "purify" the language of the courtly élite of Delhi—to free it of demotic corruption from the localities adjoining the Red Fort—as a foreshadowing of the Hindu-Muslim tensions of our own time—as a sort of distant cause not only of communalism but even of Partition.[4] Whereas such a move would be clearly absurd, it is not all that different from a retrospective reading of, say, Malviya's *Court Character* agitation of the late 1890s. Of course Malviya's agitation is part of a process—one link in the chain whereby a certain disadvantaged proto-élite maneuvers itself into power; but despite the bloody consequences of this, it is important to try and understand the process of the production of difference *prospectively* rather than retrospectively. Such a strategy would not only be academically more sound, or fair to the protagonists who lived this history without the advantage of hindsight; it might also hold some clues for the management of difference—something more than elegiac gloom or ritual denunciation in the face of this incomprehensible otherness, this will to tragedy.

Two organizations are central to the making of modern Hindi: the Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Banaras, and the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan situated at Allahabad. Of these the former, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, was founded in 1893, and, as its name indicates, its activities were focused initially on the propagation of the Nagari script, although its later activities expanded to include scholarly and bibliographic activities of a pioneering kind. The second body, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, was more overtly political from the start and it is the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan which has to a large extent defined the cultural agenda of Hindi—or cer-

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[4]See David Lelyveld, "*Zubān-e Urdū-e Mu'allā* and the Idol of Linguistic Origins," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 9 (1994).

tainly of the kind of Hindiwallah who *has* a cultural and political agenda.

The first convention of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was held in 1910 in Banaras, under the chairmanship of Madan Mohan Malviya. The start of this first annual conference was marked by a controversy that needs to be recalled in a little detail, because retrospection has rendered it deliciously symbolic. As it turned out, the conference was scheduled during Navratri and, as Malviya declared:

> नवरात्र दुर्गादेवी के पूजन का समय है, नवरात्र में सरस्वती शयन करती हैं। [५]
> Navratri is a time during which the goddess Durga is worshipped; during Navratri, Saraswati sleeps.

The orthodox Brahmins were incensed that ostensibly cultural work—which belonged in Saraswati's domain—should be initiated during the particular festival dedicated to Durga, the goddess of power. Forced on the defensive, Malviya drew attention to the cultural unity which was manifest in the spectacle of nation-wide Durga worship:

> जिस तरह पहले, उसी तरह आज भी हिन्दुस्थान में हिमालय के ऊँचे शिखर से लंका के छोर तक सहस्रों करोड़ों हमारे भाई इस नवरात्र में दुर्गा जी की स्तुति करते हैं। (p. 3)
> Even today in Hindusthan, all the way from the high peaks of the Himalaya down to the shores of Lanka, thousands of crores of our brothers are singing the praises of Durgaji during this Navratri.

And now comes the rhetorical master move:

> एक ही विद्या है, एक ही भाव है, केवल भाषा इसे पृथक् करती है। (*Ibid.*)
> It is but one culture, it is but one emotion—only language keeps them apart.

Ergo, to work for the linguistic unity that eludes the spiritual unity manifest in Durga-worship is to simultaneously appease both Durga and

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[5]Lakshmi Shankar Vyas, ed., *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan,* vol. I (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1987), p. 2. Henceforward, all references to this work appear in the text.

Saraswati!

It is not recorded whether the orthodox were in fact mollified, but setting the controversy in the context of Malviya's seminal compilation of Nagari/Hindi materials, over a decade back—the famous *Memorandum regarding Court Character …* —one can notice an interesting shift. Thus, the *Memorandum* was structured around two main concerns: the first was education, and the benefits in respect of social reform that may be expected from its extension; the other was the language of the administration, and thus addressed the matter of power. In the intervening decade, it appears, the second part of the agenda has subsumed and consumed the first. Thus, Malviya reminded his listeners that Navratri culminated in Vijayadashami.

> यह विजयादशमी वही विजयादशमी है जिसमें भगवान् रामचन्द्र जी ने राक्षसों का नाश करके देश में फिर से सुख-शान्ति की मन्दाकिनी बहायी थी। (*Ibid.*)
> This Vijayadashami is the very same Vijayadashami on which the Lord Ramachandraji finally destroyed the demons and made the river of peace and contentment flow once again in this land.

The deep conservatism that had engulfed Hindi's fledgling radical agenda (and perhaps more accurately, its possibilities) became painfully evident in the next few sentences:

> पुराने समय में भगवान् रामचन्द्र जी ने जो किया, अब वह देशी राज्यों में होता है। वही मारू बाजा बजता है, वही आर्यों के राजा महाराजाओं के वजिय का डंका बजता है। अब विजय नहीं है, उसका शब्द है, उसे तो सुन लीजिये। (*Ibid.*)
> What the Lord Ramachandraji did in the ancient days is no different from what happens today in the native-ruled states. The same trumpets of war are sounded today, the drums are the same as those that announced the victories of Aryan kings and emperors. Now there is no victory, there is only the word thereof—listen to that, at least.

To those who can read the rhetoric of the traditional symbols, it is significant indeed that the founding moment of the ideological wing of the Hindi movement is located in a time when the Goddess of Learning is deep in her annual slumber, but the militant Durga, Goddess of Energy and War, is being celebrated!

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Hindsight makes it look like conspiracy, but it is far more likely that colonial educational policy in the nineteenth century was simply inconsistent and confused—a not unknown characteristic of policy before and since. Thus, by mid-century, it had produced two distinct educational streams—one of these used the Nagari script, associated with Sanskrit and, with minor variations, various other languages and "dialects" of North India; whereas the other used the Persian script, not quite the Arabic of the Qur'ān, but near enough for the fact to become potentially combustible. Despite this, it was intended that the two streams would remain committed to the common language, though anxiety about the activities of pedants pulling away the center towards the "purer" margins can be heard from fairly early on.[6] But it cannot also be entirely surprising that in time there emerged some difference in the cultural content of the two streams. If nothing else, the mere fact that there were two streams at all would have created pressures for internal and reciprocal self-justification in both streams, pressures which were manifested also at the level of language—the Nagari stream pulling towards Sanskrit, the Persian stream towards Arabic and Persian.

Without going into the question of whether one or the other script was really beloved of the gods (or God), or scientific, or whatever—questions of obsessive interest to the combatants—the fact is that, in the couple of decades after 1857, the Nagari stream was in full flow. There were, however, significant differences between the kinds of people who belonged to the two streams. Thus, the Persian stream consisted predominantly of urban Muslims, professionals, Kayasthas, etc. The Nagari stream, on the other hand, tended to be relatively more rural, as well as drawing upon a higher proportion of the Hindu upper castes, mainly Brahmins and Banias, but also some Thakurs. However, the most significant difference was that this stream found itself closed off from the newly opening world of colonial administration after 1857. Not for the first time in history, an aspiring proto-élite discovered that the world had already been divided up.

There were successive attempts to persuade the government to open it up just a little, but the newly created Nagari challenge merely caused the entrenched élite—exercising dominance through their traditional

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[6] See King, *op. cit., passim.*

mastery of the Persian script—to gang up even more forcefully. In testimony before the government, in memorials and before commissions, there was a fair amount of name-calling, along predictable lines: thus, while the Nagari lot were accused of being upstarts, "shopkeepers," and yokels, the others were identified as the feckless gentry, their language the language of playboys and prostitutes, of indolence and immorality. In the words of one vociferous Nagari supporter, the existing situation was one in which

> कमाते तो धोतीवाले हैं, पर खाते टोपीवाले हैं।[७]
> All the work is done by the dhoti-wallahs, while the fruits thereof are enjoyed by the topi-wallahs.

The dangerous situation created by the inconsistency in official policy—creating a class of underprivileged Nagari intelligentsia—was made even worse by the 1879 order which, in the teeth of pro-Nagari agitation, further extended the already resented empire of Persian and Urdu by making a knowledge thereof an essential requirement in all public appointments with a monthly emolument of more than Rs. 10.

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The subsequent period till 1896 is, at least in respect of putting pressure on the government, deceptively quiet. It is almost as if the nascent élite has been forced on the defensive, forced to regroup. Because we know that the Nagari lot—the *dʰōtīvālē*—were not, and indeed *could not be,* acquiescent.

Malviya's 1897 *Memorial* is, on any reckoning, a masterly document. It is a thorough, professional compilation of materials and arguments in favor of Nagari. The crucial argument which he constructs, with much support from official data, concerns education, particularly primary education. He goes on to dwell on the social benefits of mass primary education, benefits that, one might add, are still awaited today. However (the critical part of the argument runs) the anticipated educational benefits will not materialize if the recipients of that education are going to be closed off from any prospect of employment. Malviya rarely lapses into the acrimony that had characterized earlier controversy—he refers *once* to

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[7]Chandrabali Pandey, *Shasan men Nagari* (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1948).

the fact of Hindus being forced by the lure of employment into learning the Persian script as "involuntary conversion." But, in the main, the voice is calm and authoritative, and speaks not of self-interest but of democratic legitimacy. (Of course, all one needs to do is to recall actual literacy levels, or the genuflecting to princelings in the 1910 address—see above—to realize that the democratic claim was mostly rhetoric.)

The fortuitous appointment of a sympathetic Lt. Governor—McDonnell—provided the Nagari camp in 1900 with a victory that was as surprising then as it appears inevitable now. McDonnell's 1900 order allowed the permissive but not exclusive use of the *Nagari script* in the courts of the Province—but this was, by an astounding slip that appears incredible even now, modified by the Governor General in Council: whereas the resolution proposed by the Lt. Governor had used the terms "Nagari and Persian character," the Government of India amended this—without acknowledgment or justification—to read as "Hindi and Urdu languages."

Even so, the victory was largely a symbolic one; the entrenched administrative caste was still in place and the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, which tried to arrange for Nagari scribes who would offer free services to plaintiffs, soon discovered that material support is harder to come by than rhetoric.[8] The "Urdu" side reacted with shock and a feeling of betrayal—having been abandoned by a colonial administration to which they had been steadfastly loyal—in favor of a bunch of no-account upstarts. But after 1900 the struggle was truly joined.

The Nagari agitation of the late nineteenth century shows clearly the advent of modern democratic political methods. Almost perforce, excluded from the corridors of government, the protagonists of Nagari resort to pressure politics, mobilizing support across the province, bombarding the government with memorials and resolutions, in a remarkably coordinated effort. Thus, the NWP&O Provincial Committee of the Hunter Commission of 1884 was bombarded by seventy-six pro-Hindi memorials, all identical, emanating from several different parts of the province, and containing in all 58,289 signatures.[9]

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[8] King, *op.cit.,* p. 162.

[9] *Report of the NWP&O Provincial Committee with evidence taken before the Commission and Memorials addressed to the Education Commission Calcutta, 1884.* In the India Office Library, London.

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The story so far is simple enough: a new proto-elite, trained in the Nagari script, seeks a share of power through official recognition of the script. The already entrenched elite seeks, arrogantly and strenuously, to protect its privileges. Finally, under the pressure of numbers as well as arguments, the Government is forced to relent, and straighten out the inconsistency between the output of its education system and the intake of its administration. What follows, however, is a little less straightforward—and is, in ways expectable and unexpected, the seed-time of our present and future woes. The *Punjab Observer* of 4 July 1900 warned direly: "We cannot characterize it as anything short of a grave political blunder, and history written a hundred years hence will have to mourn the mistake made in 1900." The "mistake" that the *Punjab Observer* had in mind was "harm to imperial interests," but the generations that are the inheritors of the divided legacy of the sub-continent are well within their rights to "mourn" something else.

As a first step towards unraveling that confusion, let us consider some aspects of the true vernacular of north India. This is truly a middle language, born out of the necessities of intercourse between different peoples, communities and cultures, who are forced to rub together in the daily business of living their lives, over centuries. This is a genuinely secular creation, not only in the sense of its being poly-communal as well as multi-lingual in its sources, but also in the sense that it is *mundane* in its origins and purposes. This is also in some sense, for reasons relating to the necessary heterogeneity of the city, an urban tongue—a fact which might give it a somewhat "Muslim" color, since a relatively higher proportion of Muslims are urban rather than country dwellers. But it is as well to remember that Nagari—the script but, in some accounts, a language also—is also, *etymologically,* "of the town." Thus, the linguistic analog of the script which drives so much of the early and divisive agitation is in fact that same, one, common language. This language was unacceptable to the early opponents of Khari Boli precisely because it was perceived to be, essentially, marked by the Muslim connection—or, to use a slightly later rhetoric, that it was, in fact, Urdu. It was, to my mind, the politics generated by the Nagari demand that helped to create the space within which this Khari Boli could be suitably "decontaminated," purified,

Hinduized—and so become modern "Hindi."[10] It is over this body that the two sides, soon to mutate into the two warring communities, fight.

And are, perhaps, *condemned* to fight by the exigencies of the socio-economic situation which forces impoverished societies, then and now, to practice and devise strategies for practicing, innovative and brutal forms of triage. It seems to me, therefore that one cannot deal adequately with the phenomenon of the production of difference without being forced to turn to the process of production—material production—itself. It is important to be able to see both in the manifestations and assertions as well as in the ascriptions of difference, the second-order consequences of distortions and injustices deriving from the process of material production. If an inadequate social product is to be shared out, someone must lose. These "losers," sometimes resigned but resentful, sometimes combative and resistant, enter the historical process in the shape of hungry, contentious groups and individuals.

The democratic legitimacy of both sides derives from their claim to the common language. The Nagari élite has an advantage here, in that it has genuinely plebeian origins. The "Persian" élite—mainly but not exclusively Muslim—takes some time overcoming its feudal/aristocratic hang-ups. Then, it asserts its claim to the secular inheritance embodied in the language—and mirrored indeed in the communally mixed character of the class which claims to defend it against the disruptive and exclusivist designs of the protagonists of Nagari and "Hindi." For the Nagari side, however, the promise of communal harmony is poisoned by the reality of privilege—or, to put it more precisely, they have a different perception of the manifest danger to communal peace. (The burden of embarrassment that Indian secularism derives from this association with élite privilege, its historical imbrication with the world of the great Avadh *zamīndārs* is, perhaps, not germane to the present story. Of course, that *zamīndārī* world did not consist only of the clichéd exploiters of popular mythology—this was also the world of composite culture, of tahzeeb [*tehżīb*] and *takalluf*, of refinement and of significant cultural achievements. Indeed, in a crucial sense, this world not only comprised but was also, in the last analysis, made by the Avadh peasantry. Thus one would be well within

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[10]This becomes clearly evident in the Braj/Khari Boli controversy that is associated with the name of Ayodhya Prasad Khattri. See my "Ayodhya Prasad Khattri's Khari Boli and Braj," in A. Bhalla and P. Bumke, eds. *Images of Rural India* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1992).

one's rights in this context to talk not only of élite secularism but also, deriving from the shared world, the existential *modus vivendi* of those self-same peasants, of mass secularism. But the critical question is: Can that popular secularism be salvaged today, rescued from the fatal embrace of the *zamīndārī* feudal order and its successor nostalgias? Rahi Masoom Raza's *Aadha Gaaon* [*Ādʰā Gā'ōṅ*], the classic exploration of the difficult terrain where the nostalgic memory of social harmony is inextricably bound up with a historical awareness of inequality, and injustice, and exploitation. The task is more than merely academic—it is politically urgent. Because one can hardly fail to notice the wholly undeserved populist energy that the politics of Hindu communalism derives from this history of attacking a world of élite privilege, at least in U.P.)

Each side claims, as indeed it must, that *the other is different,* and therefore distant from the language of the common people. But the only practical recourse available to these fractious sharers of the common language is in fact to make *themselves* different—and to forget that they have done so, and that they must continue to do so. Thus, the Nagari élite seeks to identify the language of the "Persian" élite—variously "Urdu" or "Hindustani"—with the Arabo-Persianizing lunatic fringe. The Urdu side, in turn, seeks to identify the language of the Nagari élite with the Hindi of the Sanskritizing lunatic fringe.

However, each side, in order to strengthen and make good on its claim of democratic legitimacy, is also forced not only to gesture towards the possible popular constituency of the future (which, if truly mobilized, might force a kind of politics which neither side, neither the Avadh élite identified by Francis Robinson, nor the newly arisen *savarna* Hindu élite, is prepared to countenance), but also to generate and crystallize an *immediately available* constituency.

Each side is, thus, forced to move away from the shared middle ground of the common language, and cobble together a symbology and an imaginary that can sustain the necessary cultural exclusivism: the Hindu myths about the Muslims and the Muslim myths about the Hindus. *Each side, in seeking to prove that the other is different, is forced to evacuate the middle ground and take recourse to diverse strategies in order to differentiate itself.* As a result of this process there is born a purified, Sanskritized version of this middle tongue, called "Hindi." And similarly, there is born—or born again—an Arabo-Persianized version of the same middle tongue, called "Urdu."

I suspect, however, that this point/counter-point mode of narrating these developments tends to underplay, if not altogether obscure, the *in-*

ternal dynamic of these sociocultural processes. Thus, the Sanskritization of Hindi and the Persianization of Urdu—producing, respectively, "Hindi" and "Urdu" from and upon a shared linguistic base—also enjoy a certain autonomy. Thus the moves to de-Persianize Urdu and bring it closer to the vernacular happen at around the same time as the move to purify Hindi and bring it closer to Sanskrit is gaining ground—approximately the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In time, however, the enforced intimacy of modern democratic politics forces the two processes to move more closely in tandem—ironically, in both cases, by turning away, towards their lunatic, culturally exclusivist peripheries.

I am not equipped for it, and this is perhaps not the place to narrate the evolution of these dialectically fated internal dynamics. However, in respect of Hindi, which I know better, it may be said that the differentiation is sought to be established around three axes: firstly, the script. This difference, once it is forced into the public domain, is irreducible, and renders the problem, finally, non-negotiable. Secondly, affiliation: this might sound like linguistics, but the attempt to establish family trees, with Sanskrit as the mother, and Hindi as the eldest daughter, etc., not only creates a pedigree for Hindi, and sets it in a superior relationship (this is an Indian family, and age has precedence!) to the other languages of north India, to Bangla, and Gujarati and Marathi. However, another effect that is surely not inadvertent is that it excludes Urdu, which is virtually indistinguishable from Hindi in one of its moods, from the genealogy altogether. That which is, at most, a Siamese sibling, is excluded from kinship altogether. This, to my mind, is the politics of the family trees that Hindiwallahs draw up constantly—kinship rules out the claims of other kinds of contiguity. (There is another problem with these family trees: although Sanskrit is the mother, there isn't a father in sight—which curious omission suggests to me that the biology of these genealogists is just as unreliable as their history.) The linguistic and grammatical base, far from being derived from Sanskrit by some Hindu version of immaculate conception is, in fact, a product of the cultural promiscuity that has been the historical experience of the fertile plains of Hindustan.

There are, not surprisingly, problems with their preferred ancestry: the relationship with Urdu is manifest, and that with Sanskrit is largely mythical. Given the grammatical distance between Hindi and Sanskrit, the pernicious fantasists are forced thus—the third axis—to resort to large-scale lexical borrowing, bending the relaxed, loose-limbed grammar of the achieved middle tongue in order to create a consonantal clutter which might to a largely semi-literate constituency, sound Sanskritoid. It

would be fair to note, however, that in the hands of sensitive and skilled users—Hazari Prasad Dwivedi is the name that comes first to mind—this synthetic language is capable of considerable power, drawing upon the technical and philosophical resources of Sanskrit. But in the hands of lesser mortals, the Sanskritic syncopated consonants of "Hindi" produce merely a ritual sound, whose purpose is not communication so much as it is to reassure the flock. I imagine that the strangulated gutturals of Arabicized "Urdu" fulfill a similar function.

The point to note in all this is that each side is forced to deny what both sides know—*and need to know*—is the truth: that the common people have, over the centuries, evolved a rich and various and shared language. If there weren't *one* language at the heart of the conflict, there would be no problem, no need for strenuous differentiation, in the first place. What is more, unless there is to be more than a single "common people," the claim of democratic legitimacy of both the differentiating, exclusivist factions requires that, in the teeth of mere logic, even their own, they must lay claim to it. But each side ends up justifying and deserving the accusations of the other. Or, to complete the somewhat confusing picture, with its symmetrical, mirror-like quality, the two sides not only need to know the truth about a common, trans-community language, but are also required, by political imperatives, to seek to deny and forget what they know to be true. Indeed, in so far as the body of the common language is always available to its users, partisans on both sides are condemned to violate that body and so falsify what they know to be true, and need to know to be true, simultaneously.

By the time we arrive at the 1930s, the process of differentiation is already beginning to yield its bitter, familiar harvest. Old soldiers as well as the newest long-distance media-packaged electronic warfare experts know, the dirtiest fighting is the one that happens at close quarters: hand-to-hand combat is all about blood. (And "blood" perhaps, to family-realists, as distinct from family-sentimentalists, is all about hand-to-hand combat!) In any case, the violence that the Hindi-Urdu conflict was skillfully manipulated to generate was very much violence within the family—and it is, as we know, a trauma that is infinitely renewable. However, I have no intention of going once again over this familiar territory. Instead, I would like to indicate, in conclusion, some of the less obvious effects of the process of differentiation narrated above.

Two kinds of consequences come to mind. One effect of the process of contention and difference whereby modern Hindi comes about is that it cannot afford to know the truth about itself and its origins. Thus, a

kind of amnesia and dishonesty is a *sine qua non.* It is instructive, for instance, that despite a hundred years of polemic and propaganda and projects galore, there isn't a single dictionary in existence in which Hindi can bring to mind the sources of its own word-stock. In seeking to narrate how it comes about, Hindi propagandists resort to complicated genealogies—simply because they cannot afford to acknowledge that "Hindi" has come about by ruthlessly Sanskritizing the linguistic base of the common tongue which, from the perspective of an achieved "Hindi," is anathematized as "Urdu." This fear of knowledge also manifests itself in the way in which authority is vested in some "experts"—in this case, the *pandits*. Such a delegation/arrogation of authority over the people's own gloriously hybrid language by a class/caste of persons, mainly U.P. Brahmins from around Allahabad and Banaras, with a sharply ideological agenda works—mercifully with limited success—to create an artificial and stilted tongue. It is important to understand the nature of this authority. It derives not from scholarly or literary or aesthetic considerations but from a politicized form of traditional religious orthodoxy.

The other kind of effect is much more difficult to describe. It derives, I suspect, from the precise nature of the difference that was produced. At one level, that of the script, this "difference" is non-negotiable, non-compoundable. But at another equally significant level, the boundary is porous, infinitely and endlessly negotiable, not only in the public space but in the privacy of one's mind, a wound that can always be kept fresh, a trauma waiting to be inflamed—an offense that can be renewed without hope of interdiction. Ironically, of course, in such cases the perpetrators of the offense are also, in an unmistakable sense, its victims. Their relationship to their own language must, ineluctably, be marked by a crippling anxiety, because the capacity to cause offense is directly predicated on their own vulnerability.