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What Did They Mean by 'Public'?

Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism

Francesca Orsini

During the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, the Hindi literati tried to lay down general principles and norms for Sanskritised Hindi which alone was to be Indian Hindi. For others, writing off old rules and beliefs and treading new paths was possible and desirable. The normative view prevailed and Hindi, which had the potential of becoming a unifying language, instead became an exclusivist language.

I
Introduction

IN Phaniswarnath Renu's novel *Maila Amcal*,[1] set in north-eastern Bihar in the 1940s, Congressman Baldev tries to impress upon his fellow villagers that he is a dedicated activist by quoting a letter addressed to him by a local Congress leader. Although the letter is in Hindi, nobody can understand it, let alone read it, for it is written in the Sanskritised Hindi of public discourse. The words that villagers would not possibly understand are given in bold.

> **सेवा में** बालदेवसिंहजी। **महाशय**! आपको **विदित** हो कि कस्तुरबा **स्मारक निधि** की एक अस्थायी कमेटी गठन करने के लिए कांग्रेसजनों की एक **विशेष बैठक** ता. 8-12-45 को पुर्णिया धर्मशाला में होगी। इस बैठक मे बिहार के **भूतपूर्व** प्रीमियर भी **उपस्थित** रहेंगे। इस **महत्वपूर्ण बैठक** में आपकी **उपस्थिति आवश्यक** है। आपका, विश्वनाथ चौधरी।
>
> **To** Mr Baldev Singh. **Sir**! This is to **inform** you that a **special meeting** of Congress members will take place on 8.12.45 in the Dharmashala in Purnea to **constitute** a committee for the Kasturba **Memorial Fund**. The **former premier** of Bihar will also be **present** at the meeting. At this **important meeting** your **presence** is **indispensable**. Yours. Vishvanath Chaudhari.

The gloss ('arath') for the audience, interestingly, catches only the meta-message: that Baldev is respected by Congress leaders.

> चौधरीजी भी बालदेवजी से राय लिये बिना कुछ नहीं करते हैं। यह अपने गाँव का भाग [भाग्य] है कि बालदेवजी जैसा आदमी यहाँ आकर रहते हैं।
>
> Even Chaudhariji does not do anything without asking for Baldevji's opinion. It is the good fortune of the village that a jem like Baldevji has come to live here (p 31).

The register of the letter is enough to convey to the villagers that it speaks of power and officialdom. This letter encapsulates in a way the predicament of the public in the Hindi sphere: Hindi, not English is the language of the people and of popular politicisation. Yet the villagers mobilising and seeking links with the city cannot understand it because its public register is not modelled on their speech: it does not spring from the desire to communicate and to vernacularise knowledge, politics, etc, but from a concern over the status and purity of the language. This is reflected in the impersonal syntax and the use of words almost exclusively of Sanskrit origin. But is it just a question of wrong register, or doesn't the choice of this public language even for a private letter exchanged between two political workers force us to ask questions about the understanding of the public in colonial north India that remained relevant to post-colonial India, as well? Do the processes and tensions at work in the language mirror in some way larger social and cultural processes within Indian society?

What I am concerned with here are the ways in which ideas about language and literature reflected attitudes to the 'public' among Hindi writers and activists in pre-independent India, and the institutional space and impact these ideas had. In other words, not only why a certain form of Hindi came to be identified as the future national language but also how it became hegemonic. Also, were there other varieties, and did they mirror different views of the nation and the political community?

The first difficulty is with the word public. No word existed in Hindi to cover the semantic field of the term public. Yet the fact that several words were called upon to express this notion, each with its own history and shades of meaning, seems to me evidence enough that Indian writers were struggling to find equivalents for this crucial word in the political vocabulary of modernity. They distinguished 'sarkari', i e, official, governmental (as in public office, public property, etc) from public as pertaining to the community, which different words like 'jati' 'janta', 'lok', 'sarvasadharan' were called to express. This was the hub of the matter, and the efforts at translation show that this was perceived as a need and lack ('India needs a public') and reveal different views of political community. My understanding of what the word 'did' derives chiefly from Habermas, who defined the public sphere as

> a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body...[2]

Although inspired by a similar ideal, Hindi understandings differed substantially from Habermas's model. In a nutshell, I shall argue that we can find two basic understandings of, and attitudes to, the public in late 19th and early 20th century Hindi: (a) a normative attitude that interprets public in terms of jati or community. By normative I mean an understanding of the public and of public institutions as spaces where one set of values is circulated that should constitute the norm for all; (b) a critical attitude that views and uses the public as a space where norms and consensus are questioned in the name of reason or of particular interests and subjects. These two attitudes, which were by no means exclusive of one another, will become clear in the following discussion of ideas about language and literature. As I shall argue, they also translated into different ways of using of public institutions like the press and education and into different attitudes to political participation and the nationalist movement.

II
The 'Public' and Public Language

Public Language, Nij Bhasha, Rashtrabhasha

Language and literature were at the centre of intense reflections about the progress of the country from the 19th century onwards. "The progress of one's language (nij bhasha), is the root of all progress" wrote Harishchandra in 1877, and this

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rhetoric was there in all Indian languages, to my knowledge. All underwent a similar process of standardisation and adaptation in order to perform all the uses a modern language was now called upon to perform. The peculiarity of Hindi was that this process happened as a self-definition against Urdu, the dominant public 'vernacular' in north India at the time. Also, from very early on, that is from the end of the 19th century, Hindi was presented as India's potential national language. Without treading on ground already much covered by others, I would like just to briefly draw attention to a significant ambiguity in such rhetoric in Hindi.

> The progress of dharma and of the country rests on the propagation of the mother tongue and on the growth and enrichment of the national literature. To strive and work for the progress of Hindi is therefore presently the first and foremost duty of every patriot ('deshhitaisi')
>
> A man's mother tongue is as important as his mother and motherland... One who does not respect his language, who does not love it and enrich its literature, can never improve the state of his country. His dream of 'svarajya', his vow to improve the country and his praise of patriotism are quite shallow.[3]

The ambiguity is that the rhetoric of Khari Boli Hindi as 'mother tongue' and 'people's language' supported the development of something quite different, a written standard variety. Hindi intellectuals and literary associations like the Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Benares (established in 1893) argued with the colonial authorities that Hindi, the 'people's language' ('janta ki bhasha'), was the only one fit for mass education. At the same time, they put pressure on the educated Hindu population of the province to switch allegiance from Urdu or English to Hindi. Using Hindi in a variety of public contexts was thus conceptualised as using 'matrubhasha' and doing 'desh-seva' or service to the country. This notion of 'mother tongue' delegitimised the position both of Urdu and English and of heterogeneous spoken varieties. For whereas 19th century writers like Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85) had used the variety of colloquial spoken language in a way that retained the particularity of language use, a generation later Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi (1864-1938) did, and exhorted other writers to do, exactly the opposite. By purging written, print Hindi of colloquialisms and regional usages, by privileging abstract over concrete words, by making Sanskrit loanwords the rule and fixing syntax along regular subject-object-verb lines, Dvivedi 'standardised' Hindi into a written, sober language. This was the language used in the journal he edited, *Sarasvati* (1900-20), employed by literary associations and spread through textbooks. Only in such form was Hindi deemed fit for public matters, for literature and to represent the jati, in a word fit to serve the many purposes of a modern nation.

Such a shift in the language used by journals and literary associations mirrors an analogous process in the attitude to public matters. Only that which could appear under the guise of a 'national' ('jatiy') question was fit to be discussed. What was particular, heterogeneous or could not appear under those terms was not part of the public. This of course does not mean that it disappeared, only that it did not become part of the public self-definition of 'Indian'. Such a language mirrored – and brought into being every time it was used – an (ideal) community of serious, equal, educated and public-minded Indian citizens without any other visible marker apart from education and familiarity with the common cultural tradition. Difference, conflict, caste, particular practices or interests were all pushed outside written language. The debates and campaigns over the 'national language' must be understood in the light of this cultural-political idea.

A second ambiguity had to do with the fact that the scholarly consensus that had crystallised around Hindi rashtrabhasha at the turn of the century was invoked by Hindi activists in lieu of political or cultural consensus. With a normative stance, they used the ostensibly neutral pragmatic and scientific arguments in favour of Hindi and of the Devanagari script to discursively delegitimise other claims and to deny the reality of Hindi's subordinate status in its own region – subordinate to English and, in the minds of the Indo-Muslim elite, to Urdu as well.

'Sahitya-Seva' and 'Rashtriyata'

Like language, literature too had to be thought through again in the light of the new categories of 'people', community and nation. The debates on the meaning of literature in Hindi journals show writers, scholars and critics grappling with the category of lok and the widespread implications it had for how they interpreted their role as writers and the function of criticism. As one critic put it so:

> [Earlier] literature was not created for the common people. Poets and playwrights were honoured only at the courts of a handful of literary-minded rajas and wealthy men, therefore neither did poets worry about the influence of their works on the common people nor did critics feel the need to evaluate the works from the social point of view.[4]

The tension between normative and critical attitudes was strong here: everything from style, taste, content, tradition, criticism and popularity was open to public discussion. And once accepted norms were questioned in the light of what were perceived as the 'needs of the time' and the 'welfare of the people' ('lokhit'), new guidelines and concepts could emerge only after public contestation. This, in turn, raised the question of authority, for if everyone could question them, who was going to set the new norms?

On the one hand, the recurrent metaphor of the 'bhandar' of Hindi that needed to be filled with suitable works reveals a yearning for a normative definition and a consensus about what Hindi literature 'needed' and what readers should read. It also reveals an uneasiness towards the eclectic literary scene and the market of popular publishing and the need to set new rules.

> Earlier by literature one meant a particular code ('sastra') related to the art of 'kavya' containing 'alamkara', 'rasa', 'dhvani', etc, which discriminated between its qualities and errors, as in the *Sahityadarpana*. Moreover, earlier literature used to rule over language, and poetry over grammar, and the literary scholar was the highest authority in deciding if a word was correct. But now since Bolshevism, like the sweep of time, has turned literature into a unified democracy, a rebellion ('gadar') has erupted in the realm of language! Anything which anyone may write in any style on any subject is called 'literature'. Every writer is completely free to write the way he wants. There is no obligation ('pabandi') to follow any rule ('qayda-qanun'), in fact there is no rule to follow![5]

The 'law and order' metaphor expresses well the discomfort and exasperation of the traditional literati with the new publicity of literature which upset the hierarchy of authority and genres.

On the other hand, the new 'Chayavad' poets vindicated the poet's individual right to break existing norms and explore new directions. In highly metaphorical language, Sumitranandan Pant (1900-77), for example, expressed his dissatisfaction with the poetic conventions of Braj Bhasha and the new qualities of Khari Boli poetry. Braj Bhasha poets had not explored the (national) space beyond Braj and the emotional space beyond that of devotion to god or of the various moods of the heroine: "those excellent poets could not

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go beyond that three-foot long world from her tip to toe". Khari Boli poetry may lack the precious decorations of the 'temples' of Braj Bhasha but it had 'spacious avenues' and a 'market for novelties' from other parts of the country and abroad ('desh-videsh').[6]

The view of the foremost critic and scholar of the period, Ramchandra Shukla (1884-1941), professor at Benares Hindu University and the author of a seminal history of Hindi literature, exemplifies the normative synthesis of the debate. Shukla subordinated the individual genius of the poet to the welfare of the people and held that litterateurs' aim was to change and improve their tastes ('lokruci'). Only after a poet had read studiously, cultivated a wide intelligence, reflected on contemporary society and its problems and listened to the advice of older, more experienced scholars, could he enter the field of literature, and even then with no freedom to write whatever he wanted. His aim was to capture the 'yugdharma', the 'dharma of the age', 'the ideal distillation of people's taste'.[7]

We see here a peculiar tension between the crystallising of a notion of the writer as the vanguard of society, which bestowed upon him/her great authority, and a subtle form of control, as if only a restrained, norm-abiding and selfless individual had the moral right to be called a writer. This, indirectly, bestowed even greater authority on the critic, who became the appointed judge not only of taste but of a writer's behaviour and would discriminate between those who wrote good and useful literature and those who did not.

III
Print Media

Where and how did these discourses on language and literature circulate, and how much of an impact did they have on north Indian society? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to turn to the social space and dynamics of the various 'institutions' – journals, associations and education – where these discourses circulated. In this way, I hope, their role in enhancing one or other understanding of the 'public' – normative or critical – will become clear.

Journals and newspapers: As Vasudha Dalmia has eloquently shown in her book on Harishchandra,[8] Hindi editors of his time had a very clear idea of the public function and potential of journals, plays, associations as critical instruments of public opinion. Harishchandra's articles, speeches and skits both addressed the community and claimed to represent its views to the colonial government. If we look at developments in Hindi journalism in the early 20th century, we can usefully distinguish four types of press:

(a) Normative Reformism: Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi's *Sarasvati*, the most influential miscellaneous monthly of the first two decades and a model for subsequent literary journals, represents the trend that could be called 'normative reformism'.[9] Dvivedi set the standard in many ways: through his example and relentless work correcting other people's contribution, he established a standard form of Khari Boli prose. Rejecting the language, content and aesthetics of Braj Bhasha poetry, he lay down rules for a new poetry in Khari Boli that would express suitable and inspiring feelings.

He urged poets to write on nature, on historical figures and events and on topical and patriotic matters: for example, a team of 'Dvivedi poets' (including Maithilisharan Gupta and Nathuram Shankar Sharma 'Shankar') was commissioned to illustrate with poems reproductions of Ravi Varma's 'historical' paintings. The most famous poet of the group, Maithilisharan Gupta, wrote successful mythological reworkings and a long poem modelled on Hali's *Musaddas* on the 'past, present and future' of the Hindu 'jati' ('we') which achieved unparalleled success. Only works and authors that corresponded to Dvivedi's tastes and standards could appear in *Sarasvati*. He became an extremely authoritative editor-critic. He was also an extensive and regular reviewer of Hindi publications, and although he was supportive of all works and initiatives that filled the 'Hindi bhandar' his stinging sarcasm directed at works that did not meet his rules were famous. On poetry describing the different kinds of beauty ('nayika-bhed'), he wrote that money could be better spent otherwise, and about popular fiction he urged writers and publishers to change subjects:

> यदि इन ग्रंथों के बनाने, छपाने में जो व्यय किया गया, वह जीवनचरित्र, इतिहास अथवा किसी वैज्ञानिक ग्रंथ के लिए व्यय किया जाता तो भाषा का भी उपकार होता और धन का भी सद्व्यय होता।
> If the money spent on making and printing these works were used for books of biography, history or science it would be a benefit for the language and a better use of the money.
> (M P Dvivedi, 'Nayika-Bhed', *Sarasvati*, June 1901.)

> मैं इतना और लिखना चाहता हूँ कि आजकल ऐयारी, तिलिस्मी, जासूसी और प्रेम कहानी के नाटक उपन्यासों से जो हिन्दी का भंडार भरा जा रहा है, यह भी साहित्य के लिए हितावह नहीं है। इसकी जगह यदि हिंदी के प्रेमी चरित्र शोधक, व्यापार, शिल्प विज्ञान, ग्लायन, यूरोप और भारत के इतिहास, यूरोपवालों की उन्नति के स्वरूप और साधन आदि विषय में अपनी लेखनी उठाने का साहस करें तो अवश्य हिंदी का उपकार और पाठकों के चरित्र का निर्माण हो सकता है।
> I only want to add that the stream of magical, adventure, thriller and romantic plays and novels that is filling the bhandar of Hindi is not beneficial to literature either. If instead Hindi lovers had the courage to take up their pens and write character-building books and books on crafts, chemistry, European and Indian history and on the nature and means of the progress of Europeans it would undoubtedly bring benefit to Hindi and improve the character of readers.
> (M P Dvivedi, 'Granthakarom Tatha Prakasakom ke Nam', *Sarasvati*, May 1922.)

He could be equally sarcastic towards contemporary writers such as the experimental Chayavadi poets, whom he called 'illiterate', 'useless' and harmful to Hindi literature.[10] Dvivedi thus embodied the figure of the editor-arbiter, and after he retired from *Sarasvati* his absence was often lamented by those who perceived the eclecticism of Hindi literature as detrimental chaos.

Dvivedi used the journal as a means to spread standard norms and values in the public sphere and took his role as arbiter of public taste very seriously. Despite a self-imposed censorship on religious and political matters, he certainly performed a political role in laying down a blueprint for the Hindi community and drawing their attention to the role and duty of public opinion to check on government administration. As the quotations made clear, he saw the role of the editor and writer as an educational one of 'character-building', and the boundaries of the 'public' were very clear.

(b) Literary Openness: The monthly *Madhuri* (1922), although inspired by Dvivedi's example, shows how openness alone made all the difference. *Madhuri* was an open venue for different tastes and different opinions: from Braj Bhasha to the latest experimentations in Khari Boli. *Madhuri* mirrored tastes and changes rather than guiding them. It published old and new poems in Braj Bhasha, showing that the taste for it was far from dead. In doing this it helped the process of realigning the Braj Bhasha tradition on the printed page, thus ensuring the continuity of literary transmission. It is difficult to underestimate the importance of Dularelal Bhargava's journals (*Sudha* after *Madhuri* in 1927) and publishing venture, the Ganga-Pustak-Mala, for modern Hindi literature.

All the Chayavad poets were published in *Madhuri* while *Sarasvati* still kept its doors closed to them. New writers, both

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controversial and unknown, were published: novelty and commercial success were a value for *Madhuri*'s enterprising editor Dularelal Bhargava (1895-1975). Although limited, the space provided by this and other journals was enough to support a growing number of professional writers and a literary market. The openness to novelty and to eclectic tastes and the prestige and (relative) commercial success of the journal were to Hindi writers a tangible proof that Hindi literature had matured and that they were playing a historic role as the cultural vanguard of nationalist regeneration. Also, it was here that a debate on the notion of literature could take place.

(c) Critical Voices: Contemporary to *Madhuri*, the women's monthly *Chand* (Allahabad 1922) provides the best example of the use of the journal as a critical medium and is particularly interesting for our discussion: the strategies by which women's questions and voices contested and extended the boundaries of the 'public' are well worth considering.

Women's columns had started appearing in mainstream Hindi journals and women's journals were becoming more topical, a sign that female readership was recognised, but still as a separate group with separate concerns. It was *Chand*, launched by the enterprising Ramrakh Singh Sahgal (1896-1952), that finally broke the mould of separate 'stri-upyogi' literature, questioned the home-bound role of women and placed women's issues at the core of svarajya, just as socialists would do a decade later with peasants and the economic question. Its immediate success proves it met an existing demand. (With 15,000 copies, it was the most popular monthly in Hindi.[11])

So what did *Chand* do? It broke the boundaries of (a) 'what women should know' and (b) 'what women should say'. In the first instance, it dedicated more space to news than any other women's journal – more than most monthlies in fact. All sorts of political, economic, social and historical topics were presented with no censorship of any kind: scattered among tips on hygiene, such seemingly 'neutral' information carried in fact a much wider and political education than could be achieved through schools by simply exposing women to information they would not encounter elsewhere. Implicit in this uncensored flow of information was the idea – crucial to Habermas's model – that exposure to information itself develops critical attitudes and political awareness by making issues public and the concern of each reader.

Chand carried extensive news on women 'satyagrahis' and women entering new professions or treading new paths, presenting it all as part of the same, irresistible wave of women's awakening. In the editorials the ideal of 'seva-dharma', of 'service', was taken up and redefined in terms that legitimised women's access to the public sphere.[12] Editorials also bluntly raised less palatable issues such as that of women's economic dependence and precarious position in the family and supported strongly the link between education and respectable employment.

The other remarkable novelty introduced by *Chand* concerned 'what women could say'. Publicity was extended to other dimensions of women's lives and especially their emotional needs. Stri-upyogi literature and journals thus far had envisaged women as totally self-sacrificing and focused exclusively on their duties and ideals.

Of course, stressing women's ideals was a strong plank from which to argue for their worth. Yet, by publishing letters and fictional 'true stories' *Chand* not only played a critical role but introduced the recognition of the individual's 'right to feel'. Invariably defending the individual woman's weakness and feelings, this writing highlighted the shortcomings of a purely normative attitude and urged the renegotiation of social and family norms. The 'true stories' of abandonment into destitution, sale of brides, polygamy, family corruption, unlegalised marriages and sexual relations belied the normative image of the 'Aryan family' – often boldly thematising the thin line between marriage and prostitution from the women's point of view. In fascinating ways, these 'true stories' bridged the gap between serious and commercial fiction, from which they borrowed schemata and plots.[13] Letters and first-person narratives introduced a sense of urgency and the powerful element of personalisation: this meant that the reader was forced to come face to face with the cruelty widows experienced in the family (D Chakrabarty).

The helplessness and commonality of the experience of Hindu widows became a metonymy for the condition of Indian women in general. Personalisation also meant that these life stories legitimised women's voices, their right to suggest solutions to their own problems, a new sense of individual worth and emotional life, for example, the need for kin relations to be intrinsically affective. Thus, while male reformers concentrated on widow remarriage or appealed piously to families to treat widows humanely, women's articles and testimonies spoke of a different agenda: they insisted on the right to retain one's property and place in the family; on the need for respectable employment and a place to stay; if 'fallen', to receive the same treatment as the male seducers or unlawful partners.

In other words, *Chand* exemplifies the critical use of the journal as a space where a subordinate or marginalised 'epistemological community' could criticise established views and norms and construct knowledge collectively (Assiter).

If to understand public as jati tended to naturalise definitions and freeze the process of public debate into a new status quo, new voices could exploit the implicit openendedness of publicity to redefine the basis of common sense and the boundaries of the 'public'. For example, 'justice' was introduced as a basic category by both women and peasants, and both posited the necessary connection between 'svarajya' and social change. Such a move required nevertheless additional strategies: to paraphrase Nancy Fraser, when peasant leaders intervened in the public sphere they found that the overarching nationalist 'we' did not really represent them, and when they found a voice and words to express their thoughts they discovered they were not heard.[14]

In other words, publicity itself proved not to be enough for ideas to become acceptable: if for example it was argued that it was not right to marry girls before puberty as common custom maintained (at least for the upper castes, the protagonists of the public sphere in north India), such an argument could do little against social pressure to do so until institutions like girls' schools, other pressures such as a desire for educated wives and even more radical alternatives such as women teaching, writing and taking part in the nationalist movement, made the idea of marrying a girl after puberty sufficiently 'tame' to be accepted.

For this reason, extra-discursive forces such as political mobilisation or institutional support hold exceptional importance and are often decisive in determining access to, or exclusion from, the public sphere. To give another example, peasant leader Sahajanand discovered that the best way to press home the point of peasants' participation in the political struggle for svarajya was to hold massive rallies in which peasants could be physically 'seen' and feel their own strength.

(d) Vehicles of Popular Opinion: Political dailies and weeklies such as *Pratap* (Kanpur 1920, ed G S Vidyarthi) *Vartaman* (Kanpur 1920 ed R Avasthi) *Aj* (Benares

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1920, ed B V Pararkar), *Sainik* (Agra 1925, ed K D Palival) represent the fourth kind of periodical publication, deliberately moving beyond reformist concerns. In fact, it was from these newspapers that the leadership and manpower for the Congress Socialist Party in UP emerged in the 1930s. Their move implied a different attitude to the public, no longer a middle class, paternalistic view of the Hindi public but a conscious identification with the 'common people' (janta, sarvasadharan).

If Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) had written in his weekly *Abhyuday*:

> Just like dawn announces sunrise, the birth [of leaders] announces the future rise of the nation. It is they who first dream in their minds the edifice of the nation and *display it in front of the general public* (sarvasadharan) drawing a picture of it with speeches and articles. And through their speeches and articles they forge whatever elements and strength are needed to build that edifice.[15]

now Baburao Vishnu Pararkar (1890-1955) reminded Hindi editors that their peculiar duty was to find out how common people lived, the struggles they went through and mirror them in the newspapers: "Until we adopt the common people and turn our newspapers into their mirror we shall not progress and serve the real ('prakrit') nation" [as opposed to the 'artificial', 'kritrim', one of Anglo-Indian newspapers].[16] This move involved a set of shifts: (a) in subject matter, (b) in language and (c) in attitudes to the Congress and the political movement.

(a) Firstly, news about peasants and workers started to feature regularly and extensively, much more so than in other moderate English and Hindi newspapers (like *Abhyuday* or the English-language *Leader*). *Pratap* was especially involved in the Awadh peasant movement of 1920 supporting peasants' grievances with arguments and taking side against the zamindars. The editor and manager were taken to court and jailed in a famous libel case launched by the local taluqdar. Both *Pratap* and *Vartaman* were active on trade unions issues in Kanpur.

(b) Secondly, there was a shift in language: far from the neutral, impersonal and sober language of *Sarasvati*, the language of these newspapers was much closer to colloquial speech: syntactically simpler, it made frequent use of idiomatic expressions, used few Sanskrit loanwords and more words in current use, not excluding those of Perso-Arabic origin.

(c) Finally, making people, the sarvasadharan, the locus of authority brought several other implications for attitudes towards the politics of the nationalist movement. If the Congress were really the "voice of the whole of India" as it claimed to be, "now those doors must be open which for some reason have been kept closed so far" wrote Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi (1890-1931) in 1915:

> Now the time has come for our political ideology and our movement not to be restricted to the English-educated and to spread among the common people ('samanya janta'), and for Indian public opinion ('lokmat') to be not the opinion of those few educated individuals but to mirror the thoughts of all the classes of the country. When we agitate for svarajya we should not forget the principle of a famous political thinker that democratic rule is actually the rule of public opinion.[17]

This espousal of the janta carried also a structural critique of constitutional politics. Popular opinion was rightly against the legislative council, wrote *Sainik* editor Shrikrishna Datt Palival (1895-1968) in 1936:

> The councils are temples of 'maya' because ostensibly they are there to help people rule and to hand the strings of power over to their representatives, but actually (pratyaks mein) they fulfill the interests of the ruling and capitalist classes! The whole electoral procedure is a demonic 'maya' ('raksasi maya') from the beginning to the end...In the councils and assemblies one meets power and wealth face to face [and] the rulers' rights are kept safe in a temple where [people's] representatives are denied entry, just like untouchables.[18]

The shift of the Hindi political press from being 'journals of ideas' for the educated few to newspapers reflecting and representing the 'sadharan samaj' is revealing of a point I would like to make later and that is crucial to my understanding of the Hindi public sphere: it was nationalism, particularly nationalist campaigns, that brought together the world of the literate elites and of the 'common people' and lent them an apparent unity.

In the Hindi press we found both normative and critical attitudes to the public. In the first case the journal was used as a way to transmit ideas and 'display the blueprint of the nation' to a public that needed to be educated. Ideas and norms, whether about language or about society, were presented as issuing from an already established consensus. Debate, dissent and diversity were devalued as 'confusion' and easily termed 'un-Indian'. In the second case, newspapers were used as a forum for debate open, theoretically, to all. New voices were not only allowed to raise issues concerning them as public issues, but were invited to do so in order to become part of the overall Hindi public. While in the first case editors favoured the strategy of putting pressure on colonial institutions (constitutional politics), in the second case editors emphasised direct participation and the accountability of leaders to the public they represented. The present age was acknowledged as the age of the masses and called the 'kisan yug,'. In this perspective, svarajya had no meaning without social change.

IV
Normative Institutions

This brings us back to our initial question: if the Hindi scene of the 1920s and 1930s was so strongly marked by populist tendencies, critical voices and open debate, how did the Sanskritised Hindi of Baldev's letter prevail? Once again we have to turn to institutional spaces, this time associations and education. For the gradual expansion of polite or 'shuddh' (pure) Hindi as public language, and also of the normative views of language and literature, took place thanks to education and literary associations. They were also closely related in terms of manpower and of cultural attitudes. It is useful therefore to dwell a bit on the dynamics that made them normative institutions and successful ones, too.

Associations: The Nagari Pracharini Sabha (1893) of Benares is undoubtedly the most impressive example of voluntary association and of what one such body could achieve in the framework of colonial rule. Established by a handful of college students with no money of their own, it grew with some government support and some patronage from the community, but mostly on the strength of its own activities. These were all 'canon-building' activities: the aim, to establish shuddh Hindi as the public language of the region, to fill the bhandar of Hindi with suitable books, and to draw up a canon of the Hindi literary tradition.

Established at the time of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, the Sabha bore the mark of the exclusivist discourse of the time, as its view of the unbroken tradition of 'Hindi', inclusive of all literary and regional varieties, amply shows. According to one of the first statements of the Sabha, Hindi had existed since the 11th century, but its further progress was prevented by the Muslim invasion of India and the creation of Persian-mixed Hindi, i e, Urdu. Hindi's survival strength was evident in the fact that even Muslim rulers had patronised Hindi poetry, while Sanskrit

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remained the most important language of prose.[19]

All the Sabha activities gave substance to this view: the compilation of a monumental dictionary, the search for and cataloguing of old Hindi manuscripts throughout north India, the critical editions of Hindi 'classics' and lesser-known historical manuscripts; the many series of 'suitable' books for adults, boys and girls; the distribution of endowed prizes; the large public library, a scholarly journal, lectures, etc. All contributed to the canon- and character-building vision. The pool of scholars these activities drew together effectively shaped the Hindi literary tradition as we know it now and spread the Sabha's normative view on language and literature through innumerable textbooks and anthologies.

It is interesting to note the Sabha's attitude toward the colonial government: it was one of co-operation and pressure (as representative of the 'Hindi community'). The Sabha's idiom of progress and scientific work was quite effective in securing government patronage, particularly thanks to the presence of pro-Hindi officers in the education department. In turn, official patronage and financial support enhanced the authority of the Sabha in the community and the literary sphere. It was this institutional and ostensibly 'neutral' patronage, with set rules and judging committees, that the Sabha started to reproduce with its annual lists of the best books and by awarding literary prizes. In this way the association became a seat of recognition and its active members became 'literary experts'. And when the first Hindi department was founded at Benares Hindu University, it was the scholars from the Sabha who were called to man it (Ramchandra Shukla, Bhagvan Din and the founder, Shyam Sundar Das). This new institutional position further enhanced their authority.

Education: Education was perhaps the most successful area of influence of Hindi intellectuals and it is remarkable how they were able to capture this key instrument in the transmission of culture already in colonial times. The teaching and textbooks of language and literature transmitted not only the canon developed by the literary associations, but also the social relations embedded in the 'shuddh' language that was chosen.

Hindi intellectuals were keenly aware of the importance of education both as an institutional and as a discursive space. By institutional space I mean here the space schools occupied and created: the often imposing building, the space for public interaction – for girls often the first one outside the home. Schools were often centres of local literary and political activity, visited by national leaders and leading poets, and the classroom allowed a space for politicisation outside the colonial curriculum. Schools hosted the institutional figure of the teacher and headmaster, both important professional avenues for Hindi intellectuals. They also created, through the students, an important section of the modern Hindi reading public. But education was also important as a discursive space: it was a way in which ideas and perceptions about society, modernity, culture and the 'difference' between India and the west were spelt out.

Thus colonial intellectuals, in Hindi as elsewhere, invested classroom practices with a grand national(ist) agenda: 'national education' – one standard for all – was to lift Indians out of their backward state to a rank equal to that of the most advanced countries in the world. According to Hindi intellectuals, Hindi had an 'advantage' over English here as it was ideally placed to spread modern ideas *and* Indian cultural identity. The textbook especially came to be seen as a primary tool to instil this common 'national' identity and feelings of duty towards the motherland. Practically, too, for lack of other reading material for both teachers and students, textbooks were the only books available for Hindi-medium education. And since Hindi literati became almost solely responsible for the production of Hindi textbooks, it is their choice of language and of materials that we find in the textbooks.

In them we find the same ambiguity in the discourse of Hindi: Hindi was flaunted as language of mass education (and the antithesis of English) but the Hindi actually used in textbooks was the polite 'high' language of literary journals like *Sarasvati*, from which textbooks and anthologies drew substantial material. Thus 'tadbhava' words (words of Sanskrit origin but phonetically modified through the ages) were systematically replaced by Sanskrit loanwords (given in bold below) and 'foreign' (i e, Perso-Arabic) words avoided as much as possible. The result was a peculiar language whose cultural and caste markers appear just below the surface:

> रात्रि होते ही सब **पशु** और **पक्षी विश्राम** करते हैं। हमको भी **अधिक** रात्रि गए तक जागना उचित नहीं है **अन्यथा प्रातःकाल** उठने में **विलम्ब** होगा और इससे अगले दिन कार्य में **बाधा** पड़ेगा। इसलिए रात्रि को दस बजे **से पूर्व** ही सो रहो।
>
> As soon as **night** descends all **animals** and **birds rest**. It is not proper for us to stay awake **too long** into the **night** either, **lest** the next day we **delay** getting up **in the morning** and our **activity** is **impeded**. Therefore go to sleep **before** ten o'clock **at night**.[20]
>
> सरस्वती भी धन्य है जो उनके **मुखकमल के सम्पर्क** का सुख **अनुभव करती** हुई ऐसे महात्मा के **प्रसन्न गंभीर मानस** में **राजहंसी सी वास करती** है। अकेली गंगा है। लम्बी चौड़ी वासनाओं का **निवास** उस स्थान में नहीं। आकाश पाताल को एक करनेवाले विचारों का वहाँ **प्रवेश** नहीं होता।
>
> ब्राह्मण लोग हिन्दू जाति के अगुआ हैं। इसमें कुछ संदेह नहीं कि बहुत से ब्राह्मणों ने पढ़ना-लिखना छोड़ दिया है। परन्तु यह समय की गति है। उनका प्रभुत्व ज्यों का त्यों बना है।
>
> The goddess Sarasvati is **fortunate,** for she **dwells** like a **swan** in the blissful and **profound lake** of the mind of such great souls and experiences the joy of being in **contact** with their **lotus-like faces**.
>
> The Ganges is unique. It has no place for great desires or passions; tumultuous thoughts cannot **enter** here.
>
> Brahmins are the leaders of the Hindu community; undoubtedly many of them have stopped studying, but this is a consequence of the times. Their authority is undiminished.[21]

In textbooks this language acquired a peculiar stamp of authority. The ability to use and translate from such language 'into your own' became the hallmark of proficiency in Hindi and a shorthand for proficiency at court. Learning Hindi became an exercise in translation (examination papers say – even now – 'say in your own words'). This choice of language for education had several important implications, cultural, social and political. Did the forced exercise in translation required by Hindi textbooks and examinations mean that the language spoken at home was 'wrong' (P Agraval). For one thing, as Krishna Kumar has argued, the tendency toward syntactic complexity and Sanskritised vocabulary "strengthened the reproductive role of education. Only children of upper-caste background could feel at home in a school culture where the language was so restrictive."[22] The reproduction of cultural values and social relations embedded in language could be quite apparent, as the second passage shows.

As Veena Naregal has argued, this educational 'samskara' was significant not only for those who acquired it (placing them in a continuum with, and yet in a subordinate position to, English). It was even more significant for those who were deprived of it, despite all the declarations of universal access to education. For now the lack of education and of its visible markers in terms of dress, language and manner came to mean exclusion from the liberal project of the colonial state, placing the subject instead at the receiving end of

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the state's idiom of force (Kaviraj). Lack of education thus virtually amounted to a lack of political rights. It also meant exclusion from the Indian public sphere and the need for intermediaries who would translate, as in the case of Baldev's letter, the idiom of the jati and of the state into something more local and accessible.

The success in spreading shuddh Hindi through education was therefore dense with important and discriminatory consequences, during the nationalist movement and after independence. As Krishna Kumar has remarked, Hindi education became a 'secret door' through which cultural nationalism entered the colonial system, but it also imposed a rigid linguistic and cultural ideal – the public self-representation – that was to survive in independent India.

V
The 'Other' Hindi

The reality of mass illiteracy alone is enough to raise serious questions regarding the impact of both normative and critical attitudes in the Hindi public sphere: the journals and textbooks we have been talking about were part of the experience of a relatively limited section of north Indian society. If English was the cultural and political language of a thin upper crust, shuddh Hindi was the language of another elite. Still, the question needs to be asked: What was the impact?

Even a cursory look at the *Catalogues of Publications* recording systematically publications registered from 1867 onwards offers some interesting insights. If we take the volume of publications in Hindi as an index and take into account indicators such as price and print-runs, we see that throughout the period until 1940 semi-oral genres of religious and secular nature such as 'bhajan', *Ramayana* compilations, seasonal songs, 'ghazal', versions of the *Alha* epic, 'qissa' and 'samgit' form the great majority of publications. This attests not only to the continuing popularity of oral forms in print, but also a use of print beyond the pale of the normative project and largely indifferent to new literary tastes.

So, while texts of the courtly and devotional Braj Bhasha literary culture were upheld as classics in expurgated students' editions, erotic songs in Braj Bhasha and various versions of Khari Boli circulated widely in the market-place for a few annas. Educational books were the fastest-expanding branch of Hindi publications but as late as 1935 educational titles amounted to less than one-fifth of those of popular songs and dramas. Among new literary works, only those of overt nationalist sentiments normally went through more than one print-run. The picture that emerges is one divided between a relatively small readership for new literary works and journals, a substantial proportion acquiring through textbooks the necessary linguistic and literary samskara, and an overwhelming majority reading religious or entertaining publications in non-standard Hindi.[23]

Besides, the popular market shows also a more direct kind of public intervention to address the public beyond that of the highly literate few: I am talking here of pamphlets (in prose or verse) printed directly by the author in order to comment on topical issues, a growing phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s. The Sharda Act, and especially the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930, had popular playwrights and printers, as well as private citizens, pouring their own views into print in the form of nationalist bhajan, kajli, alha, samgit, etc, in huge numbers of titles and copies. This trend supports the well-known fact of increasing mass politicisation, but it also suggests an important point for the Hindi public sphere.

Nationalism, and especially nationalism in its non-parliamentary, expansive form, was the jellying factor that brought the different sections of society together. The fact that nationalist poems appeared in all levels of the Hindi press and in textbooks and were acclaimed at poetry-meetings, that nationalist short stories were published and distributed like pamphlets (e g, Premchand's *Samar-yatra*, 1930), that popular poets and playwrights produced their own versions of topical events, and that local poets published nationalist allegories at their own expense all produced an overlap that gave a mistaken impression of unity. Poets and writers really believed that they were the seers, the vanguard of the whole society; journals believed they were the expression of public opinion in its entirety; critics and scholars believed that, despite the unruly crowds, their project would extend to all; and even marginal subjects believed they were equally members of the public of svarajya.

But the overlap and the picture of unity – still present in nationalist historiography – starts to show cracks and tensions when we pay enough attention to the mechanisms of cultural transmission and to the tensions arising even within the Hindi literary sphere – tensions that have to do with the conflict between normative and critical attitudes, with conflicts of authority, with the structural divisions within the reading public and so on.

VI
Epilogue

What did they mean by public? In the course of the article I have tried to discuss the various uses of public and to problematise the 'they', too. For, if the concept of public – whether jantaa sarvasadharan or jati – suggested an open-endedness, a unity and a principle of general validity that were not there before, it awakened different responses in the Hindi literati who wrote and thought about it. For some the open-endedness reminded them first of all of their duty, which was to lay down general principles and norms that would be valid and should be followed by all, and then do their best to try and enforce them with their unofficial authority. What they lay down was an ideal, a positive self-representation of the jati, and everything was evaluated according to these criteria and termed either 'Indian' or 'un-Indian'. For others, public meant writing off old rules and beliefs and treading new paths: where to was often not clear, but they were guided by a great faith in the intrinsic value of the process.

In the case of Hindi language and literature, the normative attitude had a more limited but continuous impact and held crucial nodes of transmission (e g, education). The critical attitude had greater momentum, was very important for certain subjects, and at times seemed overpowering but was ultimately divided and institutionally 'weak'. The success of constitutional politics after 1937 buttressed the success of the normative view of Hindi. The space left for critical and popular voices was marginal, and decreased after the movement was over. There was, to be sure, critical space left in journals, in the literary sphere (and in pockets of radical politics), but the impact on the general population was, we have seen, pretty limited.

Hindi, which had the potential of becoming the new unifying language of a new, more popular and inclusive understanding of the public, failed to do so. The ostensibly neutral, normative language that prevailed was an exclusivist language which embedded hierarchical social and caste relations. Does this 'failure' of the language reflect a larger failure at social integration despite the attainment of political democracy and a certain amount of social change and mobility? Even in post-independence India we find that critical (subaltern) voices could not determine the co-ordinates of the public in Hindi: caste, economic relations, patriarchy, personal

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authority remained, until recently, outside the purview of public.

Even within the literary sphere, the normative attitude of professors and textbooks undercut the critical (and political) potential of literature and the independent authority of writers: an Italian proverb says that at night all cats are grey: in the classroom, writers lost their distinctive colours. This may explain the apparent paradox of a very imaginative, very critical and often very political literature and conversely a culturally conservative language and an establishment endlessly feeding on talks of 'Bhartiya samskriti'.

Notes

1 Phaniswarnath Renu, *Maila Amcal (The soiled border)* Rajkamal, Delhi, 1954.

2 Juergen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', *New German Critique*, 3 (1974): 49. See also his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989 (German edition 1962).

3 Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, 'Deshvyapak bhasha', *Sarasvati*, November 1903; also presidential address at XIII Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Kanpur, 1923, quoted in *Sammelan Patrika*, X, 8-9 (1923):301.

4 Kalidas Kapur, *Sahitya-samalocna*, Allahabad, 1929:14.

5 Padmasingh Sharma, presidential speech at VI UP Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Moradabad, 1921, quoted in *Sammelan Patrika*, VIII, 6(1921):100.

6 "अधिकांश भक्त-कवियों का समग्र जीवन मथुरा से गोकुल ही जाने में समाप्त हो गया। बीच में उन्हीं की संकीर्णता की यमुना पड़ गई; कुछ किनारे पर रहे, कुछ उसी में बह गये; बड़े पराक्रम से कोई पार भी गये तो ब्रज से द्वारका तक पहुँच सके, संसार की सारी परिधि यहीं समाप्त हो गई!" [Most Bhakti poets spent their entire life going from Mathura to Gokul and the river (Yamuna) of their narrowness flowed in-between: some remained on its banks, some were washed away by the stream, and those who struggled hard and crossed it only reached Dwarka: here ended the whole expanse of the world for them!] Sumitranandan Pant, Introduction to *Pallav*, Delhi, 1963 (first edition 1926):9-18.

7 R Shukla, *Cintamani*, first part, Allahabad, 1939:227. Sagar Prasad Ray, 'Sahitya mem Lokruchi Tatha Yugdharma', *Chand*, XVII, pt 1, 1 (June 1939): 52.

8 V Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Delhi, 1997.

9 Thanks to the backing of the Indian Press, one of the most prosperous publishing houses in the province with excellent contacts in the education department, Dvivedi could set up a stable and commercially viable literary journal and assemble a team of contributors, poets and translators.

10 Under the name 'Sukavi Kimkar', *Sarasvati*, May 1922.

11 Source: *Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals Published in UP*, 1930, Oriental and India Office Library Collections (OIOLC), London.

12 See, e g, 'Seva-Dharma ka Adars', *Chand*, III, pt 2, 1-2, (May-Jane 1925), pp 3-13.

13 See, e g, Zahur Bakhs, 'Maim Patit Kaise Hui', *Chand*, IV, pt 1, 3 (January 1926).

14 N Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere' in C Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Massachussets, 1992:119.

15 M M Malaviya, 'Rashtra ka Nirman', *Abhyuday* 1907 in P Malaviya (ed), *Malaviyaji ke Lekh*, Delhi, 1962:126, emphasis added.

16 B V Pararkar, presidential address to the first editors' conference, XVI Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Vrindavan 1925, quoted in *Sammelan Patrika*, XIII, 4-5 (1925):228-41.

17 G S Vidyarthi, editorial, *Pratap*, January 11, 1915, in R Avasthi (ed), *Kranti ka Udghos*, Kanpur, 1987:103.

18 S D Palival, 'Kaunsilom Dvara Svarajya', *Visal Bharat*, February 1936, pp 449-52.

19 A summary of the statement presented at the first annual report of the Sabha is found in C R King, 'The Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Benares, 1893-1914', unpublished PhD thesis, Wisconsin (1974):316.

20 Bhavaniprasad, *Aryabhasha Pathavali*, pt 1, Bijnor, 1927:34.

21 Examination paper for the Hindi 'prathama' examination by Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad, samvat 1982 (1915):7.

22 K Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education*, New Delhi, 1991:142.

23 *Statements of Particulars Regarding Books and Periodicals Published in the United Provinces*, compiled in the Office of the Director of Public Instruction, for the years 1915, 1920, 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940, OIOLC.

Feminism and the Politics of Resistance

A discernible recent shift in feminist politics is from the representation of women's victimisation to that of their resistance. This is based on the belief that women's resistance to oppression not only is truer to the facts of their situation, but that its recognition offers more emancipatory possibilities for women's struggles.

This special issue is a call to open up the debate. At the reflexive level, we may want to ask: how do we understand the politics of this desire to construe gendered subaltern resistance in the actions of women? What, on the other hand, are the implications of affirming that 'the subaltern cannot speak'? Some of the broader questions that frame this debate are: what constitutes resistance?

In 'reading' resistance, do we privilege the intentionality or the effect of actions? How far is resistance (merely) the space of socially sanctioned licence? Is resistance only reactive to domination, or caught up in a Foucauldian micropolitics of power? Specifically for feminist politics: what are the sites of women's struggles and their context, what is the political potential of popular symbols of female power: goddess figures, women leaders, motherhood, shakti, female vigilantes? Papers that address these and related questions, in a variety of feminist contexts, are invited.

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