The Dynamics of Language in Indian Diaspora: The Case of Bhojpuri/Hindi in Trinidad

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Indian diaspora is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon: In terms of the history of their emigration; their regional, religious, social, economic and educational backgrounds; the politico-economic context in which they have developed over time; and the sociocultural experiences they have undergone, the Indian communities in diaspora vary considerably. Expectedly then, the status of the languages which the different diasporic communities carried as part of their sociocultural baggage is highly variable. They have experienced attrition and disappeared altogether, or they have survived in extremely limited spheres of life, or they have been modified and retained, or they continue to exist and are in contact with their ancestral roots, or they have been sought to be revived and revitalised with varying degrees of success.

Thus, the Estate Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Sikh Punjabis in England, and the Hindu Gujaratis in the United States of America have retained their ancestral language, whereas the Indians in Jamaica have lost all their ancestral languages. In Mauritius, Fiji and Surinam, Indic languages are still spoken. A local dialect of Bhojpuri is used in all informal spheres, and standard Hindi in religious and cultural domains. In Fiji and Mauritius, standard Hindi is even officially recognised. In Guyana and Trinidad, Bhojpuri is used in folk songs and Standard Hindi in religious services and ceremonies. In all these countries, the lingua franca is the dominant local language(s)—Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, English in England and the United States of America, Creole French or Creole English in Mauritius, Fijian or English in Fiji, Creole Dutch in Surinam, and Creole English in Guyana and Trinidad.

What accounts for the differential dynamics of language in Indian diaspora? In the literature on Indian diaspora, there is neither an empirically cogent sociological answer to this question nor a theoretically sound sociolinguistic formulation about it. Such an answer or formulation, no doubt, can only come out of extant comparative studies of the history and status of Indian languages among different diasporic communities. Before

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such comparative studies can be embarked upon, however, we need benchmark socio-historical surveys of the dynamics of language among the different diasporic communities.

Surprisingly enough, the dynamics of language has hardly attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists working on Indian diaspora.[1] The focus of a few sociolinguists who have dealt with this subject is understandably circumscribed by the concerns of their discipline: The effect of Creole and to a lesser extent of Standard Hindi on Mauritian Bhojpuri (Domingue 1971), the formal changes in Trinidad Hindi as a result of language adaptation (Durbin 1973), the koine formation in the Indian speech community in Guyana (Gambhir 1981), the sociolinguistic structure and process in Mauritian Bhojpuri (Gambhir 1986) and Fiji Hindustani (Siegel 1975), the linguistic adaptations of Fiji Indians (Moag 1979), the Sarnami as a living language in Surinam (Damsteegt 1988), the morphology of Trinidad Bhojpuri (Mohan 1978) and the death of that language (Mohan and Zador 1986), and the relationship between language and socio-economic and cultural factors in a Trinidad village (Sperl 1980).

This paper analyses the dynamics of language among diasporic Indians in Trinidad. It traces the linguistic element in the sociocultural baggage brought by their ancestors during the indenture era; it examines the metamorphosis and attrition that this element experienced in the course of over 150 years of their presence in this country; and it documents the efforts at reviving and rejuvenating the linguistic element of their cultural heritage and reflects on the prospects thereof.

Diglossia and the Evolution of Trinidad Bhojpuri

Between 1845 and 1917, 143,939 Indians were brought into Trinidad under the scheme of indentured labour, of which only 33,294 (or 23.13 per cent) eventually returned to India (Laurence 1971: 26 and 57). There is no official record of the languages and dialects which they brought with them. It is now difficult to determine the numerical strength of emigrants from each district and the language and dialect spoken by them. Nevertheless, considering the region from which an overwhelming majority of the Indians were recruited—namely, the western part of Bihar, the eastern part of the then United Provinces and the southern (or Ranchi) plateau of Chota Nagpur—it is justifiably presumed by linguists that most of these immigrants 'must have been native speakers of the various dialects of Bhojpuri'[2] (Mohan 1978: 8). This is further confirmed by 'the striking similarities between the Bhojpuri widely spoken in Trinidad (in comparison with other Indic languages) and the different varieties of Bhojpuri spoken in India' (Ibid: 11).

Besides the dialects of Bhojpuri, the emigrants brought other languages and dialects. The small groups of recruits from outside the Bhojpuri-speaking areas brought with them Avadhi, Magahi and Maithili. Mohan claims that 'there is anecdotal evidence that these languages were once spoken in Trinidad, as well as languages from further afield, such as Bengali, Nepali, and Telugu' (Ibid.: 11). The immigrants hailing from the Madras Presidency (forming about 10 per cent) brought with them south Indian languages, most notably, Tamil.

The linguistic confusion resulting from a multiplicity of languages and dialects among the immigrant Indians was often remarked by observers.[3] For instance, Reverend W.H.Gamble (1866: 33), a British missionary, noted:

> The Bengalis speak Hindustani and Bengali, while the inhabitants of the Madras Presidency speak Tamil, a totally different language. When these people meet in Trinidad, it strikes me as somewhat strange that they have to point to water and rice, and ask each other what they call it in their language. So totally different are the languages, the Hindustani and the Tamil, that English has to become the medium of communication.

How Reverend Gamble's forecast eventually became true we will see later. Initially, however, the languages brought by the Indians were preserved. According to Tinker (1993: 211), this was due to the persistence of the Indians in speaking their mother tongue among themselves. This was also assisted by the lack of educational facilities for their children, which would have forced them to learn an alien language in school. Even when educational facilities first became available, most Indian parents kept their children away from school for various reasons, not excluding the fear of conversion to Christianity (Singh 1985: 48-49).

At the outset, the exigencies of plantation life made two linguistic demands on the Indian immigrants: First, they were required to develop a language for communication among themselves, a lingua franca as it were. And second, they had to develop the ability to communicate with the authorities and in the market, which meant acquiring a more or less intelligible English patois and adopting Creole English as their link-language. About the latter, Tinker (1993: 211-12) observes that 'the plantation Indian learned to regard language as a means of protecting himself—making himself understood, when this was needed, and making himself hard to understand when that would serve him'.

The development of a lingua franca for internal communication was not easy, despite the fact that those hailing from the Bhojpuri-speaking

areas of north India formed the numerical core of the Indian community. Even the Bhojpuri brought to Trinidad was not homogeneous, and it reflected the dialectal variations of the parts from which the speakers came.[4] In due course, however, through a process of koineisation (that is, levelling) of different dialects, a new variant of Bhojpuri was evolved as a reasonably homogeneous lingua franca on the sugar plantations.[5] This variant is called by linguists as 'Trinidad Bhojpuri' (see Mohan 1978; Mohan and Zador 1986) and by historians, following plantation and colonial officials, as 'Plantation Hindustani' (see Tinker 1993: 208).[6]

According to Gambhir (1986: 193), the process of dialect-levelling was almost automatic as the various dialects and languages of the immigrants more or less represented 'a linguistic continuum of the western to the eastern dialects in India in such a way that there were minimal differences between any two geographically adjacent dialects'. This process was boosted by the 'psychological and emotional unity' provided by the perception of the speakers of the various north Indian linguistic systems as forms of Hindi or Hindustani.

In the opinion of sociolinguists, Trinidad Bhojpuri is a linguistic system by itself (see Mohan 1978; Gambhir 1986). It is governed by linguistic rules like any other natural language. That it is a compromise between different speakers, or that it is a simplified version of Indian Bhojpuri, does not make it linguistically less different. Some of 'the competing linguistic alterants from the second stage' may, no doubt, persist in the speech of some people. These are only redolent of the multi dialectal origin of Trinidad Bhojpuri (Gambhir 1986).

The evolution of Trinidad Bhojpuri as a distinct language has not been documented, and 'it is extremely difficult to reconstruct' (Mohan 1978: 12). It may be surmised, that with every succeeding generation, the relatively greater impact of peer groups as compared to that of parents in the matter of language use must have contributed to the increasing homogenisation of Trinidad Bhojpuri. That is, there must have developed 'a single system [of language] incorporating residual dialectal variation rather than persisting as a series of distinct dialects' (Mohan 1978: 13). By the time the Indians had settled down as an agricultural community in the last decades of the 19th century, Trinidad Bhojpuri had become their ethnic language. Thus, in his 1914 Report on Trinidad, J. McNeill could observe that 'soon after arrival all immigrants learn Plantation Hindustani' (quoted in Tinker 1993: 211).

Although Trinidad Bhojpuri evolved as a language different from the ancestral languages, it never became a 'native language'. This was due to the fact that with the expansion of education, the younger generation, especially those in urban areas, gradually adopted Creole English and/or

Standard English as the native language. According to a sociolinguistic profile prepared by Sealey (1983: Intro-2) on the basis of 1970 Census data, currently the Indo-Trinidadians 'share with the rest of the population ... varieties of Trinidadian Creole English as the major L1 and language of daily communication'. This community-wide language shift over the decades has meant that Trinidad Bhojpuri is a dying language (see Durbin 1973; Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3; Mohan and Zador 1986).

Using Roger Bell's sociolinguistics formula, Sealey (1983: TB-1-2) arrives at the following profile of Trinidad Bhojpuri: 'A dialect of "mainland" Bhojpuri', 'a Tolerated Language', 'spoken as an L1 by less than 3 per cent of the population' and 'used as a language of restricted internal communication', Trinidad Bhojpuri monolinguals are generally over 75 years of age, and Trinidad Bhojpuri and Trinidad English bilinguals (including semi-speakers) are generally in the age group of 55-75 years. The fluent speakers of that language are Hindus who have remained fairly isolated in rural areas.

The few native speakers of Trinidad Bhojpuri use it among their restricted friends or kin circle. It is reportedly used by the elders in the presence of strangers or children when they discuss something confidential or when they wish to exclude them from conversation. The same is said to be true of the very few elderly persons in the 'Madrassi' settlements in rural areas who still speak Tamil, and the elderly Muslims who speak Urdu.

Missionaries and the Introduction of Standard Hindi

The process of dialect-levelling and the emergence of Trinidad Bhojpuri was spontaneous and unconscious, and it was determined by the exigencies of plantation life. Not surprisingly, the speakers of this language did not even give a name to it and observers called it 'Plantation Hindustani'. Parallel to this was the conscious effort of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission at introducing Standard Hindi in Trinidad. The credit for this goes primarily to the doyen of that Mission in Trinidad, namely, Reverend John Morton of Bridgewater, Nova Scotia in Canada.

Reverend Morton came to Trinidad in 1868 and established a Mission to work almost exclusively among what were then called the 'East Indians'. He at once appreciated the need to use the native language of Indians for propagating Christianity among them.[7] The native language which he found best suited for his work was 'the Hindi dialect'.[8] By the end of 1870, he notes in his diary: 'I have now familiarised myself with

the Hindi and use it or the Urdu, according as the person to whom I speak may be a Hindu or a Mussalman'. In December 1871, he was granted a Government License 'to practice as a sworn Interpreter of the English and Hindustani languages in this colony' (Morton 1916: 66 and 67).

In the early days of the Mission, its members had to learn Hindi so that they could communicate with the newly arriving immigrants from India. The first regular church of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission was the 'Susamachar Church' in San Fernando. In this Church religious service was given in Hindi. As of August 1871, there was only one complete copy of 'the Hindi Scriptures' in Trinidad, and that was Reverend Morton's own. In January 1872, there arrived from Calcutta boxes of books containing Bibles, and tracts and catechisms in Hindi. In 1872, Reverend Morton began translating and preparing hymns, assisted by Reverend Andrew Gayadeen. A little book containing 30 hymns thus produced was printed (in Halifax, Canada) in 'the Hindustani language, employing Roman character' (Morton 1916: 110 and 111).

Considerations of economy of time and money soon made the Mission think of starting a Hindi printing press of its own. First, Morton purchased 'all the East Indian's type' and got press-work done in Port of Spain. Then he bought a hand-press and moved the plant to Tunapuna and started his own press. At this first Hindi press in Trinidad were printed, in 1903, thousands of copies of *Prarthna Mala* (The Garland of Prayers), the Hindi hymn book, which came to be used at all Hindi services not only in Trinidad but in far away Jamaica too. Also brought out from this press were copies of 'a simple catechism' adapted to 'the Hindi using the Nagari character'. At this press Morton also translated, printed and published 'for the Government all their Hindustani notices and circulars' (Morton 1916: 425, 432 and 433).

In March 1905, Morton began printing four pages of Hindi in those copies of *The Trinidad Presbyterian* which circulated among the 'East Indians'. Morton also brought out the 'International Sabbath School Lessons' in Hindi with a simple commentary in English. This publication went a long way in systematising the teaching of Hindi in the Sunday School, allying it closely to the religious instruction in the day schools (Morton 1916: 432).

Thus, under the stewardship of Reverend John Morton, the Canadian Presbyterian Mission played a pioneering role in introducing and propagating Standard Hindi in Trinidad. Though the Mission continued to use Hindi for its activities right through the first half of 20th century, gradually the initiative was lost and Standard Hindi experienced attrition even among the Presbyterians. According to Niehoff and Niehoff (1960:

149 and 151), who observed the situation in the late 1950's, the Mission gave up the emphasis on Hindi as its administrators found that 'the young Indians no longer have any interest in it'. In fact, their field work revealed that 'except for the very old, they [the Presbyterians] show very little interest in maintaining Hindi as a spoken language and it is very rarely heard in Christian homes' (Ibid.: 151).

At a thanksgiving ceremony in a Presbyterian household in La Romaine in south Trinidad in December 1995, the author heard an octogenarian lady recite what she called a *bhajan* in Hindi, and freely translate it into English for the benefit of those (i.e., nearly the entire audience?) who did *not* understand the original. She lamented on the loss of Hindi among her Presbyterian brethren. The religious service that evening was carried out exclusively in English, and the hymn book (*Hymns and Choruses*, published by the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad) circulated among the members of the audience, consisted of five *bhajans* in Hindi printed in Roman characters.

Attrition of Trinidad Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi

By all accounts then, the spontaneously evolved Trinidad Bhojpuri and the deliberately developed Standard Hindi did not survive for more than a century in Trinidad. If at all they are still spoken fluently, it is almost exclusively by the very elderly in rural areas, and as such there is no speech community of these ethnic languages left among the Indo-Trinidadians anymore.[9] Whatever has survived is mostly in their folk songs and in their lexicon of kitchen and food, and to some extent in their kinship terminology. The only systematic ethnic use of Hindi in contemporary Trinidad is to be found in the religious realm among the Hindus.

The attrition[10] of native languages among diasporic Indians in Trinidad, and the attrition of the lingua franca which was spontaneously evolved (Trinidad Bhojpuri) and deliberately developed (Standard Hindi) by them are intriguing to scholars engaged in the study of Indian diaspora. This is particularly so considering that the diasporic Indians are the single largest ethnic community in Trinidad (forming 40.3 per cent of the population, according to 1990 Census), and considering that other elements of culture (e.g., religion and food habits) and social organisation (e.g., marriage and family) have been reconstituted relatively successfully (see Klass 1961; Vertovec 1992). What explains this linguistic attrition among diasporic Indians in Trinidad?

To begin with, throughout the period of indenture, and later too, the life of the immigrant Indians was witnessed by the patterns of their

ancestral culture being ignored, ridiculed or suppressed by the carriers of the dominant culture of the colony. Their economic exploitation was matched by cultural subjection, and there was continuous pressure on them to Creolise. That the Indians did not allow the total obliteration of their 'Indianness' under these conditions is indeed surprising. Though with some loss (including their language), the Indians still retain more of their own cultural identity than their African counterparts (see Tinker 1993: 208).

Although through a process of koineisation the Indians evolved Trinidad Bhojpuri or Plantation Hindustani as a lingua franca, 'few recognise it as a language distinct from rather than derivative of Standard Hindi'. The lexical similarity (notwithstanding the morphological and grammatical differences) between the two languages resulted in this language being viewed as a 'corrupted' variety of Standard Hindi (Mohan 1978: 2). The speakers of Trinidad Bhojpuri themselves referred to it as 'broken Hindi' or 'bad-Hindi' (Sealey 1983: TB-2). Some even refer to it disparagingly as '*chamar* Hindi (low-caste Hindi) or *gaoo bolee* (village speech)' (Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3).

The Trinidad Bhojpuri speakers used Standard Hindi as their index of comparison. Standard Hindi was viewed as 'Good Hindi' or 'Proper Hindi' (Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3). They heard this Hindi spoken in Hindi films, which have a wide audience in Trinidad, and by the few expatriate residents (i.e., Indian nationals) there (Sealey 1983: TB-2). In other words, the native speakers of Trinidad Bhojpuri themselves had feelings of inferiority about that language. This, according to Mohan (1978: 2), is 'partly responsible for the failure of its speakers to transmit this language to younger generations of Trinidad Indians'.

Significantly, right from the beginning, the Canadian Presbyterian Mission adopted Standard Hindi, and not Trinidad Bhojpuri, as its language of religious propagation. Whether the Mission too had a poor image of Trinidad Bhojpuri ('the language of the heathens') vis-a-vis Standard Hindi ('the language of the civilised'), is difficult to say. Be that as it may, the Mission's efforts did not ensure the survival of Standard Hindi. As noted earlier, even before a century after its establishment, the Mission almost entirely switched over to English.

From the point of view of the larger community of Indians, the identification of Standard Hindi with the Canadian Presbyterian Mission was perhaps what subdued its chances of developing as a second language in the country. The use of Standard Hindi by the Mission was suspected by many a Hindu and Muslim alike as a stratagem for their conversion to Christianity. In Seepersad Naipaul's (father of V.S.Naipaul) perceptive work of fiction, *The Adventures of*

Gurudeva and Other Stories, depicting the life of Indians in rural Trinidad in the 1940's, Sohun (the school teacher) tells Gurudeva (the protagonist): 'In school you never were keen on Hindi. Your father felt that teaching you Hindi was only a ruse on my part to teach you the Bible. He preferred his sons to grow up as ignorant Hindus rather than as intelligent Christians...' (1976: 91-92).

There is no gainsaying the fact that when educational advancement was unthinkable for the indentured immigrants, the doors of English education were opened for the children of those Indians who got converted to Christianity, more so to Presbyterianism. Along with this came the prospects of employment in the emerging modern sector, including the cherished professions of medicine and law. Such an education also meant exposure to Christianity and to a new outlook on life. One element of their culture which English-educated Indians sacrificed as part of the process of modernisation was their ethnic language.

English, and literacy in English, carried high prestige in the colonial period.[11] As a language of education, English became a *sine qua non* of upward mobility in the colonial social order. Sperl (1980), who studied the language shift towards Trinidad Creole English in an Indian village in Trinidad, concluded that this shift reflects the acculturation to wider society and the decreasing meaningfulness of 'guiding principles' which are rooted in tradition and religion. The later part of her conclusion is, however, certainly contestable (see Vertovec 1992).

Not only has there been a shift towards Trinidad Creole English as the first language, and even as the mother tongue, among the diasporic Indians, but also there has been a pronounced strain towards monolingualism in that language. This is explained by the fact that their native language has no use whatsoever in commerce and administration. Trinidad Creole English is the first language of most Trinidadians and Standard English is the official language of the country.[12] Trinidad Creole English (at primary level) and Standard English (at secondary level and beyond) are used in education. From the utilitarian point of view, those who study an additional language, invariably choose Spanish or French.

Retention and Survival of Linguistic Heritage

According to Berko-Gleason (1982:21), 'the traditional linguistic subsystems (phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary) may suffer differential loss in attrition, since they are learned

separately'. It is important to note that both Trinidad Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi were predominantly a part of the oral culture, and the script was basically confined to the religious literati—the pandits among the Hindus and the ministers among the Presbyterians. This accounts for both the general attrition of these two languages among the Indians and the survival and retention of some elements of their native languages.

Thus, Hindi is still used in liturgy and Bhojpuri has been retained in folk songs. The survival of Bhojpuri or Hindi (and even Tamil) words in the spheres of food, domestic worship, and kinship relations, is also to be understood in this light (Winford 1972: 13-14).[13] The polite routines and routinised sequences, which are taught/learnt explicitly, have been similarly retained.[14] These expressions have little intellectual or referential content, but serve sociocultural purposes. Similarly, numbers, songs, and emotionally laden words like curses or swearwords have survived.[15]

Language retention is also an age-related phenomenon. It was mentioned earlier that Trinidad Bhojpuri monolinguals are generally over 75 years of age, and Trinidad Bhojpuri and Trinidad Creole English bilinguals (including semi-speakers) are mostly in the age group of 55-75 years. The same could be said about the retention of Standard Hindi. The elders retained their first language mainly because they did not know English.[16] They did not develop as a bilingual community. With the younger and newer generations becoming increasingly proficient in English, their incipient bilingualism gave way to monolingualism in English. If language survival is noticeable at all among the young Indo-Trinidadians today, it is only at the lexical and idiomatic levels (Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3).

There is a gender dimension in language retention. The social organisation which the Indian settlers reconstituted in Trinidad was pronouncedly patriarchal, resembling that of their ancestral land. In the post-indenture period, men had the major share of interactions in the outside world where English (Creole or Standard) was the ruling language. While the role of woman was not entirely confined to the family, the responsibility for running the household and the socialisation of children was primarily hers. Not surprisingly, it is in the spheres of kitchen and food, and household and kinship that the survival of the lexical and idiomatic elements of Trinidad Bhojpuri and Hindi are most pronounced.

Ethnicity and Linguistic Revival

In Seepersad Naipaul's fiction referred to earlier, there are perceptive observations about the linguistic situation among Indians in rural Trinidad in the 1940's. A few characters in this novel speak Hindi: 'In nearly half a century's residence in the island Boodhoo still spoke nothing but Hindi, ... he being India-born'. Some characters speak 'mongrel Hindi'—'a sort of patois Hindi which, spoken elsewhere but in Trinidad, would be unmeaning gibberish'. Though he himself is a pretender speaking Standard Hindi, Gurudeva, the protagonist of the novel, bemoans the fact 'that not two in a hundred knew their mother tongue' and he exhorts the village youth to regard it as 'their duty to learn Hindi' (1976: 64, 38 and 106).

Seepersad Naipaul's portrayal of the Indian community in rural Trinidad reveals the realisation among some Indians as early as the 1940's that with their community shifting to English their linguistic heritage was facing extinction. The celebration, in 1945, of the centenary of their arrival in Trinidad, and the introduction of adult suffrage in 1946, gave the ethnic self-perception of Indo-Trinidadians a boost. This combined with increasing contact with visiting religious personages from India triggered off a concerted effort at cultural revival and rejuvenation among them. As part of this general movement, Standard Hindi, not Trinidad Bhojpuri, was sought to be revived.

It is true that an ethnic group is not necessarily coterminous with a linguistic or speech community. But, there is no gainsaying that in a multiethnic polity characterised by cultural contentions, language could become an important element of ethnic identity. Thus, the efforts at revival of Hindi and its propagation, which began in the 1950's, could be viewed as a conscious reaction by sections of the Indo-Trinidadians against the loss of their distinctive cultural heritage through linguistic attrition. Several organisations and individuals, religious and/or cultural in orientation, played a role in this.

The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (established in 1952), the major religious body representing the Hindu population, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (incorporated in 1943) and other Hindu religious bodies took an interest in Hindi[17] as a liturgical language of the Hindus.[18] Pandits went to India to study Hindi and learn scriptures like *Bhagwad Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Srimad Bhagavta*, *Shiva Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, etc. Hindi has now become a religious requisite of the pandit class. Many leading pandits of Trinidad, both in the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha are Hindi graduates. Hindi is taught in *mandirs* (temples) under the jurisdiction of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and

as part of the radio programme '*Dharm Shiksha*' (Religious Education) for school children sponsored by it.

Although the cultural aspect is not ignored, the Hindi orientation of the Hindu organisations is primarily religious in nature. However, Hindi, unlike Sanskrit which has become essentially a sacral language, has far wider sociocultural potential. The recognition of this fact was behind the establishment, in 1952, of the Hindi Education Board under the sponsorship of the then High Commissioner of India, Anand Mohan Sahay. The Board had as its objective the teaching of Hindi and elements of Indian culture in villages. It offered Hindi courses at three levels—*Prarambhik* (Beginner), Junior and Senior (equivalent to India's lower secondary). Books published by the Dakshin Bharath Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras (now Chennai), were used as approved textbooks.

Till 1957 the Board functioned under the able directorship of Edward Joseph Pillai.[19] He was replaced by Induthai Kelar, who was deputed by the Government of India. Under her directorship about 650 students passed the Board examination. After her departure from Trinidad, the Board slackened in its activities, and the number of students began dwindling steadily. The propagation of Hindi was resumed after the arrival, in 1966, of Hari Shankar Adesh as a Secretary at the High Commission of India in Port of Spain. Because of his efforts several classes were restarted, seminars were held, and a cultural camp was organised. In the last Board examination, held in 1970, 251 Hindi students were successful.

Though the propagation of Hindi was resumed under the leadership of Adesh, the Board continued to be embroiled with internal differences about the scope of its activities. Some wanted the Board to confine itself exclusively to teaching Hindi and conducting examinations. Others wanted the scope of the Board to be extended to include fine arts too. The infighting within the Board aggravated to such an extent that it even became difficult to convene a General Body meeting. Eventually, the Board became defunct.

As if in anticipation of the void about to be created by the collapse of the Hindi Education Board, Adesh had founded the Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan in November 1966. This organisation sought the all round development of Indian culture, including the teaching of Indian languages (Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu), music (both vocal and instrumental), and performing arts (like dance and drama). The Sansthaan has made considerable contribution to the revival and propagation of Hindi in Trinidad. Starting with a few students, the Sansthaan has established more than 30 schools spread all over the country. It prepares students for the Hindi examinations conducted by the

University of London, the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samithi (Wardha) and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Mumbai). Starting from March 1968, the Sansthaan has been publishing a monthly magazine called *Jyothi*. One of the former pupils and a notable activist of the Sansthaan, Kamla Ramlakhan, has written two Hindi language textbooks—*Hindi Prabhaat* (Dawn of Hindi)—keeping in mind the sociocultural background of the Trinidad learners.[20] Incidentally, it is the Sansthaan which has sought to popularise *Namaste* as a form of greeting among Hindus, whose culturally rooted mode of greeting has been *Sitaram* (Panday 1993).

The Hindu bias in the propagation of Hindi by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan hardly needs to be emphasised. Contrasted with this is the pronouncedly less religious orientation of the Hindi Nidhi (Hindi Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago), established in 1986 to propagate Hindi in Trinidad. The Nidhi has brought out a few Hindi textbooks for beginners, and it sponsors the teaching of Hindi in schools and the *Hindi Sikhen* (Let us learn Hindi) programme on the radio. It had organised an International Hindi Conference at Couva in central Trinidad in April 1992, and in collaboration with The University of the West Indies, St.Augustine, it organised the Fifth World Hindi Conference in April 1996.

It is appropriate here to mention the keen interest that the Government of India has evinced in the revival and propagation of Hindi in Trinidad, as also in some other countries with a substantial proportion of population of Indian origin. The initiative taken by the High Commission of India in the establishment and working of the now defunct Hindi Education Board has been referred to earlier. The Commission had started free evening classes in Hindi in 1985 which, after being suspended for some years, were restarted in 1992. It also observes *Hindi Divas* on January 14 every year.

The Government of India has been providing scholarships to Trinidadians for studying Hindi in India. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations has been offering the services of two Hindi Professors—one at the St.Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies (since 1989), and the other at the National Institute of Higher Education and Research in Science and Technology in Port of Spain (since 1987).

Also important to note here is the sudden spurt in the use of Hindi in the audiovisual media in the recent years. Before 1993, Indian cultural programmes hardly got a few hours of broadcast time on the radio. Now there are three radio stations broadcasting Indo-Trinidadian and Hindi programmes, and two exclusively so. They also carry a few advertisements in Hindi. In 1995, two of them offered Hindi lessons—*Hindi Sikhen* (Let us learn Hindi) anchored by V.R.Jagannathan on

WABC's FM 103, and *Hindi Mein Bath Chith* (Conversation in Hindi) anchored by Sumita Broomes on Radio ICN. Hindi films and film-based programmes, and cultural programmes using Hindi in varying degrees are regularly telecast by the local television stations. Cinema halls regularly screen Hindi movies, whose audience has reportedly grown over the years. Also, the innumerable cultural organisations and associations often use Hindi in varying doses.

Prospects of Hindi as an Ethnic Language

It is more than forty years now that concerted efforts have been on at reviving Hindi in Trinidad and propagating that language among Indo-Trinidadians. What has been the outcome of these efforts? What are the prospects of Hindi becoming an ethnic language of Indo-Trinidadians, and of Indo-Trinidadians becoming a distinct speech community and bilingual (in English and Hindi)? The growth of interest in Hindi in the recent past and the increasing observability of Hindi in the audiovisual media may suggest that the prospects are bright. However, a sociological review of the historical experience of language attrition and revival among Indo-Trinidadians does not allow one to be sanguine. The development of a speech community is a complex and long drawn sociolinguistic process, and more so in an ethnic group in diaspora which has experienced language attrition.

First is the problem of the interface between Hindi and Hinduism. Certainly, there is no intrinsic linkage between language and religion. When conscious efforts are made to introduce a language or revive it, however, language can hardly be religiously neutral. One may recall here that the Canadian Presbyterian Mission carefully chose Standard Hindi, and not Trinidad Bhojpuri, as its liturgical language. This move kept many a Hindu away from Standard Hindi in the colonial era. It was in a way ironical that when the Christian Missionaries were getting their scriptural materials translated into Hindi, the Hindu religious leaders were using English translations of their scriptures.

Successful efforts at propagating Hindi today are associated with Hindu religious bodies or organisations leaning towards Hinduism in one form or another. Whereas for the Hindu pandits Hindi is a sacral language, for the Presbyterian ministers it has long since been replaced by English, and for the Muslim mullahs Arabic rather than Hindi or Urdu is the sacral language.[21] Any effort at propagating Hindi is expected to be articulated by groups which have an element of religious agenda, with its own consequences. The excessive emphasis on the sacral nature of Hindi and its identification with Hinduism is, therefore, likely to alienate non-Hindus from learning it, let alone adopting it as an ethnic language.

The emphasis on *Shudh* (Pure or Standard) variety on the part of most propagators of Hindi, including the Indian and India-trained teachers, is an impediment to the revival of Hindi in diaspora. As Sperl (1980: 9) has observed, 'language loyalty movements among Indians in Trinidad attempt to counter the language shift towards Creole/English by promoting not Trinidad Hindi, the ordinary local vernacular, but Standard Hindi as spoken in India'. For Indo-Trinidadians learning Standard Hindi is as good as learning an alien language. In fact, most of those who have learnt Standard Hindi become diffident, and even apologetic, when they have to use that language in interacting with Indian nationals.[22]

How to interpret the burst of Hindi in the audiovisual media over the last few years? One must remember that Hindi movies and Hindi film music have always been popular among Indo-Trinidadians. Hindi movies portray what Indo-Trinidadians perceive as the society and culture of their ancestral land. They even seem to subconsciously identify themselves with the dynamics of family and folk culture depicted in the Hindi movies. The impact of Hindi film music, both songs and dance, on what Indo-Trinidadians call 'the Indian culture' in Trinidad is pronounced, as witnessed in such extremely popular programmes as *Mastana Bahar* and `Indian Cultural Pageant'.[23]

What the average Indo-Trinidadian is interested in is Hindi *movies*, and not Hindi *per se*. Hindi movies screened in Trinidad invariably carry English subtitles, and a few popular Hindi movies have even been dubbed into English. In their Sunday magazine section, the two prominent dailies often include supplements—*Tamasha* (*Sunday Express*) and *Savera* (*The Sunday Guardian*)—containing news and articles in English from Bollywood, the Indian equivalent of Hollywood. The average Hindi moviegoer's familiarity hardly exceeds a few routine phrases or popular expressions and a few lines of film lyrics.

Similarly, most Indo-Trinidadians listen to Hindi songs without understanding them.[24] These songs may be characterised by soothing melodies, lilting tunes, or fast beats. Their appeal may be in the emotions or sentiments they seem to convey or in their easy adaptability to dance. Reviewing Mani Ratnam's film 'Bombay', Joannah Bharose wrote in *Trinidad Guardian* (7 September 1995): 'I could not understand a word of Hindi or Arabic but the music sounded great'. Similarly, columnist Omatie Lyder declared in *Daily Express* (6 May 1995):

> For years I have listened to Indian singers and sung along with them. It never mattered to me that I couldn't translate a verse of Kishore Kumar's or Lata Mangeshkar's songs. Not understanding them didn't

> take away the joy of listening. The same can be said of my fascination with Latin music.

The interest in Hindi songs *sans* their meaning can result in piquant situations with songs being sung in wrong situations. The author has heard a funeral song sung at a farewell function and a love song with sexual innuendoes sung at a thanksgiving party.

Considering the nature of Trinidadian ethnic politics in general and the politics of culture in particular, the increasing observability of Hindi in the audiovisual media appears to be an attempt by sections of Indo-Trinidadians to occupy the keenly contested cultural space in the country. In ethnic terms this 'culturalisation of politics' (see Jain 1997: 351) is significant considering the Indo-Trinidadian perception that 'national culture' in Trinidad is almost exclusively identified with the Creole culture of Afro-Trinidadians. Substantively too, the Hindi programmes (mostly film-based) offer ready-made material to fill the available broadcast/telecast time. Shrewd entrepreneurs are always alert to exploit the situation to their advantage.

In the ethnic politics of Trinidad, the Hindi question has often acquired a political colour. According to John La Guerre, in the post-colonial suffrage situation, 'Hindi and the institutions associated with Hindi ... were seen as centres of resistance against the newly independent government and also as centres for opposition resistance'. Viewed in this light, the first International Hindi Conference held in Trinidad in April 1992 appeared to him to be a celebration, of 'not really a language, but the presence of the Indians on the social and political stage of Trinidad and Tobago' (*Daily Express*, 20 April 1992).

In view of the ethnic tag attached to Hindi, anybody explicitly advocating its introduction in schools during the early decades of independence would have been accused of advancing an ethnic cause. Campbell's (1992: 84) following commentary is indicative of this:

> ... the biggest surprise in terms of Indian demands for something which would benefit Indians alone came from Hans Hanoomansingh in December 1970, when he called for a full debate on the teaching of Hindi and Urdu in Indian schools. Nothing had been heard in Parliament about this since the PNM[25] first came to power. Hanoomansingh never got his debate; and there is no indication that the majority of the Indian parliamentarians would have supported him.

Even today nobody dares to raise the cause of Hindi without being apologetic about it. In his speech at the flag raising ceremony to officially signal the launching of the Fifth World Hindi Conference, Foreign Affairs Minister Ralph Maraj was constrained to assure that there was nothing to fear from sections of the national community seeking to rediscover their roots since Trinidad and Tobago is a cosmopolitan country. He even expressed a desire to see the Afro-Trinidadians teach their ancestral languages (*Daily Express*, 17 February 1996).

Conclusion

The revival of Hindi in Trinidad and the prospect of it becoming an ethnic language of Indo-Trinidadians is thus apparently enigmatic. The basic *material* requirements for the revival and development of Hindi are there: The Indo-Trinidadians form 40.3 percent (1990 Census) of the population; organisations such as Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan (established in 1966) and Hindi Nidhi (Hindi Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, established in 1986) provide the institutional base and direction; the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the High Commission of India extend academic support and guidance; Hinduism, the religion of the majority of Indo-Trinidadians, uses Hindi in liturgy as well as in popular religion; and the audiovisual media give exposure to the language in high density.

However, what is lacking is *functionality*. Hindi is seldom sought to be used in interpersonal communication in everyday life within the community. Even the few who have learnt the language, feel diffident to use it in speech. The possibility of Hindi being used in economic transactions or in administration is extremely remote as these involve inter-ethnic group interactions. Moreover, since ethnicity has evolved even without language providing the emotional glue, and in view of the likely identification of Hindi with Hinduism, there is not much use of Hindi as an ethnic binder either.

Thus, in the light of the general domination of Trinidad Creole English and Standard English in the wider society, and in the absence of economic motivation or the administrative necessity for learning Hindi, the prospect of Hindi becoming the ethnic language of Indo-Trinidadians and their becoming bilingual does not appear to be bright. Hindi will certainly take deep roots as a sacral language of the Hindus and it will be widely tapped and used in the cultural domain. Motivated by divergent reasons, some Indo-Trinidadians will continue to learn Hindi with varying degrees of commitment and competence. In brief, while Hindi

may develop as a *language* among Indo-Trinidadians, Indo-Trinidadians are not likely to become a distinctive *speech community*.

Notes

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1. There is not a single reference on this theme in the Special number of *Sociological Bulletin* on 'Indians Abroad' guest edited by Sharma (1989); Jain's (1993) survey of literature on Indian diaspora lists only one study on this subject.
2. Bhojpuri is the westernmost member of the Magadhan family of Indo-Aryan languages spoken in northeastern India (see Grierson 1919: 125-26).
3. The virtual babel of Indian tongues was, however, welcomed by the plantocracy: 'The proprietors or managers of sugar estates purposely choose men speaking three or four separate and distinct languages not understood by each other, in order to prevent combination in cases of disturbances among them', observed Baptist missionary Reverend Bronkhurst (1888: 18).
4 In her study, Mohan (1978: 12 and 35) found 'evidence of this initial diglossia in the pockets of variation in present-day Trinidad Bhojpuri where the formal options correspond to features which are functionally equivalent in the different dialects of Indian Bhojpuri'. She noticed 'the lexicon and the Present/Optative forms of the copula' to be the aspects manifesting 'the highest degree of dialectal variation (due to differences between the Indian parent varieties rather than to Creole contact)'.
5. Unlike in British Guiana and Trinidad, where Bhojpuri formed the basis for dialect-levelling, in Surinam (Dutch Guiana) the evolution of Sarnami was largely influenced by Avadhi (Damsteegt 1988).
6. Long after Grierson (1919) classified Bhojpuri as a Magadhan language rather than as an eastern variety of Hindi as was previously assumed, there is a tendency among some scholars to mistake it (as also some other languages/dialects) as a dialect of Hindi. For instance, Tinker (1993: 53) refers to Bhojpuri (the language spoken by people of Shahabad) as 'a form of Hindi'. Similar misrepresentation is also noticed with reference to south Indian languages. For instance, 'the Malabar language' [Malayalam?]is identified as Tamil (Ibid.: 77).
7. In British Guiana, Reverend William English had pleaded with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in London to 'send a missionary to us who is able to speak the language of India'. This resulted in Reverend J.E.S. Williams, who had worked with Tamils in Ceylon [Sri Lanka], being sent to British Guiana in 1852 (Ruhomon 1947: 207).
8. Reverend Morton uses the word 'Hindui' as including the Urdu dialect (Morton 1916: 67).
9. Mohan (1978: iii), who studied the morphology of Trinidad Bhojpuri in 1970's, notes: 'Ajie, my grandmother, who taught me this dying language from my earliest childhood in solitary defiance of convention, and, more recently, helped me to decipher and transcribe all my recorded data'.
10. Following Freed (1982: 1) we may broadly define language attrition as the loss of any language or any portion of a language by an individual or a speech community. It may refer to the declining use of mother tongue skills by those in bilingual situations

or among ethnic minorities in (some) language contact situations where one language, for political or social reasons, comes to replace another.
Mohan and Zador (1986: 293) refer to 'a community-wide shift to a new native language, in such a way that the community of native speakers ceases to be self-renewing, and/or the speakers cease to be native' as language death.

11. Significantly, in the 1940's the Franchise Commission had proposed that universal adult suffrage should be restricted only to those who were competent in the English language.
12. Trinidad Creole English (Trini) and Standard (Trinidadian) English are lexically related. They coexist 'not as discrete codes but as a continuum of speech forms exploited according to the communicative intent of members of the speech community' (Sealey 1983: Intro-4). For a more general theoretical statement on 'cultural continuum', see Drummond (1980).
13. See the dictionaries compiled by Mahabir and Mahabir (1990) and Sookhoo (1985). It is noteworthy that in compiling *A Dictionary of Common Trinidad Hindi* Mahabir and Mahabir have relied on 'purely oral' sources and have not consulted any existing Hindi-English dictionary or glossary. Sookhoo's *Hindi-English Dictionary,* which cannot claim such an originality of sources, has in addition, however,proverbs and 110 pithy sayings. *A Dictionary of Hindi Names* has been compiled by Orie (1994).
14. Polite routines such as *Sitaram* (Greetings) and *Kaisen hai* (How are you?), and routinised sequences such as *Shabas, beta*! (Bravo, son!) and *Wha-wha* (exclamation) are still in use in Trinidad.
15. Sometimes an expression used by a public figure becomes a catchword: For instance, the expression *Nemackharaam* (Ingrate) used by Basdeo Panday (the then Leader of Opposition in Parliament and now the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago) in 1986 to refer to some of his erstwhile cabinet colleagues in the then National Alliance for Reconstruction government has become so popular that even people of non-Indian descent use it now.
16. For instance, Sookhoo's (1985: iii) 'ajie' could not speak English. She told stories in Hindi, and someone had to say *Han* at the end of each sentence.
17. Visiting Hindu missionaries from India such as Pandit Hariprasad Sharma (in 1914) and Pandit Kunj Beharry Tiwary (in 1917) had commented on the loss of native language among Indians and its adverse impact on Hinduism. The arrival of Pandit Jaimini Mehta (1928) marked a milestone in the development of Hindi as he assisted in the establishment of a Hindi school in Marabella. Also, even before their establishment/incorporation, the Hindu organisations had been in the vanguard of the effort to retain or revive Hindi. According to Forbes (1984: 156), 'whereas many Sanatanist Hindi schools were extremely ephemeral, the Arya Samaj schools were maintained, during the 1930's and early 1940's, in a semi-institutional manner...'
18. Sanskrit is the sacred liturgical language of Brahmanic Hinduism in India. Traditionally, Brahmans, the priestly caste group, held a monopoly over it. In Indian diaspora, however, it is Hindi which has taken the place of Sanskrit, from which it is derived, in Hindu liturgy. The credit for rendering the famous Hindu epic *Ramayana* into Hindi, so that laypersons can understand it, goes to Acharya Tulsidas, whose *Ramacharita Manas* is a popular religious text among the Hindus in Trinidad.
19. Forbes (1984: 157-58) highlights the point that Pillai was a 'Madrassi' and a Christian, and Hindi was not his parents' native tongue nor did it have direct cultural import for him. 'His interest in the language was motivated by broader cultural nationalism, similar to that of Swami Dayananda, the Arya Samaj founder, who learned Hindi late in life because he recognised it to be the language of Indian unification'.

20. Ramlakhan also has to her credit *Smaran*, a compilation of Hindi Bhajans in Nagari script with transliteration in Roman alphabets and translation in English. Incidentally, in his collection of poetry in Hindi written by people of Indian origin abroad, Pandey (1985) has included the poems of two Trinidadians, both of whose mother tongue is English. They are Karmchand Ganesh, teacher at the Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan, and Tara Vishnudayal Singh.
21. About 13 per cent of the indentured immigrants who came from India were Muslims. According to the 1990 Census, Muslims constitute 5.8 percent of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Like Trinidad Bhojpuri, Urdu, a language which most Muslims spoke, has faced attrition. There are a few elderly Muslims who can converse in Urdu. Observations made about language attrition, retention and survival will thus hold good for the rest of the Muslim population. Currently, under the auspices of the Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association (the major organisation representing the Indo-Trinidadian Muslims), the Haji Ruknuddeen Institute of Islamic Studies, offers a course in Arabic, *not* Urdu, as part of a Diploma in Islamic Learning.
22. Tinker (1993: 211) refers to an instance in British Guiana in the colonial era: 'When the allegation was made in Demerara that the interpreters of the Immigration Department could not speak Hindustani, the Agent-General defended the proficiency of his staff, though he admitted that they spoke a 'literary' form of the language'. He quotes the following communication (dated 14 March 1883) from Robert Mitchell, Immigration Agent-General, British Guiana, to the Governor: 'I remember Sir Richard Temple [Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal] addressing a Bengali return immigrant at the Transit Depot in Calcutta in his native tongue, which he spoke fluently, and the man asked me in Creole French what His Honour had said'.
23. That this impact is not necessarily positive has been stressed by some Indo-Trinidadian commentators. Maharaj (1995: 31-32) speculates that the Indo-Trinidadians would be more creative if they had not started imitating the packaged Hindi film culture and music. He bemoans that Indo-Trinidadian drama has become almost extinct, and at ceremonies like *matikor*, *barahi*, *chathi*, and weddings, folk songs are, by and large, replaced by loud speakers providing film music.
24. It is interesting to note that a key objective of Hindi Nidhi's newly designed Hindi courses for beginners is to help them 'comprehend dialogues and songs from Hindi films' and 'read and understand Ramayana' (Hindi Nidhi's advertisement in *Trinidad Guardian*, 8 September 1995).
25. The People's National Movement (PNM) is the political party founded by Dr.Eric Williams in 1955. It has always been perceived, not only by Indo-Trinidadians but also by Afro-Trinidadians, as a party mainly representing the interests of Afro-Trinidadians.

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