

Debunking the Myth of the Standard: Development of Hindi in Bihar

Meenakshi Yadav, Assistant Professor, Affiliation: Shivaji College, University of Delhi
Address: Flat No.- 148, Vidya Vihar Apartments, Sector-9, Rohini-110085

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Abstract: The paper traces the historical trajectory of the construction of standard with specific reference to the language politics in Bihar in nineteenth century. The paper looks at the language hierarchy intrinsic to the Bihari populace in contemporary society. In the process, the attempt is to look at the “other” Hindi languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili and Hindustani. The paper also underscores the narrativization of historical ties between Hindi and Urdu in terms of binaries.

Keywords: Script, Hindi, Hindustani, language and Urdu.

One language may become two languages tomorrow (mark the cases of Hindi and Urdu emerging from Hindustani or Serbian and Croatian from Serbo-Croatian) or that mothers may come to be called daughters (or dialects) as is the case with languages like Braj, Maithili, Awadhi, Bhojpuri etc., which people without even a moment's thought dismiss as dialects of Hindi. – Rama Kant Agnihotri.

The speaker in the aforementioned quote interrogates the conceptualization of the ideas of language and its dialects. In fact, Agnihotri rejects the authority of the grammatical structures, literary tradition, a unique script, and a considerable number of speakers in establishing any given language as the standard. The paper, in tandem with Agnihotri's perspectives, intends to deconstruct the authority of Hindi by examining the history of its development and standardization. The paper attempts to chart the trajectory of the development of Hindi to become the official language of Bihar in late nineteenth century and thus, subsuming the regional languages like Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili under the new identity, that is, dialects. The project of standardization started with the purification of Hindi by eradicating the influence of Arabic and Persian. The purification was followed with the Sankritization and the ‘new’ Hindi derived its authority from the constructions of the myths and the symbols to harness the immediate loyalties related to one's religious and cultural nationalisms. The standardization led to the marginalisation of the regional languages.

The intervention of the colonial officials, the intelligentsia of Bengal and North-West provinces led to the marginalization of the regional languages and their respective cultures.. Bihar had been one of the largest ‘Hindi’ speaking regions. Therefore, the intelligentsia of the North-Western provinces sought to assimilate to formulate a firm ground, on the basis of the number of speakers, to claim the official status for Hindi in eighteenth century. The Hindi movement was started to counter the impact of Urdu in courts, education, and administration; it engulfed the regional languages of Bihar in its project to homogenize the varieties of languages under the banner of the ‘new’ Hindi. Where North-Western Provinces were actively involved on Urdu-Hindi question, Bihar still managed to uphold the composite culture for a long time. The paper will attempt to trace the development of Hindi in Bihar from the second half of the nineteenth century to twentieth century.

The two languages Hindi and Urdu have emerged from the Hindustani, the lingua franca of the North India. A large section of the historians and intellectuals maintain that the institutionalization of Hindi and Urdu as separate languages related to specific religious identity, was a nineteenth century phenomenon. When Fort William College was founded, in 1800, to train the colonial officers about the oriental culture, John Gilchrist became the Head of the Hindustani department. Gilchrist used the term Khari Boli as early as in 1803; Sadal Misr and Lallu Lal were the first Indians who used the phrase, as T. Grahame Bailey in “Does Khaṛī Bolī Mean Nothing More than Rustic Speech?” (1936) claims, in the same year itself. Gilchrist along with Misr and Lal believed that the Khari Boli existed in between the Urdu, the language of court, and Bhasha, a rustic language spoken in the villages. Bailey’s article underscores that the Khari Boli was largely used in those Hindu settlements, which were away from the Muslim ones; his article hints that Urdu and Khari Boli were already established as the languages of Hinduism and Islam respectively.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji, in “Hindi, the National Language of India, and its Modernization” (1952), claims that Khari Boli was spoken in Madhyades (the midland), which was the seat of the Aryan rule. The choice of Khari Boli is rooted in its identification with the socially elites. Interestingly, most of the writers have evaded the underlying casteist orientation in going back to the origin of the Brahmanical culture to seek cultural ideals for the Hindi movement. While most of the studies on the standardization of Hindi focus on the conventional Hindi- Hindu- Hindustan ideology, one wonders why they scarcely examine the embedded caste politics in the construction and propagation of Hindi. The project to construct the ‘pure’ Hindi, which would counter the authority of Urdu in the cultural domain, compelled the likes of Bhartendu Harishchandra to strive for the essential Hindu symbols and this was when the “contours of the ‘new nation’ were traced” (Orsini’s *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940*).

However, the credibility of the Khari Boli had been questioned owing to its lack of mass accessibility and its almost absence in the Bihari public-sphere. King(1994) enumerates that the supporters of the “new” Hindi installed the language in Bihar through a well-structured process. The intelligentsia of the North- Western Province along with the Bengali

ones took the reign in their hands to insinuate Hindi into the Bihari public-sphere. The father of the modern Hindi, Bhartendu and his followers became the key functionaries in fashioning the cultural production of North-Western and Bengal Provinces. Bhartendu Harishchandra pronounced the 'new' Hindi as the adequate means for writing prose and deplored the usage of Urdu owing to its foreign origin. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the 'new' Hindi built its inroads into the domain of poetry since appeals were made to write poetry in Khari Boli. As King (1994) claims, the 'new' Hindi was acknowledged as the most important language of poetry in the wake of the Romantic Movement(Chayavad Kaal) by 1914. The teachers and scholars at the Allahabad University played crucial role in disseminating the 'new' Hindi, some of them were- Dharendra Verma Hindi Bhasha Ka Itihas, Hindustani Academy Allahabad, 1933; Babu Ram Saksena, Evolution of Awadhi (A Branch of Hindi), Allahabad, 1937; Shardadevi Vedalankar, The Development of Hindi Prose Literature in the Early 29th Century, Allahabad,1968.

However, Aishwarj Kumar, in his article entitled, "A Marginalized Voice in the History of Hindi", argues that Bihar was away from the communalization of the conflict between Hindi- Urdu. There were poets like Bedil whose *sher* and *ghazal* (couplet and poem/song) gave the radiance of the influence of Magahi dialect. He further elaborates that colonial administration accepted the works by Shivprasad Sitarehind with open hands and added them as textbooks, the Bhartendu Mandal criticized the step for the incorporation of Urdu vocabulary in Sitarehind's works. They assumed themselves to be the authority to adjudicate creative works on the basis of their idea of "the correct expression" (Kumar:10) of Hindi.

The intelligentsia of the North- Western Provinces were the pole bearers of the 'new' Hindi movement and did not have any qualms in homogenizing the regional languages in the name of the standardization of Hindi. They interceded into the public-sphere by publishing pamphlets, books, and journals that advocated the case of 'new' Hindi. Some fruitful alliances between the elites of the North-Western provinces and Bihar led to the further promotion of the movement. One such friendship was between Bhatendu Harishchandra and Ramdeen Singh who owned Kharagvilas press in Patna. Their bonding culminated into the publication of most of the Harishchandra's works by Kharagvilas press. Ramdeen Singh also published a Kanpur based periodical *Brahman*.

The name of the above-mentioned periodical rings a bell owing to its caste specific title. If one delves deeper into the history of the nineteenth century publications, one finds that a large number of Hindi publications were caste oriented. Vijay Bhaskar(2013) discusses the publication in the nineteenth century in detail. Some of them were Dwij Patrika, Bhumihar Patrika, Brahmin Patrika, Khatri Hitaishi, Kayasth Samachar, and Kayasth Komudi. These magazines were about the social issues about their respective caste communities and not about the Bihari populace as a whole. Bhaskar(2013) also relates that the social activists like Keshav Chandra Sen and Swami Dayanand Saraswati wrote and campaigned for Hindi movement. The newspapers in Hindi and English became markers of one's elite status. The general disenchantment with Bhojpuri, Magahi and

Maithili was the consequence of the increasing influence of the standard Hindi and English. Although, there was a large number of Bhojpuri speakers, Bhaskar claims that most of them were illiterate and poor and could not afford to buy newspaper. (58) In fact, the first Bhojpuri weekly was published on the eve of independence in 1947. 1960's and 70's saw a massive rise in the Bhojpuri literature and journalism namely- *Sahityik Sangathan*, *Bhojpuri Parivar Patna*, *Bhojpuri Samaj Aara*, *Bhojpuri Mandal Motihari*. First Magahi monthly *Magahi* appeared in 1958, and a weekly *Magah Ka Hunkar* in 1965.

Khari Boli a "bureaucratic language" (Yadav, "Interactions of Written and spoken Hindi": 6) for the chief advocates of the 'new' Hindi were socially elites- the educated upper castes and the Indians who were part of the British administration and the intelligentsia of Bengal and North- Western Provinces. The reason why the elites chose to neglect their own mother-tongues, Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili, to promote Hindi was that they sought a stake in the power and administration which was then enjoyed by Urdu. In fact, Paul R. Brass perceives the dispute between the supporters for Hindi in Devanagiri and Urdu in Persian scripts as the "cleavage between the aspirations and interests of educated Hindus and Muslims".(134)

While the supporters of both languages were proclaiming their accessibility among the Bihari population, they actually negated the regional languages of Bihar. Ironically, the claim of the Bihari languages – Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri did not find space in any intellectual debates in late nineteenth century. It was a colonial administrator, G. A. Grierson, who protested against the imposition of a 'foreign' language on Bihar since the 'new' Hindi was not the mother-tongue the people of Bihar. Grierson's thorough studies on the Bihari local cultures equipped him with valid arguments against the homogenizing thrust of Hindi and to support the distinct culture of Bihari language. He conceptualised the idea of Bihari language and its three dialects namely- Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Magahi. One needs to examine the crucial role of the colonial officials in formulating or rather, reshaping the cultural space in Bihar. The colonial discourses held the past responsible for India's cultural, economic, and social problems. The colonial perception evoked different responses from Hindi and Urdu campaigners. Where the former went back to the glorious age of the Aryan civilization and excavated the Brahmanical cultural heritage, the Urdu supporters rejected the past altogether. The Hindi supporters drew upon the religious myths and symbols to fashion the linguistic debate into the communal one. Language reduced to become an instrument in the hands of the elites from both sides to chart the contours of a 'new' nation. To borrow King's idea, a community attains nationality by creating and propagating myths. By providing a religious basis to the structure of a linguist heritage, myths, and symbols, the elites of the community affected mass mobilization. As Alok Rai posits, the nationalism is always conceptualized against the other nation (nations), in the given case, Urdu in Persian script posited the other and was conceived of as a threat to the Hindi- Hindu- Hindustan propaganda. No doubt, the capability to organize the masses enchanted the nationalists in the favor of the Hindi movement. Madan Mohan Malviya publicly voiced his support for the 'new' Hindi. Rabindranath Tagore in *The Home and the World*, cautions the young

generations against the rhetoric of the religious symbolization. In contrast, Bankim Chandra Chatterji propounded the politics of symbolism in his song *Vande Matram*, in which he portrays the nation as the mother India. Nationalist discourses were replete with instances where myths and religious symbols were utilized to titillate the sentiments of the masses.

Education became the site of conflict in the wake of the cultural issues aroused out of the conflict between Hindi and Urdu. As discussed previously, the Hindi advocates sought to replace Urdu of its superior position in colonial administration. The Hindi campaigners identified the importance of the domain of education to bring changes at the grass-root level. The second half of the nineteenth century saw inflation in the demand and printing of textbooks. The proponents of the Hindi movement like Bhartendu Harishchandra and Madan Mohan Malviya wrote and appealed writers to adopt the Sanskritized Hindi and Urdu writers wrote in Persianized Urdu. Associations like Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Nagari Pracharini Sabha mobilized people to adopt Hindi as the national language. Malviya wrote a pamphlet entitled “Court Character and Primary Education in the N-W. Provinces and Oudh”, urging to replace Urdu with Hindi from education, courts, and administration. Bihar was still distant from the communal politics of the North-Western Provinces and therefore, still receptive of the works of writers like Sitarehind in the late nineteenth century. The alliances of the elites of Bengal, Bihar and North-Western Provinces paved the way for Hindi to become the official language in Bihar and Central Provinces in 1880’s. However, the enrolment in the schools deteriorated extensively because the students were proficient in Kaithi script, which was used to write the regional languages (Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili) and could not cope with the sudden introduction of Hindi in Devanagari script. The government took heed of the situation and decided to reform Kaithi itself for official purposes. However, all efforts came to a halt when suddenly the administration again chose Hindi in Devanagari as the official language in Bihar, the Central Provinces and the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1900. The debate between Grierson and Babu Radhika Prasanna Mukherjee on the language of education is relevant to analyse the differential perspectives on the issue of the language of education. Mukherjee countered Grierson’s perspective to employ the regional languages of Bihar as the medium of instruction. He says, “They plead ostensibly for the people’s tongue, a tongue which is understood by people in the streets. Mr. Grierson of Bengal Civil Services has given expression to the views of this class.” (Kumar: 14)

Where the intelligentsia of Bengaland North-Western Province were concerned about the handful of literates who were proficient in Hindi, G.A. Grierson was the only one who brought the question of the language and culture of the masses. In the introduction to *Seven Grammars*, he argued that the Bihari languages had their independent identities. He discarded the claim of the ‘new’ Hindi as he presumed that would mar the cultural ethos of Bihar. He took the examples of Punjab and Bengali, which were, according to him, related to Hindi and Bengali groups of dialects but treated as distinct languages nonetheless. He desired the case of Bihari languages to be addressed in the similar manner. The usual allegation against the Bhojpuri and Magahi was that they did not have a written literary

heritage. He undertook the task to textualise the oral cultural forms of the dialects of Bihar. He studied the peculiarities of the Bhojpuri folk songs in *Some Bihari Folk-Songs (1884)* and strengthened the claim of the Bhojpuri to be identified as the distinct linguistic form. The Bihari women were the creators as well as the transmitters of the Bhojpuri songs. Therefore, the credit to bring the unique Bhojpuri culture and tradition out of the women's quarters to the public sphere went to Grierson. *Some Bihari Folk-Songs* consisted various forms of Bhojpuri songs, for instance, *biraha* (songs of separation and longing), *sohar* (songs on the eve of child-birth), *barah masa* (songs celebrating the months), *jatsars* (*mill-songs*). Grierson works like *Some Bihari Folk-Songs*, *Seven Grammars*, and "Plea for the People's Tongue" revealed that the Bhojpuri songs were rooted in their local socio-cultural contexts and a foreign language like standard Hindi could not convey the sentiments and spontaneity of the people of Bihar.

Grierson's interest in the regional languages of Bihar stood him apart from other colonial officials and the Bihari Intelligentsia. He was wary of the incomprehensibility and inaccessibility of the 'new' Hindi to the farthest corners of the region. He articulated, "Hindi is a foreign language to all who use it in Bihar. The native language of every Bihari (excepting those born and bred in the large towns) is as different from Hindi, as French is from Italian;... The matter, no doubt, is different in the North-West Provinces, west of Benaras; for there, Hindi may fairly claim to be the vernacular of the country; but it is not, never was, and never can be, the vernacular of Bihar." (Kumar: 25) The greatest problem was that the elites did not take into account the perspective of the rural people who used to contribute a huge proportion to the cultural- space in Bihar.

In fact, there was a clear demarcation in the intensions of the social elites, who were promoting Hindi, and Grierson. Where, the latter came across as the champion of the popular culture in the dialects of Bihari, the elites spoke for the manufactured culture of the few literates. Unlike the elites who represented the upper classes, Grierson talked about the majority that comprised the socially marginalized classes, e.g., the *jatsars*, the workers sing *jatsars* when they work in the mills.

In post independent India, Gandhi wanted to make Hindustani in Roman script as the national language of India. For Gandhi, Hindustani was the emblem of Hindu-Muslim unity, and Roman script was suggested to prevent any discord between Devanagari and Persian. Rabindranath Tagore disagreed with the idea, and enumerated the importance of script for a language and suggested that such a step would inhibit the cultural heritage of India. As Rai(2002) states, Hindustani was "the universally and consensually acceptable 'national' language" (74) before the assembly debates started. It was a great leap from there to Govind Das' statement that 'the question of Hindustani ... exists no more'. (74) The fervent supporters of Hindi-Hindu ideology, like the Jana Sangh, demanded for a Sankritized Hindi. Hindustani was the pertinent option in the wake of the purist notion of language exhibited by the Hindu right wing. The advocators of Hindi refuted the claim of Hindustani to make Hindi, the official language. Undoubtedly, the claim of Hindi rested on the myth that Hindi had the highest number of speakers. But, such claims were(are) rooted in the negation of the

separate identity of the regional languages like Bhojpuri and Magahi. The case of regional languages of Bihar, and Bhojpuri to be specific, is still relevant since the languages are still awaiting constitutional recognition. The anxiety of the Hindi supporters is replicated in the statements like, "...recognition of its(Hindi's) dialects as separate languages would deprive Hindi of its millions of its speakers, there would eventually be no Hindi left".

The supporters of Hindi praise the language for its global expansion. I have serious reservations against such claims for the language has disseminated across the globe through migration of the indentured labor, technicians, doctors, and industrialists. If one looks into the history of migration, one finds that the indentured migrants comprised the largest proportion of the emigrants, and the mostly belonged to the eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Interestingly, they have preserved their language and culture across the globe. Most of them were Bhojpuri speakers and carried their language with them. Subramani managed to write a Bhojpuri text *Dauka Puana* (2001) in Fizi, only because of the wide accessibility of the language. The claim regarding the global accessibility of Hindi is rooted in the similar politics of negation of the "other" languages across the globe.

Although different writers hold different perspectives on the communalization of the Hindi and Urdu, almost all of them talk about the role of the colonial officials, along with the elites of Bengal, Bihar, and North- Western Provinces in the development of the standard Hindi. The "conscious symbol selection"(Brass: 121) by the elites organized the Bihari population along religious lines. One can observe the elite orientation of the linguistic discourses in nineteenth century and afterwards. These elites represented the voice of the upper class people and did not take into account the demands of the majority; the common people in Bihar were equally unaware of both Persianized Urdu and Sanskritized Hindi. Ironically, the idea of the standard language to keep the unity becomes the reason for the disintegration of communities. One can conclude that it is better to do away with such conceptualizations as the standard language and official language, which inadvertently structure the languages in a hierarchy on the lines of the *chaturvarna* system of the Brahmanical society, and even worse, negated the existence of certain languages e.g. Bhojpuri. In a multicultural nation like India, we need to maintain the coexistence of the distinct communities and recognize the rights of every citizen. The nation ought to remember the motto of "unity in diversity". Ironically, sometimes it is the state itself that tend to enforce the standard through the violence of assimilation and incorporation; the citizens need to reclaim the diversity of the nation for speaking in Hindi does not make one more Indian or speaking one's regional language any less Indian.

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