



**NMML  
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

**HISTORY AND SOCIETY**

**New Series  
51**

**Jawaharlal Nehru and the Politics of National  
Language (c. 1937–50)**

**Ilyas Husain**



**Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
2014**



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*Published by*

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
Teen Murti House  
New Delhi-110011

e-mail : [ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com](mailto:ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com)

ISBN : 978-93-83650-31-6

Price Rs. 100/-; US \$ 10

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Page setting & Printed by : A.D. Print Studio, 1749 B/6, Govind Puri  
Extn. Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110019. E-mail : [studio.adprint@gmail.com](mailto:studio.adprint@gmail.com)

*NMML Occasional Paper*



## **Jawaharlal Nehru and the Politics of National Language (c. 1937–50)\***

**Ilyas Husain\*\***

In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru explained why Mahatma Gandhi was called ‘Gandhiji’.

I have referred to Mr. Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi as “Gandhiji” throughout these pages... I have seen some extraordinary explanations of this *ji* in books and articles by English writers. Some have imagined that it is a term of endearment—Gandhiji meaning ‘dear little Gandhi’! This is perfectly absurd and shows colossal ignorance of Indian life. ‘Ji is one of the commonest additions to a name in India being applied indiscriminatingly to all kinds of people and to men, women, boys, girls and children. It conveys an idea of respect, something equivalent to Mr., Mrs., or Miss. Hindustani is rich in courtly phrases and prefixes and suffixes to names and honorific titles. ‘Ji’ is the simplest of these and the least formal of them, though perfectly correct.<sup>1</sup>

Preferring “ji” over “Mr.”, Nehru reflected his interest in Hindustani. The autobiography was published in 1936. It was the time when Indian nationalists were facing a heated debate over the name and nature of a national language for the country. Since late nineteenth century a well-organized group had mobilized support to make Hindi in Nagari the national language of India. Instead, Mahatma Gandhi introduced the idea of Hindustani—a language written in two scripts, i.e., Urdu

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\* Revised version of the lecture delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 14 March 2013

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and Nagari. Mahatma Gandhi explained this Hindustani in two ways: one, as a mixture of Hindi and Urdu,<sup>2</sup> second, as a “village” language which was understood by the masses.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi’s idea of Hindustani was a unique one. While he adopted the modern European idea that a nation should have a national language, he changed it to fit Indian conditions. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his early political life, was not quite attracted to the Gandhian concept of a national language in two scripts. Nevertheless, he was attracted to indigenous languages including Urdu and Hindi. He had his own way to arrive at a similar conclusion.

### **Quest for a National Language**

Nehru’s view on a national language developed over a long period. During his first public speech in 1915, Nehru felt that “public speeches should not be [given] in English”.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, Nehru started to learn Hindi and Urdu.<sup>5</sup> Not only in his private life but also in public life, Nehru was rapidly becoming a supporter of Hindi and Urdu. He gave a speech in Hindustani at Kakinada session of the Indian National Congress in 1923. This was objected to and he was asked to speak in English. Rejecting the demand Nehru insisted that he must be allowed to speak in Hindi.<sup>6</sup> These early efforts of Nehru, however, cannot be read as considered support for Hindustani in two scripts as the national language of India. These were examples of Nehru’s increasing attraction to indigenous languages specially Hindi and Urdu. After Gandhi’s endorsement, Nehru showed more interest in Hindustani. But Nehru doubted on the practicability of the adoption of two scripts. He conducted an interesting experiment with Hindustani in 1933. When an invitation of the marriage of his younger sister Krishna was printed, Nehru used Hindustani in the Roman script. This was a first attempt by any nationalist leader to use the Roman script for Hindustani.<sup>7</sup> Nehru wanted to assess people’s reactions. He found most of the reactions “unfavourable”. Gandhi didn’t approve of the innovation either. Although he remained attracted to the Roman script, Nehru concluded that “[a] change of script is a very vital change for a language with a rich past, for a script is a most intimate part of its literature... It would be cruel vivisection to force such change, and it would retard our progress in popular education”.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, Nehru accepted the Gandhian solution of two scripts. On the form and content of the national



language, Nehru had no doubt. His autobiography was the first document in which Nehru laid out his view on a national language. He admired Hindustani without denying the importance of English.

As for Hindustani, with its variations, it is spoken, I imagine, by about a hundred and forty millions in India, and it is partly understood by a vast number of others all over the country. Such a language has obviously enormous possibilities. It rests on the solid foundation of Sanskrit and it is closely allied to Persian. Thus it can draw from two rich sources, and of course, in recent years, it has drawn from English.<sup>9</sup>

As soon he got involved with the issue of a national language, Nehru looked towards an inclusive language. He admired Hindustani because it was a symbol of syncretic culture and he believed that it had the potential for modernization by adopting and assimilating terms from English. Hence, Nehru suggested: “I would personally like to encourage Hindustani to adapt and assimilate many words from English and other foreign languages”.<sup>10</sup> These early ideas of Nehru were developed in the form of an essay, when in 1937, as the President of the Congress Jawaharlal Nehru wrote an essay *The Question of National Language*. This was the time when the old Hindi-Urdu controversy had resurfaced in a new form. The elected provincial governments of the Congress were being criticized by conflicting Hindi and Urdu lobbies. To re-endorse the concept of the All India Congress on national language, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote this essay where for the first time he articulated his detailed views on the national language.

### **Imaging a National Language**

Nehru started his essay while raising a typical question: “how shall we promote the unity of India?” It was a strong belief and shared view of many nationalists that a nation required a national language with national unity being seen as co-terminous with linguistic unity. A national language was also needed to counter colonial arguments which often presented India as Babel of tongues. Less than a decade ago, George Grierson, in the *Linguistic Survey of India*, identified 179 languages and 544 dialects spoken in the various parts of the country. Based on the survey Grierson commented on Indian linguistic diversity and argued

that there were parts of India which have their own “Tower of Babel”.<sup>11</sup> Grierson’s survey posed a challenge to Indian nationalists who were developing the idea of a national language. A decade later, when Jawaharlal Nehru was engaged with the question of language, he rejected the over-emphasis on Indian linguistic diversity, calling it a “cry of the ignorant”, and advanced the alternative idea of a “common all-India language”. Nehru wrote that “India has also one dominant and widespread language which, with its variations, covers a vast area and numbers its votaries by the hundred million”.<sup>12</sup> While rejecting Grierson’s idea, Nehru accepted the presence of many languages in India. In the essay, he strongly questioned colonial speculations that English could act as the all-India language. Contrarily, he argued that English could not educate millions of people as one could not make a deep contact with one’s own people in a foreign tongue concluding that “the only possible all-India language is Hindustani”. Nehru didn’t categorically deny the importance of English but argued for Hindustani on three grounds—the number of speakers, common cultural affinities and its simplicity. Nehru also described the nature of language and indirectly questioned the process of Sanskritization or Persianization.

A living language is a throbbing, vital thing, ever changing, ever growing and mirroring the people who speak and write it. It has its roots in masses... How then can we change it or shape it to our liking by resolutions or orders from above? And yet I find this widely prevalent notion that we can force a language to behave in a particular manner if we only will it so.<sup>13</sup>

Here, we can notice Nehru’s early commitment to the democratic evolution of a national language. Cautioning language ideologues about the dangers of a purged and artificial Hindi (or Urdu) he wrote:

If a language loses touch with the people, it loses its vitality and becomes an artificial, lifeless thing, instead of the thing of life and strength and joy that it should be. Attempts to force the growth of a language in a particular direction are likely to end in distorting it and crushing its spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, Nehru clarified that the ‘Congress desired to develop a common language’ and was not willing to impose any specific form of language. In common with Gandhi, for him Hindustani vaguely included ‘a golden mean of Hindi and Urdu’. And, it meant also the spoken and written language of various parts of northern and central India.<sup>15</sup> He acknowledged that the old enmity between Hindi and Urdu had complicated matters on the issue of a national language. Aiming to weaken the controversy, he reconstructed the history of the origin of Hindi and Urdu. He argued that they were two offshoots of a common language and the difference between Hindi and Urdu was just a matter of script. Nehru argued that the terms Hindi and Urdu were interchangeably used for a long time and “it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the words Hindi and Urdu began to signify something different from each other”.<sup>16</sup> And, “it was probably a reflex of the rising national consciousness, which first affected the Hindus, who began to lay stress on purer Hindi and the Devanagari script”.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the emergence of two literary forms — Urdu and Hindi was not considered as the work of evil-minded persons by Nehru. Rather Nehru described it as “a sign of healthy growth” of language.<sup>18</sup> However, he warned that both the languages were “inadequate for the proper expression of modern ideas”. So, both should come closer to each other and “absorb words and ideas from foreign languages”.<sup>19</sup> These opinions led him to conclude that literary forms of Hindi and Urdu would remain. But for all-India usage both should come closer to each other and develop into a common national language. Nehru further suggested a developmental path for Hindustani to make it more eligible as a national language. This involved evolving a “basic Hindustani”. The basic Hindustani would not be merely an amalgam of Hindi and Urdu. On the lines of ‘basic English’, basic Hindustani would have a simple grammar and a thousand words vocabulary. He explained:

Such a basic Hindustani should be the all-India language and with a little effort from the State it will spread with extreme rapidity all over the country and will help in bringing about their national unity which we all desire. It will bring Hindi and Urdu close together and will also help in developing an all-India linguistic unity.<sup>20</sup>

Nehru went beyond the Hindi-Urdu question in his conception of a common all-India language. He recommended ‘basic Hindustani’ bearing in mind the non-Hindi speaking southern states. For these states he suggested inclusion of ‘if necessary, a southerner script’ too, besides Devanagari and Urdu scripts.<sup>21</sup> Nehru was first among the nationalist leaders to consider southerner concerns in the learning of a national language. On the other hand, he was very critical and opposed to the invention of artificial new words and suggested inclusion of English technical terms in Hindustani. He wrote: “We should be bold enough, I think, to lift bodily foreign technical words which have become current coin in many parts of the world, and to adopt them as Hindustani words”.<sup>22</sup> To further develop national unity among Indian languages, Nehru suggested adopting some scientific, technical, political and commercial terms for Hindustani as well as other Indian languages.<sup>23</sup> The idea of evolving some kind of linguistic unity was very strong in the nationalists. Nevertheless, Nehru did not ignore the prominence of provincial languages in the provinces. He wrote:

Our great provincial languages are no dialects or vernaculars as the ignorant sometimes call them. They are ancient languages with a rich inheritance, each spoken by millions of persons, each tied up inextricably with the life and culture and ideas of masses as well as of upper classes. It is axiomatic that the masses can only grow educationally and culturally through the medium of their own languages. Therefore, it is inevitable that we lay stress on the provincial languages and carry on most of our work through them.<sup>24</sup>

Nehru in his essay authored general principles and proposed a realistic solution of the national language problem. These reflections of Jawaharlal Nehru on the national language were commended by Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote a foreword when Nehru’s essay was published by the All India Congress Committee in a pamphlet form.<sup>25</sup> Gandhi also republished its main suggestions in the *Harijan* on 21st August 1937.<sup>26</sup> On Nehru’s lines the Congress Working Committee also passed a resolution. With these efforts the proposed national language was re-endorsed by the All India Congress.





Even after Nehru's assurance and the Congress' commitment Hindi and Urdu supporters refused to settle on a compromise. Nationalist leaders were constantly trying to develop consensus on Hindustani. At a symposium, held in 1940, every school of thought on national language was given representation. It seemed that most leaders favoured the content of language but there were differences over the name. Z.A. Ahmad, the compiler of symposium papers described the situation.

There is no difference of opinion on the question whether or not India should have a national language... Nor is there any dispute over the fact that of all the Indian languages that which is commonly spoken in the towns and villages of the greater part of the North, and which is variously described as Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani, is best suited to act as national language.<sup>27</sup>

Though, the idea of Hindustani was finally challenged in the Constituent Assembly, the Hindi lobby had started rejecting Hindustani as early as from 1938.<sup>28</sup> They, under the leadership of Purushottamdas Tandon, disassociated themselves from Gandhi's national language movement.<sup>29</sup> Gandhi, wishing to draw support from Hindi lobby, had accepted the membership of *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*, an institution established for the propagation of Nagari-Hindi. Hindi lobby used Gandhi's support for the propagation of Hindi but remained reluctant to adopt Hindustani. In 1945, failing to convince the Hindi lobby, Gandhi resigned from the Sammelan.<sup>30</sup> After Independence, the Hindi lobby, with renewed enthusiasm, followed a path very different from the legacy of national movement on the issue of national language.

### **Hindustani and the Age of Hindi Enthusiasm**

The Partition of colonial India weakened the idea of Hindustani, though Mahatma Gandhi strongly stood in favour of Hindustani. He wrote in the *Harijan* on 10 August 1947 that “[d]uring the crisis the Congress must stand firm like a rock. It dare not give way on the question of the *lingua franca* of India. It cannot be Persianized Urdu or Sanskritized Hindi. It must be a beautiful blend of the two simple forms written in either script”.<sup>30A</sup> The death of Gandhi on 30 January

1948 was detrimental to the idea of Hindustani as a national language. Demands of Hindi in Nagari gathered support. Hindi lobby now vigorously demanded the acceptance of Sanskritized Hindi in Nagari as the national language of India. Many Congressmen now supported them. G.V. Mavalankar in a letter to G.S. Gupta attacked the pledge of Hindustani. He argued that only Sanskritized Hindi as the national language could provide national unity. In a meeting, he said:

Communal unity did not mean the majority submerging themselves to please a militant or fanatic minority. While Sanskritised Hindi alone could be the national language capable of making the country strong and united, English, Arabic and Persian should be abandoned altogether.<sup>31</sup>

Nehru rejected such views and questioned how they were an ‘appeasement of Muslims’ or meant “just to attain some kind of communal unity”.<sup>32</sup> He criticized the Hindi lobby and wrote to G.S. Gupta that the “protagonists of Hindi look at the language question in a very limited way. Often they are not cognisant of the great literatures of the world and the history of languages. English is a powerful language because it has kept its doors and windows always open”.<sup>33</sup>

Though the baton of Hindustani was taken by Nehru after Gandhi’s death, the Hindi lobby started adopting coercive policies. Z.H. Lari informed the Constituent Assembly in July 1948 when schools reopened, his six-year-old son was asked not to bring Urdu books any more. Subsequently, Lari proposed an amendment to incorporate an article in the Constitution guaranteeing primary education in one’s mother tongue to any minority. Nehru entirely agreed with the object of the amendment proposed by Lari, though he believed that the discussion and incorporation of the issue in the Constitution will only delay the process of the making of the Constitution. He also believed that it was, however, a policy matter rather than an issue to be incorporated in the Constitution. He wrote to the provincial governments to follow such a policy.<sup>34</sup> It was not only Urdu speakers who were developing grievances but some regional languages also experienced the thoughtless and enthusiastic implementation of the Hindi policy. In 1948, Bihar adopted Hindi as its State language and



by a corollary order of June 1948 it was also made the “sole court language” in the whole of Bihar.<sup>35</sup> The order was vehemently opposed in Dhanbad, a sub-division of Manbhum district,<sup>36</sup> where a good number of Bengali populations resided.<sup>37</sup> Signature campaigns were carried out and letters were sent to the Central Government.<sup>38</sup> When the Bihar government justified the order by invoking the Census (1931) figures that showed presence of less than 50% Bengalis in the region, Nehru was not pleased. Rather he questioned the principle itself. He demanded making of a more liberal policy specially for the regions which had large number of speakers other than the State language. Subsequently, the Congress party passed a resolution in this regard (details of this resolution are given below). Through another directive the Bihar government decided to replace Bengali language by Hindi in primary and secondary schools. When this was imposed in Purulia, another sub-division of Manbhum district, 5,000 Bengali-speaking students abstained from school. A complaint was also sent to Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru immediately send a telegram to the Bihar Premiere Sri Krishna Sinha to adopt a policy that education must be given in the mother tongue wherever sufficient number of students demanded so.<sup>39</sup> Abul Kalam Azad also complained that the Bengali-speaking children in Manbhum district of Bihar and the Urdu-speaking children in U.P. were being imparted education in Hindi only. He discussed with Nehru to issue a circular to “all provincial governments that education up to the sixth standard” must be imparted in the mother tongue and “Hindi be taught from the seventh standard only”. Nehru agreed that a circular must be sent.<sup>40</sup> Some resentment had also developed in the south. Speaking at the Dakshina Bharat Hindustani Prachar Sabha, Madras, Nehru said that he had heard some voices that “Hindustani was being imposed and it was being set up above the regional languages”. He allayed such confusions and clarified that regional languages would be given importance in the regions. He also disapproved deviation “from the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi” in adopting a national language. Nehru stated that he would “express his views strongly when the matter comes up before the [Constituent] Assembly”.<sup>41</sup>

Before the Assembly debated on the issue, Jawaharlal Nehru campaigned to save Hindustani. Speaking at the Osmania University, Hyderabad on 26 Dec 1948 Nehru criticized the attempts to produce

a somewhat “pure Urdu” or “pure Hindi”. He admired the attempts for the development of Turkish commenting that “Kamal Pasha, when he wanted to develop Turkish, appointed a commission to collect good village words which were incorporated and popularized in schools and colleges”. Nehru also praised English because the language progressively adopted words from other languages. Hence, he wanted Hindustani to adopt “familiar English expressions, such as station, instead of using some fantastic Hindustani word which might not be understood”.<sup>42</sup> Nehru explicitly attacked the politicization of the national language question when he addressed the Gujarat Vernacular Society on 12 February 1949. The Society, founded by Colonel Alexander Forbes, was intending to change its name to Gujarat Vidya Sabha. The programme was presided by the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly G.V. Mavalankar, who expressed his views against Hindustani. Nehru countered saying that “[i]t is unfortunate that the [national] language question is not a literary question but has become a political and a communal question.” He appealed to the supporters of Hindi that the correct approach would be “to adopt a language which is understood by the majority of people”.<sup>43</sup> Nehru indicated that he was not fixed to the name of language and it could be either Hindi or Hindustani. But the doors of that language should remain open to either incorporating new words from English or from Persian. Nehru also wrote an article in the *National Herald* on similar lines to reach a larger public. The article was published on 13 February 1949. He started: “I am writing this article not as a Prime Minister but as an author and as a person intensely interested in the question of language. I am interested in the question because of its political and, unfortunately, communal aspects. Of far greater importance, however, are the wider cultural aspects.” He reiterated that India must have an all-India language and that could not be English. Nehru wrote that he was distressed with the way the question of language was considered and debated. He stated that he was not fixed to the term Hindi or Hindustani, “except for the fact that every word had a history behind it and connotes something very definite, which limits its meaning”. He was also ready to accept some compromise on the question of script. Nehru wrote that “[a]s for the script, it is clear that the Nagari script will be the dominant script. But again, because I think it wrong to be exclusive, both from the cultural and political points of view, I think that the Urdu



script should be recognized and taught, where desired. We cannot ask all people to learn both these scripts.” It seemed that Nehru was ready to compromise with the Hindi lobby without losing the original concept of Hindustani. He also attacked the tendency to translate well-known common English words and warned “if tendency persists, that surely was murder of a fine vehicle for the expression of thought”.<sup>44</sup> Nehru emphasized that Persian had played an important role in developing Indian languages and “an attempt at undoing and going back would be depriving one of a cultural heritage”. He reminded that linguistically “no language was nearer to Sanskrit than Persian”. For evolving a national language understood by masses, Nehru proposed a simple exercise—“to collect a number of basic words (approximately 3,000) which might be considered well-known common words, used by the people generally. These might often include alternative words for the same idea, provided both were in common use. This should be the basic vocabulary which everyone, who desired knowledge of the all-India language, should learn.” Another general principle Nehru laid down was that “every child should be given primary education in his or her mother tongue”.<sup>45</sup> This article succeeded in influencing many people and Seth Govind Das, a strong Hindi lobbyist, later remarked that after the publication of this article many politicians changed their position on national language.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Mirza M. Ismail showed his agreement with Nehru, Govind Das attacked Nehru in the Assembly for publicly expressing his personal views. Raghu Vira, who coined many Hindi words, in a letter to Nehru questioned Nehru’s view on the closeness of Sanskrit with Persian. G.S. Gupta in a letter favoured the Hindi, based on Sanskrit, as the national language and the Devanagari as sole script.<sup>47</sup> Nehru politely replied to everyone but he attacked the approach of Hindi supporters when he was speaking at Delhi University a few days later. Nehru called their approach “a negative approach” which was a sign of “narrow-minded mentality” and emerged only from “hatred”. He again reminded that “in the question of [national] language, very wisely Gandhiji showed a way”.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, with Jawaharlal Nehru’s support for Hindustani, the Hindi lobby remained relentless in their demand. Meanwhile in Punjab, Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, demanded the enforcement of Punjabi in Gurumukhi script as the language of Punjab.<sup>49</sup> Nehru indicated that though there would be no compulsion in Punjab he was open to accept

any proposal decided by consensus in Punjab having no hesitation in providing education in Punjabi. Writing to Vallabhbhai Patel, Nehru recalled that the Constitutional amendment proposed by Z.H. Lari, although not accepted, was a good one in regard to the choice of mother tongue.<sup>50</sup>

Time was close for the final discussion on the language provisions in the Constituent Assembly as it was the last big issue to be decided on. To draw certain principles on various language issues, the Congress Working Committee came with a resolution on 5 August 1949. The resolution acknowledged the importance of regional languages and proposed for their protection and growth. However, for bilingual provinces and areas it stated that “if, in bilingual areas, the minority is of a considerable size, i.e. 20% of the population, public documents should be in both languages”. The resolution also emphasized that for “Court the language of the Province or area will be used. However, it will be open to any person having another language to submit petitions in his own language, which is officially recognized”. For educational purposes the resolution proposed that “at the primary stage a child should get instruction in his mother tongue which would be decided by the parents”. Instruction in public primary schools would be given in mother tongue even if mother tongue was not the language of the province or a minority language of the area, provided at least 15 pupils in class demanded instruction in that language. Interestingly enough it was separately written that “for the purposes of this resolution Urdu shall be one of the languages concerned”. The most important indication was on national language. The resolution stated that “for all-India purposes there would be a State language”. It was also indicated that for 15 years English might be used. It was for the first time the Congress showed reluctance to name the national language and also the first time it used the word “State language” instead of “national language”. Since the draft Constitution was tabled many members from Southern India demanded continuation of English, at least for fifteen years.<sup>51</sup> The Congress Working Committee partially agreed to their demand and the final solution was left to the Constituent Assembly.

### **Politics of the Hindi Lobby outside the Constituent Assembly**

It had been decided that the Assembly would discuss the language proposals from 12 to 14 September 1949. The Hindi lobby under the leadership of P.D. Tandon and Seth Govind Das launched a signature campaign in favour of Hindi.<sup>52</sup> Seth Govind Das toured large parts of India and he later claimed to have convinced many members of the Constituent Assembly from Madras, Bengal and Bombay provinces.<sup>53</sup> Seth Govind Das had been made the president of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, in its previous session, held in December 1948. In his presidential speech he thanked P.D. Tandon for assigning him the post. He proposed a new name *Bharati* for the national language, as it closely reflected the tradition and culture of a country named Bharat, rather than Hindi or Hindustani. He also emphasized that the new words in Hindi must be coined from Sanskrit. He believed that Sanskrit, because of its historical role as the mother of all Indian languages, would help in making close contacts with other regional languages. Govind Das also rejected Nehru's proposal to incorporate scientific terminology from English but argued for a terminology based on Sanskrit language instead. Govind Das, nevertheless, appreciated Mahatma Gandhi for his support to Hindi.<sup>54</sup> Under his leadership the Hindi lobby adopted a unique strategy. To convince non-Hindi members in favour of the language, the Hindi lobby used the name of Gandhi and the legacy of the Congress support to a national language.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the Hindi lobby under the leadership of Seth Govind Das fought for Sanskritized Hindi against Hindustani. It seemed that the Hindi lobby succeeded in garnering good support from non-Hindi speakers. The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan convened a National Language Convention at Delhi in support of Hindi and Nagari from 6 to 7 August 1949.<sup>56</sup> A number of writers of regional languages participated in the convention.<sup>57</sup> With the list including the well-known linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Sajanikanta Das, the Secretary of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, from Bengal; L. Krishna Sharma, Secretary Kannad Sahitya Parishad represented Karnataka and the well known poet Vellathol represented Malayalam.<sup>58</sup> The convention explicitly favoured Sanskritized Hindi in Devanagari for a national language. The convention also agreed to the continuation of English for the next ten years in which Hindi progressively should replace English. The Hindi lobby projected the decision of the convention as an agreed solution

to the national language issue. In the convention P.D. Tandon presented Urdu as “the language of military court” and rejected any attempt to adopt Hindustani as the national language. He claimed that the adoption of Hindustani “was an appeasement” to cater to “communal aspirations” and endorsed the decision of the convention to adopt “Hindi as the national language” and Devanagari as “single national script”.<sup>59</sup> Nehru was perplexed with the developments. He wanted the decision on national language to be postponed for ten years but felt that the Assembly would never agree to such a postponement.<sup>60</sup>

It was too late to further postpone the matter. On the very next day a language amendment was tabled on very similar lines to the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’s convention. Some members from southern India were ready to accept Hindi in Devanagari but objected to any progressive transition from English to Hindi in fifteen years but the Hindi lobby did not agree to their demand.<sup>61</sup> It seemed that a new battle was ready to begin between the members from the north and the south on the question of national language. Finally, Nehru showed flexibility agreeing to accept Hindi in Devanagari if consensus emerged. He, however, wanted to broaden the meaning of Hindi. On 11 August he wrote to Amrit Kaur:

It seems to me that in the language controversy we should proceed now on the basis of accepting Hindi and Devanagari. An attempt to put in Hindustani instead of Hindi will have little support and will probably come in the way of other changes that might be brought about. I suggested that we might put an explanation somewhat to the following effect: “Hindi will include allied forms and styles such as Hindustani and Urdu.” This is just an indication. The wording might be improved. If such thing was put in, it would go a long way to meet our point of view. I think most people are agreeable to this, though some people object strongly to the mention of Urdu.<sup>62</sup>

Within two years after the Partition of colonial India the cherished Hindustani project died though Nehru tried to save the concept. In the Constituent Assembly the language proposals were debated by two parties—a strong Hindi lobby and a divided non-Hindi group.<sup>63</sup> Non-Hindi members were keen to retain English for as long as possible and



Nehru was ready to accept the demand from Madras to continue the use of English for fifteen years as it had been already proposed by the Congress Working Committee. The demand of the southern Indian members that no change should take place in the transition period seemed “impracticable” and “undesirable” to Nehru.<sup>64</sup> He advised Amrit Kaur to discuss the matter with Rajaji. Rajagopalachari and Amrit Kaur along with N.G. Ayyangar, K.M. Munshi, Abul Kalam Azad, B.R. Ambedkar, P.D. Tandon and others were members of a special committee appointed by the drafting committee to draft the final language provisions. Azad resigned from the committee and alleged later that the committee neither accepted Hindustani nor was ready to accept any wider interpretation of Hindi.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, a new issue of numerals emerged in the Assembly. K. Santhanam, a member from Madras, had suggested the use of Arabic numerals but the Hindi lobby resented it and demanded the adoption of Nagari numerals instead.<sup>66</sup> Seth Govind Das in June had already raised the question of Hindi numerals.<sup>67</sup> On 24 August, Nehru wrote a letter to N.G. Ayyangar, an important member of the special committee expressing his unhappiness over the numeral controversy: “It seems to me that most members of the Assembly do not know that the whole system of numerals in use today all over the world is of Indian origin. They get rather mixed up by these numerals being called Arabic numerals”. He advised Ayyangar that he must not show any weakness on the question and it was right to use the phrase “the international form of Indian numerals”. Nehru hoped that a Schedule of languages would also be added. Understanding inevitable exclusion of Urdu script from national language, he asked Ayyangar that “Urdu will be included” in the list of Indian languages.<sup>68</sup> Despite Nehru’s anxiousness and clear opposition from the southern Indian members, the Hindi lobby preferred to decide the matter of numerals by voting.<sup>69</sup> Ayyangar complained to Nehru that the Special Committee was also going to permit the use of international numerals only for the first fifteen years. Nehru replied that he was “very tired of all this business”. He informed Ayyangar that “he had asked Munshi to co-operate with Ayyangar”. Nehru “would agree to anything” that the duo prepared. The final draft was prepared by the special committee, hence referred to as the Munshi-Ayyangar formula.

### **The Munshi-Ayyangar Formula and the Constituent Assembly Debate**

The Munshi-Ayyangar formula or draft language proposals were tabled on 12 September 1949. Tabled the proposals, N.G. Ayyangar seemed very grim commenting that “it was not without a pang that he agreed to that decision” because “it involved his bidding good-bye to a language on which India had built and achieved freedom”. He lamented on a possible exclusion of English in near future. Ayyangar informed that “there was, however, one thing about which we reached a fairly unanimous conclusion that we should select one of the languages in India as the common language of the whole of India”. He demanded from the members of the Assembly to accept the formula as a whole as it emerged as “a compromise”. He painfully said that the compromise came after “great sacrifices of opinion, of very greatly cherished views and interests”.<sup>70</sup>

The draft had four chapters and a schedule. The first chapter proposed Hindi in Devanagari script with international forms of Indian numerals as the “official language” of the Union. But this provision was deferred and English was to be retained for the next fifteen years. To satisfy the Hindi lobby, it was left to the President to allow the use of Hindi language or Devanagari forms of numerals in addition to English language and the international form of numerals in the interim. To fulfil the demand of non-Hindi members Parliament was allowed to further provide for the use of English language even after fifteen years. These concessions later strengthened confusion in the two blocs. The Hindi supporters believed that Hindi had become the national language of the republic of India with the acceptance of the Constitution and they demanded its early implementation i.e. within fifteen years. The non-Hindi bloc thought that English would continue for fifteen years and after that the Parliament would decide whether English could be continued at least for some purposes.<sup>71</sup> These contrary interpretations were of significance in 1950s and 60s. To implement the adoption of Hindi within the fifteen years transition period, there was a provision for the formation of a Language Commission after each five-year interval whose recommendations had to be first examined by a Parliamentary Committee before implementation. These provisions were



meant to check any hasty implementation of Hindi as the official language. There was an important and historical change on the issue of national language. Hindi was mentioned as the “official language” in spite of “national”. Hindi lobby did not understand and almost ignored the change. For them it was not a big matter whether Hindi was called ‘national’ or ‘official language’.<sup>72</sup> An enthusiastic supporter of Hindi R. V. Dhulekar continuously called it national language in the Assembly. When Guruv Reddy of Mysore objected, Dhulekar rebuked him saying that “I say it is the official language and it is the national language. You may demure to it. You may belong to another nation but I belong to Indian nation, the Hindi nation, the Hindu nation...”<sup>73</sup> Hindi enthusiasts failed to understand the difference. A national language means a language enshrined as the language of masses, a language which reflect some affiliation with its people. In a multi-lingual nation only a neutral language could be designated as national in India. A shift from a neutral, un-iconic national language Hindustani to iconic and official language Hindi was, hence, a great change.<sup>74</sup> Soon iconic Hindi was identified as a provincial language. The view that Hindi is a provincial language was first expressed in the Assembly itself when S.V. Krishnamoorti Rao stated:

My respectful submission is that today Hindi is only a regional language and a provincial language and just because it is being spoken by about ten crores of people out of thirty-two crores, we are raising it to the level of a common language. I would call all languages spoken in India as our national languages—Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Gujerati and all other languages are national languages.<sup>75</sup>

It was a new and unique idea though perfectly correct that every Indian language must be called national language, not only Hindi. Another member of the Constituent Assembly sharply objected to calling Hindi a national language. Shankarrao Deo of Bombay province reacted: “I am one of those who have been insisting that this language which will replace English should not be called the national language. If you mean by national language one language for the whole country, then I am against it. I must make it quite clear. India is a nation and I am Indian

but my language is Marathi".<sup>76</sup> These outbursts were against iconic Hindi and against the enthusiasm of its propagandists. These views further strengthened and shaped in 1950s when Hindi protagonists failed to develop Hindi in an inclusive language. The strong view of the Hindi lobby over the question of numerals also alienated non-Hindi speakers in the Assembly.<sup>77</sup>

The second chapter provided for the regional languages. A State was free to adopt any language or languages or Hindi or may continue the use of English. Here, to avoid discrimination against any language the President was authorised to direct States to use language(s) other than the State language spoken by a substantial population of the State. In the third chapter English was recognized as the language of the Supreme Court, High Courts and all legislations (of Union or States governments) till the Parliament changes it by law. Hindi lobby reacted on these provisions. They demanded that Hindi should be allowed for the courts' proceedings in the Hindi-speaking provinces. At the end of the debate States were authorised to prescribe the use of Hindi or any provincial language for High Court proceedings with the consent of the President.<sup>78</sup> The fourth chapter i.e. Special Directives was the most crucial and important one. It assigned "the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi". It also suggested a direction for further development of Hindi. The development should go in a way that the official language must "serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India". It was also proposed that the language would "secure its enrichments by assimilating the forms, style and expression used in Hindustani, and in the other languages of India". Under pressure from Hindi lobby it was also directed that "*wherever necessary or desirable*" the language could draw "its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages". This particular directive was later used to justify the process of Sankritization of Hindi.. The other directives, such as suggesting the development of Hindi in a way to make it a vehicle for composite culture, were certainly incorporated to direct the liberal enrichment in the official language Hindi. These were, however, ignored by the Hindi lobby. A Schedule of the languages was also attached with the draft proposal to recognize some Indian languages. The Schedule included twelve important regional languages and Urdu. The inclusion of the

Schedule in the draft proposal of the Constitution was meant to recognize Indian languages. Interestingly, Urdu was also recognized as an Indian language, though all other languages in the Schedule were regional languages.<sup>79</sup> The discussion above shows that Urdu got a place in the Schedule with the support of Nehru. It was Nehru's conscience and his ethos of pluralism that prevented the exclusion of Urdu from the Constitution of India.

Nonetheless, the proposed articles on the language issue were not received uncritically by the Assembly members. There were more than 300 amendments to the draft language provisions of the Constitution, highest among any other provision of the Constitution.<sup>80</sup> The number of amendments shows deep feelings of members on the issue. Many members proposed more than two or three amendments in their name.<sup>81</sup> It was not possible to allow every member move and speak on his amendment personally as it could take several days for discussion. Hence, the President Rajendra Prasad took every amendment as moved. Every member, who wished so, was allowed to speak on his amendment or withdraw it without discussing in the Assembly. This was advised to complete the debate within allotted times. However, there were only a few amendments which were fundamental in nature and which had garnered some support within the Assembly. First, that *status quo* should be maintained and the question of language should be left to the future Parliament. Second, Hindustani in two scripts should be made the official language in spite of Hindi in Devanagari. Third, Sanskrit should be made the official language of India. Fourth, the Roman script should be the script of the official language in spite of Devanagari. The first proposal was advanced by S.V. Krishnamoorthy Rao who pointed out in support of his amendment that Hindi was still an underdeveloped language and 'the question of language could not be looked objectively in the present situation'.<sup>82</sup> It may be observed that a good number of members were in favour of postponement. Two other members moved similar amendments—Qazi Syed Karimuddin<sup>83</sup> of C.P. and Berar, and P.T. Chacko,<sup>84</sup> a member of Travancore & Cochin. It may also be observed that the movers of these amendments had different positions on the language issue and were not united or strong enough to carry forward their proposals. The proposal that 'Sanskrit should be the official and national language of India' was

moved by Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra of Bengal. Although it was not a serious attempt to make Sanskrit the national language of India, its mover provided significant insights why he proposed so. Maitra interpreted that Hindi was also a provincial language like many other languages in the country. Acceptance of Sanskrit, Maitra argued, would dispel all such psychological feelings and a sense of parity would evolve. Maitra attacked the Hindi protagonists' politics against Urdu or simple Hindi. He argued that if Hindi could be learned in 15 years Sanskrit could also be. Maitra also demanded retention of English arguing that the national movement was against British domination of country but not against the English language and culture.<sup>85</sup> It seems that Maitra covertly attacked the sankritization of Hindi by proposing Sanskrit as the national as well as official language. He attracted some support for his move. Syama Prasad Mookerjee of West Bengal supported Sanskrit because it was 'the mother-language of India'.<sup>86</sup> Kulandhar Chaliha of Assam also liked the idea.<sup>87</sup> It was clear that the question of Sanskrit was raised by Maitra only to ridicule the Hindi lobby which opposed the move vehemently. Maitra did not seek to put his amendment for vote. Nevertheless, it was Maitra who, in the Assembly, was the first to demand the induction of Sanskrit in the Schedule of Indian languages. This move found favour and Sanskrit was given a place in the final draft. The assumption that Sanskrit was given a place in the final Schedule of languages because Urdu was inducted in it seems incorrect.<sup>88</sup> We find no discussion in the Assembly to suggest that there was any demand to treat Sanskrit and Urdu at parity.

The other two kinds of amendments were somehow similar in nature. The amendments demanding retention of Hindustani in two scripts did not find favour in the Assembly. Nonetheless, Hindustani as a national language was liked by a good number of members. If we consider the amendments demanding Roman script for national language as merely another way to favour Hindustani, the support to Hindustani seemed exponential. The amendment to adopt Hindi in the Roman script was moved by Frank Anthony. Frank Anthony also opposed sanskritized Hindi and termed it 'new Hindi'. He believed that if Roman script was adopted for Hindi the provincial languages might also adopt it for their languages and it would be a 'decisive blow in the cause of Indian unity and national integration'. Anthony lamented

that due to a sense of hatred, English was excluded from the Schedule of languages.<sup>89</sup> However, the inclusion of English in the Schedule of languages was then not demanded by Anglo-Indian Anthony but by a Madrasi Subbarayan.<sup>90</sup> Second proposal for the adoption of the Roman script came from a Punjabi and Akali leader Sardar Hukam Singh. He demanded that ‘instead of Hindi in Devanagari script it should be Hindustani in the Roman script’. He was the one who has provided pointed reasons in favour of the Roman script. A similar amendment was also moved by P. Subbarayan. Sardar Hukam Singh’s speech highlights that the politics of Hindi lobby annoyed some of its previous supporters and they started reversing their earlier decision to support Hindi as an official language.

[W]hen this [language] question arose here for the first time I was consulted by several members and I gave my unreserved support for Hindi in the Devanagari script....

As the days passed I have changed my mind. The most enthusiastic protagonists of this Hindi have alienated my sympathy and I must say that I agree with Mr. Anthony. I am one of those who have withdrawn their support from Hindi in Devanagari script simply because of the fanaticism and intolerance of those who support it.<sup>91</sup>

The retraction of support to Hindi were replicated in the coming decades and similar reasons were cited. At that time, Hukam Singh was anxious because a demand of Akalis for Punjabi was being ignored in his state. But the withdrawal of support for Hindi was not limited to its known opponents but was developing as a phenomenon. When the debate was reaching its end and P. D. Tandon started to speak in favour of Hindi he was frequently interrupted. Tandon argued that the idea of a national language took shape in Bengal. Lakshmi Kanta Maitra, interrupting him said: “[w]e have been amply rewarded for all that!”<sup>92</sup> Tandon vehemently demanded the adoption of Hindi numerals and asked for a referendum on this issue. Many members shouted “[i]f there is a referendum in India Hindi will go!”<sup>93</sup> Syama Prasad Mookerjee also challenged Tandon over the referendum. The situation came under control when President Rajendra Prasad pacified members and emphasised that there was no provision for referendum. It seemed

that many members from Bengal, Bombay and Madras provinces increasingly started opposing Hindi within the Assembly while they were supporting Hindustani. Lakshmi Kanta Maitra from West Bengal, B. Das from Orissa, K. Chaliha from Assam, B.M. Gupte and N.V. Gadgil from Bombay, and Jerome D'Souza, L. Krishnaswami Bharati, G. Durgabai along with P. Subbarayan from Madras were supportive of Hindustani. Ms. Durgabai who had once promoted Hindi in southern India said that she did believe that "in the interest of national unity, Hindustani alone could be the national language of India".<sup>94</sup> It may be rightly argued that Hindustani had greater support among non-Hindi speakers rather than Hindi. It would also be wrong to assume non-Hindi members as a uniform bloc. The members of this bloc had different, often contrary, opinions on the national language. There were members who did not have any objection to accepting either Hindi or Hindustani. Some members were opposed to Hindi in any form. But there were also members who were sympathetic to Hindustani or an inclusive form of Hindi.<sup>95</sup> Then, why was Hindustani not adopted as the national or official language? The answer lies in the opposition of the Hindi lobby which was numerically strong and opposed to Hindustani. It must also be recognized that the draft proposals were accepted with a large majority because of the presence of the Hindustani clause. Durgabai's support for the draft indicated this.<sup>96</sup> Many others expressed similar views. Shankararao Deo attacked the Hindi lobby but supported the draft due to this directive.<sup>97</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru was the man behind this directive. He himself would have not agreed to accept the draft provisions in the absence of this particular directive.<sup>98</sup> Nehru said that when he accepted the word Hindi he was a little afraid that "it might signify some constricted and restricted meaning" but now he felt that it would be "an inclusive language and not an exclusive one, and include in it all the language elements in India which have gone to build it up with a streak of Urdu or a mixture of Hindustani". Nehru knew that the proposed draft was not a perfect one but there was no other way and therefore supported it.

I support that amendment, not because I think it is perfect in every way; perhaps if I had my way, I would like to change it here and there. But I know that this is the result of continuous effort and endeavour, and thought and





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consultation, and as a result of all that consultation and thought, some integrated thing took shape. Now it is a difficult matter to alter or vary something that is an integrated whole, which displays a certain strain of thought. You may change it here and there but I do not think that will do justice either to the original amendment or the person who wants to change it. It would be far better if some other integrated solution was found if the first one was not liked or approved of. Therefore, although I would have liked, perhaps if I had a chance, to lay greater emphasis on some aspects of that amendment, nevertheless after all that has happened I think that amendment displays not only the largest measure of agreement but also, I think, a thought-out approach to this difficult problem.<sup>99</sup>

In his speech, Nehru clarified the two possible effects of language as: “It is a unifying factor and it is also a factor promoting disunity.” Though Nehru was not happy with the enthusiasm of the Hindi lobby he felt that the prescribed formula was a possible solution for the unity of India at that time. He said to the members of the assembly: “All of us here, I have no doubt, wish to promote the integrity of India.” The larger target of the promotion of unity of India was a decisive reason, for which Nehru wanted to make Hindustani the national language. So, when he found consensus developing on the Munshi-Ayyangar formula, he accepted it. Here we must note that because Nehru supported the formula others supported it. Shankarrao Deo had already indicated that.<sup>100</sup> Abul Kalam Azad was a strong votary of Hindustani, stating in the Assembly:

The term “Hindustani” has developed a wider connotation; it embraces all forms of the language spoken in Northern India. It includes ‘Hindi’ as well as ‘Urdu’ and even more than that. It includes each and every shade of the spoken language of the North. It does not exclude any. It covers all.

But he did not oppose the Munshi-Ayyangar formula, though, he warned the nation:

Today you will decide that the national language of the Indian Union will be “Hindi”. You may decide that. There is nothing substantial in the name of “Hindi”. The real problem is the

question of the characteristic of the language. We wanted to keep it in its real form by calling it “Hindustani”. Your majority did not agree to it. But it is still in the hands of our countrymen not to allow the shape of Hindi to be deformed and instead of making it an artificial language let it remain an easy and intelligible medium of expression.<sup>101</sup>

Azad, like Nehru accepted the draft language provisions because there was a ray of hope that Hindi would be developed in an inclusive form. So did many non-Hindi speakers. It was only the Hindi-speaking people who wanted a pure form of Hindi. Seth Govind Das, Raghu Vira, Tandon with many other Hindi protagonists attacked Urdu and Hindustani in the Assembly. Their other objective was to ensure that English should not be retained for more than fifteen years. Their enthusiasm to hasten the implementation of Hindi and their attack on Hindustani cautioned non-Hindi speakers in the Assembly. However the latter were not united to stall the acceptance of Hindi. The legacy of the national movement to achieve a national language could not be undone at that time. At the end of the debate, the Constituent Assembly accepted the draft language provisions with minor changes. It was left to the republic of India to evolve an official language and the question of national language was left to Indian masses.

## **Conclusion**

After the acceptance of most of their demands the Hindi lobby engaged in evolving a new form of the official language—Hindi. They preferred a Sanskritized form over an inclusive Hindi by ignoring an important directive in the Constitution and ended up not helping the Hindi-speaking masses with their invention. For the masses the official language became unintelligible. However, an inclusive form of Hindi or rather Hindustani spread through Hindi cinema in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>102</sup> Abul Kalam Azad was correct to claim that it would be from the masses that the real national language would emerge. This was also the view of Jawaharlal Nehru who fought a new battle for inclusive Hindi in the decade of 1950s but failed. In 1963 when he was going to support the Official Language Bill, Nehru criticized the foolishness of the Hindi-Urdu controversy and again made a plea for

a simple language.<sup>103</sup> The Bill was intended to provide an assurance that English might be retained even after the 15 years deadline envisaged by the Constitution. Nehru had already assured that in 1959, but even now he rejected any explicit commitment to continue the use of English forever.<sup>104</sup> This shows his continuous commitment to indigenous national language which did not wane with time. It started with his support to Hindustani, reflected in his struggle against the dogmatism of the Hindi lobby and then in his hopes for an inclusive form of Hindi. For him English was a great language—modern and inclusive, but never possibly a national language of India. This part of Nehru’s support and admiration for indigenous all-India language still remains unexplored. His celebrated biographer S. Gopal praised Nehru for the retention of English in the Constituent Assembly for at least fifteen years.<sup>105</sup> Other biographers follow a similar line. It was almost ignored that English was retained for the simple reason that it facilitated communication across India and not because Nehru had any ill-designs against Hindi. Robert D. King who has worked on Nehru and language politics and is very sympathetic to him portrayed Nehru in these words: “Before Independence, and indeed afterwards, Nehru was as insistent as any other leader of India that Hindi [actually Hindustani] and not English would eventually have to become the national language. But, unlike many of his comrades in the struggle for freedom, Nehru was never an extremist on the issue. He himself was far more comfortable in English than ever in Hindi, and *no one knew better than he that official India could not function without English.*”<sup>106</sup> This observation in collaboration of another that “Nehru’s cradle language in Allahabad was Urdu-Hindi, but by any unbiased evaluation his ‘native’ language was English” presented Nehru as a real person behind retention of English. King also sketches a parallelism between Nehru and Churchill for their love of the English language.<sup>107</sup> Hence, King carefully paints Nehru as a supporter of English. From this point of view Hindi was used in Nehru’s speeches only for winning votes. These arguments must be seen in the light of King’s own understanding that “[t]here was at Independence and there is now realistically no alternative to English as an all-India language for official working purposes.” This view is, however, not much different from the view of some colonialists that there could be only one link language in India, i.e. English. Available literature showed that Nehru was keen to evolve an indigenous all-

India language. King's narrative ultimately diminishes Nehru's support for an indigenous national language to narrow politics, not recognizing that Nehru was supportive of Hindustani but opposed to a Sanskritized form of Hindi. We have discussed Nehru's visions in length. Nehru imagined a language, which could be liberal in borrowing words from Indian languages and would not purge English scientific-technical terms. A language rooted in indigenous languages but open to new ideas of the world. This vision of Nehru was not tolerated by Hindi protagonists in the Constituent Assembly. Even then Nehru did not give up hope and tried to save his vision through the Special Directive. He was open enough to tolerate others' views and not impose his own. In the name of consensus he agreed to the Munshi-Ayyangar formula.

It must also be noticed that Jawaharlal Nehru was keen to promote some kind of linguistic unity in India. In the early 20th century national unity could not be imagined without some kind of linguistic unity. Robert D. King traced that '[t]he linking of language and nationalism can be traced at least as far back as Rousseau, who had argued... that language originally distinguished nations from one another.'<sup>108</sup> The emergence of the modern nation-state was seen closely associated with the emergence of a national language. Two prominent views on the origin of nationalism as ideology of a modern nation-state also relates the nation to the national language. The primordial theory on the emergence of nationalism attributed specific importance to linguistic identity. Adam Smith argued that "ethnic", i.e. primordial identities of language, myths, history, and religious traditions played an important role in the emergence of nations. He argued that the nations appropriated these primordial identities.<sup>109</sup> The Modernist theory on the origin of nationalism also emphasizes the centrality of language to a nation. Benedict Anderson argues that the proliferation of print culture and standardization of language became instrumental for the emergence of nationalism. With these developments people identified themselves as a "close community" associated with each other through a common language. Anderson, however, termed them an "Imagined Community". The standardized forms of languages, promoted by the proliferation of print culture were adopted as the national language of the nation.<sup>110</sup> This tendency to relate nation and language was more vigorously expressed in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Historian Arnold Toynbee claimed that after

the First World War “the growing consciousness of nationality had attached itself neither to traditional frontier nor to new geographical associations but almost exclusively to the mother-tongues.”<sup>111</sup> It is also argued that the phenomenon of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe certainly had an impact on colonies where the ideology of nationalism replicated itself in colonies. The manifestation of the ideology of nationalism in India replicated the idea that a nation must be based on a national language.<sup>112</sup> Indian nationalists including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru did not remain uninfluenced. Gandhi at a very early stage of his political life, though Nehru a little later, reached the same conclusion that India must have a national language. Both identified simple spoken forms of north India as best suited for this. Their nationalism was liberal enough to go beyond the European concept by accepting two scripts for a national language. Nehru, when engaged with the issue, increasingly developed the idea how the national language could be developed. He was impressed with the growth of English. Fascinated with the experiment of developing a modern Turkish language, he wanted the Indian national language to evolve into an all inclusive language borrowing words from Hindi and Urdu and also from other Indian languages. For official purposes he proposed a language with a smaller vocabulary. His proposal that literary forms of Hindi and Urdu could remain was perfect to allay the fear of Hindi and Urdu lobbies, not ready to merge their languages and believed them to be vehicles of culture. Nehru’s idea was both democratic and sophisticated. For reasons of democracy he was not keen to impose his idea. Considerations of democracy and pragmatism led him to accept Hindi in Devanagari as the official language for the Indian republic. This approach could not ignore India’s linguistic diversity leading Nehru to direct the inclusion of the Schedule of Indian languages in the Constitution of India. Keen on the evolution of an indigenous and inclusive official language, he was not averse to promoting a greater role for regional languages. The next two decades witnessed the emergence of linguistic pluralism in India.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, Hindi lobbyists were deeply influenced by the ideology of linguistic nationalism. They attacked Urdu, blaming its foreign origins and ignored regional varieties of Hindi when asked to evolve an official language. Their ideas reflect a form of cultural nationalism which was expressed in the form of linguistic nationalism.

**Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Nehru (2003), p. 29 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Writing in *Young India* while appealing to Madras on January 21, 1920 Gandhi wrote: “I have come to the deliberate conclusion that no language except Hindustani—a resultant of Hindi and Urdu—can possibly become a national medium for exchange of ideas.” Gandhi (1956), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Speaking at Indore while presiding over the annual conference of *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*, Gandhi said: “It is necessary to give some thought to the definition of Hindi language. I have often said that Hindi is that language which is spoken in the north by both Hindus and Muslims and which is written either in the Nagari or the Persian script. This Hindi is neither too Sanskritized nor too Persianized. The sweetness which I find in the village Hindi is found neither in the speech of the Muslims of Lucknow nor in that of Hindu *pandit* of Prayag. The language which is understood by the masses is the best.” Gandhi (1956), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> On the occasion, when Nehru delivered his first public speech, he doubted his capacity to speak at any length in Hindustani. So, he made his speech in English. Nehru (2003), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> King (1997) traces Nehru’s enthusiasm in far length, pp.153–57.

<sup>6</sup> *SWJN* (1972, Fist Series, Vol. 2), p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> In his autobiography Nehru recalled it as ‘innovation’. Though, Hindustani in Roman script was extensively used in colonial Indian Army and some missionary also used it, but it was not used in public spheres. When Subhas Bose adopted Hindustani in the Roman script in the INA and called it national language, it was not completely a new practice. For details see Husain (2010), pp. 267–74.

<sup>8</sup> Nehru (2003), pp. 451–452.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 453.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 456.

<sup>11</sup> The comprehensive survey of Indian languages was published in eleven massive volumes having nineteen parts. The survey was conducted in thirty years from 1898 to 1928 and was published simultaneously from 1903 to 1928. Grierson wrote providing example from North-East India : “From the little province of Assam, with its population of only about six

and a half million, and a million less than that of London, eighty-one Indian languages were returned at the Census of 1911, and it contained others that were not specially returned. Mezzofanti himself, who spoke fifty-eight languages, would have been puzzled here.” For particular comment see Grierson (1927, *LSI*, Vol. 1 Part I), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Bright (1946), p. 230; Nehru (1941), pp. 241–61.

<sup>13</sup> Bright (1946), p. 231.

<sup>14</sup> Bright (1946), p. 231; Nehru (1941), pp. 241–61.

<sup>15</sup> Bright (1946), p. 233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 235.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 239–40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 240.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> King (1997), p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> Gandhi (1956), pp. 194–97.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad (1940), p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> It can be noticed from the papers of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan that from 1938 the Sammelan returned to its old Hindi-only policy. In its 24<sup>th</sup> session held at Indore the Sammelan under Mahatma Gandhi’s influence passed a resolution explaining the nature of national language. The resolution said that “this Sammelan announces that in the perspective of national language that nature of Hindi would be recognized which is spoken by the people of all religions, rural and urban of Hindu-Muslim etc, in which there is no restriction to Arabic, Persian, English, Sanskrit words and idioms and which is written in Nagari or Urdu script.” Contrary to this approach the Sammelan in its 26<sup>th</sup> session held in 1937 attacked the government of Frontier Province for using only Urdu script.

In the 27th session, 1938, the Sammelan asked national leaders to accept Hindi as language and Devanagari as script to be used in Central Legislation. In the session the Sammelan criticized Alwar state for making Urdu a compulsory official language of the state. In 1939 the Sammelan attacked Hindustani policy being implemented by various Congress governments in United Provinces and Bihar. In 1940 the Sammelan and its leader P.D. Tandon categorically expressed his view against Hindustani. For detail see *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Adheveshan Karyavivran* (n.d., Vol. 1), 24th session, p. 45; 26th session, p. 3; 27th session, p. 10 & p. 21; 28th session, pp. 7–8, pp. 31–34 and pp. 37–42; 29th session, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> See ‘Gandhi-Tandon Correspondence’ in Gandhi (1956), pp. 133–44.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>30A</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

<sup>31</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, IInd Series (hereafter SWJN-II) (1989, Vol. 8), p. 168 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 163 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Manbhum was a part of Bengal till 1912. In 1912 it was made a part of Bihar when the new province of Bihar and Orissa was carved out. In 1921 Manbhum was divided into two sub-districts—Dhanbad and Purulia. Socially and economically both sub-districts were very different from each other. Dhanbad, an industrial region, attracted people from different areas though predominantly Hindi spoken. And Purulia had based on agriculture, greater concentration of Bengalis. For more details see Raychaudhury (1964), pp. 79–80.

<sup>37</sup> The Census Report, 1931 shows the presence of about 34% Bengali population in Dhanbad. However, according to the Census Report 1951 the percentage of Bengali population was diminished to 25.4%.

<sup>38</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 8, p. 163 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 9, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 7, p. 514.



<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp. 511–13.

<sup>42</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 9, p. 116.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 119–23.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 129–34.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 132–33.

<sup>46</sup> Govind Das (1958), pp. 128–29.

<sup>47</sup> All these letters were answered by Nehru. An abridged text of these letters is given in footnotes. See *SWJN-II*, Vol. 10, pp. 111–18.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 12, p. 173 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>51</sup> Austin (1966), p. 279.

<sup>52</sup> Das Gupta (1970), p. 135.

<sup>53</sup> This was claimed by Govind Das himself in the Assembly. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (1950, Vol. IX) (hereafter *CAD*), p.1325.

<sup>54</sup> Shukla (1987), pp. 116–45.

<sup>55</sup> Das Gupta (1970), p. 133.

<sup>56</sup> Govind Das (1958), p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Jyotirindra Das Gupta and Granville Austin, both, have argued that the representative of other languages was “selective”, “known-sympathizer of Hindi” and did not represent their respective languages. They claimed that the conference was a claque for Hindi and Govind Das. See Das Gupta (1970), p. 133; and Austin (1966), p.291.

<sup>58</sup> *CAD*, p. 1327.

<sup>59</sup> Austin (1966), p. 291; the reports published in the newspapers specially in *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times* dated 7 August 1949 and 8 August 1949.

<sup>60</sup> On the very same day i.e., 7 August, Nehru expressed his view in a letter to Kailas Nath Katju, who was then the Governor of West Bengal, that he wanted postponement of the issue. *SWJN-II*, Vol. 12, p. 176.

<sup>61</sup> Austin (1966), p. 292.

<sup>62</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol.12, p. 178.

<sup>63</sup> Salil Misra wrote in an article that “Broadly speaking, three positions developed at the CA on the question of an official language for India. The largest group wanted Hindi written in the Nagari script to be declared the official language (a small minority within this group wanted Hindi to be designated the *national* language and not just an official one). This group was led by leaders like Govind Das, Purshottam Das Tandon and Sampurnanand. A small but influential group, led by Nehru and Maulana Azad, wanted to retain the word Hindustani for the official language that could be written in both the Nagari and the Arabic script. Then there was a group consisting of members from the south that did not want any single language to be declared official and wanted this question to be deferred. This group was led by T.T. Krishnamachari who accused Hindi enthusiasts of practising linguistic to talitarianism. There were other positions also but ultimately these three emerged as the dominant ones.” This view imagined non-Hindi group as a single bloc and ignores differences of opinion within non-Hindi members of the Assembly. Misra (April–June 2002), pp. 95–6.

<sup>64</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 12, p. 178.

<sup>65</sup> *CAD*, p. 1452.

<sup>66</sup> Austin (1966), p. 293.

<sup>67</sup> Laxmichand (Saka 1885), p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> *SWJN-II*, Vol. 13, p. 143–44.

<sup>69</sup> Austin (1966), p. 294.

<sup>70</sup> *CAD*, p. 1321.

<sup>71</sup> Seth Govind Das contradicted N.G. Ayyangar in the Constituent Assembly. He said: “Shri Gopaldaswami Ayyangar has told us in his speech today that English may have to be retained for long, even after fifteen years. I must tell him that we do not agree to this. Our definite opinion is that if English is at all to go from the country it must go at the earliest possible moment.” *CAD*, p. 1326.

<sup>72</sup> Seth Govind Das happily accepting the Munshi-Ayyangar formula said: I express my gratitude that Hindi in Devanagari Script alone can be the language of the Union, whether we call it the National language or the State language.” *CAD*, p. 1325.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1348.

<sup>74</sup> King (1997) argues that “[l]anguage can serve either as a badge of membership in the community or as a mean of exclusion or exile. This is an iconic use of language: language as symbol to use non-linguistic goals,” p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> *CAD*, pp. 1335.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1431.

<sup>77</sup> P.D. Tandon, Seth Govind Das and other Hindi supporters relentlessly fought the case of Devanagari numerals. Under pressure from Hindi lobby Munshi-Ayyangar formula incorporated another article that after fifteen years Devanagari numerals may also be used if Parliament decided that. *Ibid*, pp. 1467.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1467.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1321–23.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p.1312.

<sup>81</sup> The strength of the Constituent Assembly was 389 before the Partition including members of British India and Indian States. After the Partition of colonial India the Assembly was reconstituted. The number of members then reduced to 324.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1335–38.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1366–68.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1394–96.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1352–60.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1389.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1402.

<sup>88</sup> This is assumed by Alok Rai, See Rai (2000), p.113.

<sup>89</sup> *CAD*, p. 1360–64.

<sup>90</sup> P. Subbarayan moved an amendment asking the inclusion of English language in the Schedule of Indian languages as fourteenth language. *Ibid*, p. 1401.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1437–39.



<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 1448.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 1446.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 1427.

<sup>95</sup> Misra (April–June 2002), pp. 95–6.

<sup>96</sup> CAD, p. 1428.

<sup>97</sup> Deo also said: “So when you say that Hindi is spoken by the majority of the country I doubt it. I can only concede that it is perhaps understood by the majority, and that too, not the present high-flown Sanskritised Hindi.” Ibid, pp. 1429–36.

<sup>98</sup> A biographer of Jawaharlal Nehru M. Chalapathi Rau concluded that while making Hindi as official language, the Constitution Assembly accepted Jawaharlal’s view that the content of Hindi should reflect the composite culture of India adopting the forms of Hindustani. Rau (1973), p.147.

<sup>99</sup> CAD, p. 1409.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, pp. 1429–36.

<sup>101</sup> For Azad’s speech see CAD, pp. 1452–59.

<sup>102</sup> Ramchandra Guha quoting from essayist and historian Mukul Kesavan’s article on Urdu, Awadh and Hindi Cinema pointed out that the language of Hindi Cinema remained “closer to the colloquial Hindustani”. Guha (2007), p. 729.

<sup>103</sup> For the full speech of Nehru given in Lok Sabha while participating in the debate on the Official Language Bill, 24 April 1963 see *Selected Speeches* (1996, Vol. V), pp. 16–32.

<sup>104</sup> Nehru’s biographer S. Gopal wrote: “To Nehru an explicit commitment to continue English seemed unnecessary and even constitutionally improper; but no Government worthy of their salt were going to budge an inch from the assurance for which the Act had cleared the way. Indeed, apart from assurance, the imposition of Hindi seemed to Nehru impossible, because it would raise such problems and difficulties that no Government could conceivably want to secure the spread of Hindi by force.” Gopal (1984, Vol. III), p. 251.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> King (1997), p. 74.



<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p.142.

<sup>108</sup> King (1997) further argues that “[o]ne of the lesser-known aims of the [French] Revolution was to impose a standard national language on all people of France”. pp. 24–5.

<sup>109</sup> Smith (1986).

<sup>110</sup> Anderson (2006).

<sup>111</sup> King (1997), p. 26.

<sup>112</sup> Salil Misra points out that “the European notion that language forms the bedrock of a nation directly fed into the concern that India should have one major language for the entire country. A single language was seen as the instrument through which a single nation could be forged and developed”. Misra (April–June 2002), p. 89.

<sup>113</sup> For this argument see my paper ‘The Genesis and the Working of the Sahitya Akademi: Linguistic Pluralism in the times of Nationalism’ published in the *IHC: Proceedings, 72nd Session, 2011*.

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