

Contours of Hindi journalism

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POLITICAL power equations have changed drastically in India since 2014 due to the new mobile telephony and the Internet... so the content available in Hindi needs to be accepted with more caution, observes Mrinal Pande, perhaps the first woman editor of a leading Hindi daily, in her book 'The Journey of Hindi Language Journalism in India: From Raj to Swaraj'.

Tackling such a vast subject — its birth, development, acceptability, dominance, commercialisation to mutation and corruption through digitisation — was so formidable a task that it required someone with a deep insight such as Pande.

She describes the British-initiated dichotomy between Hindi and Urdu courtesy a British surgeon of the East India Company, John Gilchrist. He was appointed as the supervisor of the Hindustani Department at Fort William College, Calcutta. He assigned the task of splitting Hindavi (the language of Amir Khusro) to identify Hindi as distinct from Urdu to four 'Bhaka' (read Bhasha) clerks: Munshi Sadasukhlal, a Kayastha; two Brahmins, Pandit Lallulal and Pandit Sadal Mishra; and a Muslim, Syed Insha Allaha Khan.

In the 17th century, the Portuguese had coined another synonym for Hindavi, describing it as 'Indostani'; this later became 'Hindustani'.

Pande sounds almost prophetic when she writes, given the recent statements to promote Hindi as an official language, that "there are many regional biases against the Hindi language, especially in the non-Hindi-speaking areas". These,

she adds, "stem not from a dislike for the language, but from Hindi's perceived proximity to political leaders... powerful political leaders have unfairly pushed for Hindi to be the sole official language".

She traces the rise of Hindi, stating that it got the biggest boost with the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene and his decision in 1920 to address the people through a Hindi journal, *Navjivan*. By now, educated Indians had begun pushing a literary, political and social agenda through the Fort William College version of Hindi, thanks to the efforts of freedom fighters and social reformers.

Pande writes, "In the North, the large community of Hindus and their increasing identification with Hindi as a vehicle of nationalism received a big boost when major political leaders and social reformers began to use Hindi as the unifier of various national agendas... among them were Gandhi, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of Arya Samaj."

We also learn that May 10, 1826, became a historic day for Hindi journalism when the first Hindi newspaper, *Udant Martand*, was published from Calcutta by Jugal Kishore Shukla of Kanpur. She recalls that once the native princes and prince-lings got attracted to the idea of a Hindi newspaper, several of them started their respective ventures, engaging oft times noted persons. Raja Rampal Singh of Kalakankar employed Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya as the editor of *Hindustan*, launched in 1883.

Munshi Naval Kishore's press, established a year after 1857, soon rose to be one of the most commercially successful early publishers of Hindi-Urdu texts.

The book gives the reader a panoramic view of Hindi journalism, including the technology that developed from the now obsolete

hand-operated printing press, to the rise of Hindi journalism in the esteem of the middle class, and to it becoming a money-spinner.

As the awareness of Hindi's influence on the largest section of the North Indian population dawned on entrepreneurs, some major publications like *Dainik Hindustan*, *Navbharat Times*, *Nai Duniya* and later *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Dainik Jagran* hit the market. However, contrary to presumption,

Punjab Kesari came in much later. The original paper started by Lala Jagat Narain was *Hind Samachar* in Urdu.

Pande does not wince from stating how the Hindi newspapers which tackled the basic issues of the common man, its main reader, now tend to move away from these concerns despite the higher literacy levels among the Dalits, the Advaitis, the OBCs. As against the English media, which looked the other way, the neo-upwardly-mobile Hindi print media, perhaps on account of the changing priorities of its readers, is being used ever so often by the ruling establishment to perpetuate and propagate its agenda.



THE JOURNEY OF HINDI LANGUAGE JOURNALISM IN INDIA: FROM RAJ TO SWARAJ

by Mrinal Pande.
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