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The Fictional “Fallout” from Fort William?

ALTHOUGH LANGUAGE CONTROVERSIES WERE “repeated in every part of British India” (Robb 1997, 14) during British rule, the Urdu-Hindi controversy in the North Western (later United) Provinces (NWP) during the latter part of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries became an integral part of the increasingly bitter communal divide between Hindus and Muslims, leading ultimately to the partition of India. The 1837 abolition of Persian in the lower courts generally saw it replaced with local languages: Bengali in Bengal, Gujarati and Marathi in Bombay and Tamil and Telugu in Madras. In the North Western Provinces (NWP), however, the Government adopted Hindustani (or more properly Urdu)¹ in Persian script, which retained much of the previous Persian terminology. Hindus argued that this gave the, mainly Muslim, Urdu-speaking élite an unfair advantage in terms of employment and the new Hindu proto-élite called for Devanagari to be recognized in the courts. Initially, the demand to allow the use of Devanagari was a purely economic one. From 1854 onwards Hindi-medium education, especially at the primary level, had received government encouragement in the NWP, yet all the posts in administration and the courts continued to require Urdu in Persian script. The result of this confused and contradictory colonial language policy was that those educated through Hindi found themselves unable to gain employment in the colonial administration. Crucially, at the same time as the controversy itself was developing, khari boli Hindi was also beginning to develop a Sanskritized literary form. As religious and political conflict intensified, Urdu and this new Sanskritized khari boli Hindi became weapons in the battle and the initial argument of script increasingly developed into one of language as a marker of sociocultural and religious identity.

Fort William College has been seen by many writers as the “origin

¹The complex and often confused and undifferentiated use of the terms Urdu and Hindustani is discussed in detail in the present author’s Ph.D. thesis, “The Colonial Construction of Hindustani 1800–1947” (University of London, 2012).

and fount of linguistic division,” part of a colonial plot of divide and rule (Rai 2001, 23). At the top of the hierarchy of blame is John Gilchrist, the “*bete noire* of the Hindi world, [who] set up Urdu (in the name of ‘Hindoostanee’) against Hindi (*Bhākhā*) and took due care that they ran on two parallel, mutually exclusive lines” (Rai 1984, 8).² Such arguments of a deliberate divide and rule policy come mainly, though by no means exclusively, from Indians in the latter days of British rule, and in the first few decades of Independence. In a 1939 speech on All India Radio, Tara Chand directly attributed the complex problems surrounding the choice of a national language for an independent India to Fort William College. He argued that Lalluji Lal and others were “ordered to prepare books comprising prose texts” and because Braj “had prose barely in name,” they adopted the language of Mir Amman excising the Arabic/Persian words from it, and “replacing them with those of Sanskrit and Hindi” (qtd. in Faruqi 2002a, 399).

...Thus, within the space of less than ten years, two new languages ... were decked out and presented [before the public] at the behest of the foreigner. Both were look-alikes in form and structure,... but their faces were turned away from each other ... and from that day to this, we are wandering directionless, on two paths.

(*ibid.*)

Sulaimān Nadvī, writing in 1941, also subscribed to the theory of British “divide and rule,” insisting that the Hindi being popularized in India was “a deliberate creation of the British rule in India,” and had “never existed before the establishment of Fort William College” (in Ahmad 1941, 121). In a work from 1944, Tara Chand reiterated his earlier arguments that

[...] the zeal of finding distinctions led the professors of the College to encourage attempts to create a new type of Urdu from which all Persian and Arabic words were removed and replaced by Sanskrit words. This was done ostensibly to provide the Hindus with a language of their own. But the step had far-reaching consequences and India is still suffering from this artificial bifurcation of tongues.

(57–58)

Pandit Krishna Prasad Kaul, writing in the 1950s, similarly saw the origins of the controversy, and of khari boli Hindi, as being the work of the colonial government. He suggested that the “new” Hindi owed its origin to “the political expediencies of the British Government” and the

²Rai is describing this viewpoint, not subscribing to it.

encouragement of Fort William College at the end of the eighteenth century. The language produced by Lalluji Lal in *Prēm Sāgar* was, he argued, “neither Urdu nor Brij Bhasha but a mixture of Khari Boli and Hindustani” (1951, 14–15).³

Two decades later J. Das Gupta continued to attribute the “split” between Urdu and Hindi to Fort William College.

During the early years of the foundation of British rule, Dr. J. B. Gilchrist, of Fort William at Calcutta engaged a group of writers to write Hindustani prose. This form of prose was channeled into two distinctly different styles: Hindi, purged as far as possible of Persian words, and Urdu, remaining as close as possible to a Persianized style. From this time onward, the difference between Hindi and Urdu became increasingly sharper.

(1970, 52)

One of the most extreme expressions of this argument is that of Fatehpuri.

[...] the birth of Modern Hindi was not the result of natural or linguistic evolution; [...] it was brought forth at the instigations of Fort William College authorities by an unnatural process. [...] [It] was a pre-planned political manoeuvre, meant to get the minor communities of India into the clutches of Hindu nationalism [...] and was designed against the Indian Muslims, with the active collaboration of British Imperialists. Some, however, regard it a British sponsored scheme to do away every trace of Muslim supremacy and create a wedge between Hindus and Muslims, for furthering their policy of divide et impera.

(1987, 43–44)

There were also those among the British who saw Fort William as having deliberately created a separate style of Hindi. In 1867 Frederick Growse asserted:

The division of the vernacular into Hindi and Urdu was a most unfortunate invention of the munshis of the College of Fort William at the beginning of the present century, and has never been generally recognized by the natives. [...] Hindus and Musalmans alike, till very recent times, used one dialect for popular composition, though the Hindu, [...] would naturally, though not inevitably nor uniformly, use more Sanskrit words, and the Musalmān, from the nature of his religion, more Persian words.

(1867, 178)

In 1889, George Grierson maintained that Lalluji Lal’s translation of

³Translations from Urdu are by the present author unless otherwise noted.

Prēm Sāgar resulted in “practically a newly-invented speech” (107) and in his 1896 introduction to *The Satsaiya of Bihari* he again suggested that Gilchrist had “created” a new language. The language used by Lalluji Lal was, he said,

[...] invented by him at the instigation of Gilchrist. That gentleman wanted an Urdū book written, with all Arabic and Persian words excluded, their places being taken by Hindū words. *Such a language did not exist in India before.* Urdū had been used to some degree, as a vehicle of literature, by Musalmāns, and was the *lingua franca* of the Bāzār. [...] Urdū was nowhere the language of any locality or any nation. It was simply a broken mixture of half a dozen Indian dialects, used by the Mughul conquerors in their intercourse with natives, and larded freely with foreign, Arabic, and Persian, words. Gilchrist made the initial mistake of supposing that it was a national language, and *he attempted to restore it to what he imagined must have been its original Hindū form*, by turning out all the Arabic and Persian words, and substituting Hindū ones. [...] When, therefore, Lallū-jī-lāl wrote his *Prēma-sāgara*, in Hindī, he was inventing an altogether new language.⁴

(1896, 12–13, emphasis added)

In his 1898 literary history, the Madras civilian Robert Watson Frazer observed that “High Hindī” had “evolved under the influence of the English who induced native writers to compose works for general use in a form of Hindustani in which all the words of Arabic and Persian origin were omitted,” with Sanskrit words being employed in their place (265).

In a footnote in his 1897 translation of *Prēm Sāgar*, Frederic Pincott, however, made a completely different claim. Having first lamented that Hindi had not received the encouragement it deserved, he asserted that Gilchrist

[...] devoted his attention to the cultivation of the *patois* which formed the medium of communication between the Persian rulers of northern India and the inhabitants. He caused a whole literature to be written in this mongrel dialect, and by *copiously enriching it with Persian words, may be said to have created what Europeans call the Hindustani language.* This artificial form of speech having been adopted for public business in 1830, has spread since then at a prodigious rate, and has had the unfortunate result of greatly obstructing communication between the rulers and the ruled.

(*Prema-Sāgara* 1897, 2n3, emphasis added)

⁴The idea of a “new language” conflicts with his own idea (also that of Dalmia) that Gilchrist was restoring it to its original form.

In his 1920 history of Hindi literature, F. E. Keay returned to the idea of the “creation” of Hindi.

Under the direction of Dr. John Gilchrist he [Lallu Ji Lal] and Sadal Miśra were the creators of modern “High Hindī.” [...] A literary language for Hindi-speaking people which could commend itself more to Hindus was very desirable, and the result was produced by taking Urdu and expelling from it words of Persian or Arabic origin, and substituting for them words of Sanskrit or Hindī origin.

(88)

According to Keay, *Prēm Sāgar* was the “first work in this new dialect” whereas he described *Sinhāsan Battīsī* and *Baitāl Pačīsī* as being in “mixed Urdu and Hindi” (*ibid.*, 89). In his 1921 *Hindi Grammar*, Edwin Greaves observed similarly,

[...] two pundits in Calcutta, Lallu Ji Lal and Sadal Misra, instructed and inspired by the European head of the college in which they were professors, initiated, or to speak more exactly, developed, a movement which is largely responsible for the existence of modern Hindī. The endeavour was made to draw on the Prakrits or Apabranshas and, to some extent, on Sanskrit, for the vocabulary, and to exclude, as far as practicable, Persian and Arabic words not already naturalized.

(2–3)⁵

The expression of such views towards the end of British rule, or in nationalistic writings during the first few decades of independence is, perhaps, to be expected. More recently such arguments have largely been discredited, yet, surprisingly, some twenty-first-century scholars have continued to pursue them. In 2001, Faruqi contended,

[...] the British generated a sense of identity [...] for the Hindus of the North, so as to alienate them from the Muslims with whom they had shared a common language for centuries. The British produced the rabbit of “Hindi” out of their imperial hat within a space of about ten years.

[...]

[...] Urdu was not an instrument of imperial policy, [...] Urdu was a victim, and a very unwilling victim, of the imperial policy. Indeed, modern Hindi was an instrument, and a willing instrument, of that policy.⁶

(2001a, 399, 400)

⁵Greaves states that this was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but this is clearly a mistake or a misprint for nineteenth century as Fort William College was opened in 1800.

⁶The vocabulary used here (“victim” and “instrument”) is loaded and it is not clear how a language can be either “willing” or “unwilling.”

The following year, Orsini, citing Faruqi as her source, maintained that the language of the predominantly urban Hindu-Muslim class of Persian-educated gentry, officials and law professionals used “Hindi” written in the Arabic script as their language of communication “until in the late eighteenth century John Gilchrist and other Orientalists popularized the names ‘Hindustani’ and ‘Urdu’ *in order to spread the notion that there were actually two different languages, one for Hindus and one for Muslims* (2002, 3, emphasis added). And in their 2004 article, Hasnain and Rajyashree argued that with the establishment of Fort William College

Khadi boli was communalized. Hindu and Muslim writers from far-flung places were called to write prose in two styles of *Khadi boli* making use of two different scripts: Devanagari and Perso-Arabic. [...]

[...]

Lallu Ji Lal and Sadal Mishra of the FWC [Fort William College] “created” a new language called “Modern High Hindi” or “Standard Hindi” on sectarian lines expelling words of Persian and Arabic origin from Urdu.

[...]

Thus the establishment of FWC brought about the overt policy of divergence between Hindi and Urdu language, and the covert and subtle policy of a divide between Hindus and Muslims. [...] What became significant in this literary venture was the deliberate use of Devanagari script, which incited the minds of the Hindi revivalists.

(250, 251, emphasis added)

Such arguments, attributing design on the part of Gilchrist or the munshis and pandits at Fort William College, to create a deliberate “divide and rule” split are clearly unsustainable when considered against Gilchrist’s all-inclusive construct of Hindustani as the entire khari boli continuum—a construct which was maintained by the British for nearly a century. Some writers have suggested that Fort William recognized a preexisting linguistic difference and merely “legitimised and consolidated it” (Rai 2001, 23). According to Christopher King, Gilchrist’s own writings suggest that “the ingredients for the bifurcation of Khari Boli into two forms” were already clearly in evidence at the end of the eighteenth century (1994, 26). Amrit Rai went further contending,

[...] Fort William College did not initiate a language policy that subsequently led to the division of the natural language Hindi/Hindavi into its two present forms, modern Hindi and modern Urdu. [...] [T]he *cleavage already existed* when the British came upon the scene. [...]

(1984, 11, emphasis added)

[...] [I]t seems fairly clear that the allegation against the East India Company

or Fort William College of having initiated the division of the naturally evolving language of northern India, namely, Hindavi, into its two modern forms, Urdu and Hindi, is not well-founded; that the split was already a *fait accompli* when the British arrived upon the scene; and that in the given situation, which they had little reason to question or to rectify, they found it advisable to follow a result-oriented, practical policy.

(*ibid.*, 17)

Observations made, “en passant,” by Gilchrist have been taken as “proof” of his desire to distinguish the language along Hindu-Muslim lines. Much has been made, for example, of his comment that “Hindoos will naturally lean most to the *Hinduwee* while the Moosulmans will of course be more partial to Arabic and Persian” whence two styles arise, namely the court or high style, and the country or pristine style” (1800, iv; 1802, 11). Faruqi sees this as a prediction which “found many ways of coming very nearly true” (2001b, 35), but, interestingly, omits the final section of Gilchrist’s observation which refers to a third style, “the middle or familiar current style between them,” which he recommended as “the most useful” (1802, 11). If such conclusions are to be (over)drawn from *this* observation, it would surely follow that Gilchrist’s other “observations” that “Moosulmans are fonder of wearing beards,” and that Hindoos “tie or fix the strings of their garments on the left side, while the Moosulmans prefer the right,” (1800, vii) were also deliberate instances of divide and rule, resulting in the “Beard–No-Beard” and “Left–Right” controversies! Gilchrist’s observations on linguistic styles were precisely that—*observations*—as he tried to make sense of a complex linguistic situation and a language that he found “evanescent.” Alok Rai has suggested that many Indian writers have been content to attribute a deliberate policy of linguistic divide to the British and Fort William College because

[... the] “colonial” explanation has an oddly consoling quality about it. It locates the source of the evil *outside* and implicitly exonerates the “native” perpetrators and collaborators. But just as significantly, it implies a possible recognition by all sides to this conflict that there is some evil [...] that needs to be explained, some loss that needs to be accounted for. The desire to find a culprit must necessarily imply that a crime has been committed [...].⁷

(2001, 20–21)

In tracing a supposed divide to Fort William, what is constantly overlooked, is that the British theoretical construct of Hindustani had already

⁷This does not, however, explain why British or other non-Indian writers would hold such views.

been formulated by Gilchrist in writings from 1785 onwards, well before the establishment of the College. Arguments involving a “split” attach little or no importance to this all-inclusive construct of Hindustani, focusing almost entirely on the works produced by the College under the Hindustani “umbrella,” in particular the completely un-Persianized *Prēm Sāgar*. What is also (conveniently) overlooked is that *Prēm Sāgar* was the *only* example of its kind in the history of the College. Whilst various works were produced in a Persianized style similar to that of *Bāgh-o-Babār* and a number of others, such as *Sinhāsan Battīsī* and *Baitāl Pačīsī* in varying degrees of “mixed-ness,” *Prēm Sāgar* sits in splendid isolation and Gilchrist’s own contributions, as Dittmer has argued, “do not point [...] to the fact that he had the intention to create a new language style” (1972, 62).

Prēm Sāgar may have been an isolated example in the context of Fort William publications, but it was not the only work published in the first decade of the nineteenth century in non-Persianized khari boli. In his 1803 *Rānī Ketkī kī Kabānī*, Insha’ Allāh Khān, too, deliberately excluded all Persian and Arabic vocabulary. Unlike *Prēm Sāgar*, this work has not been seen by protagonists of Urdu and Hindi as an attempt either to create a new language, or as part of a divide and rule strategy. It has, rather, been argued that it was merely written “under the spell of a humorous mood for entertainment only” and that it was quite different from “the experiment carried out by Lallu Lalji and his associates, under the patronage of Fort William College,” whose object was “obviously” to “create, in opposition to Urdu, a new language” (Fatehpuri 1987, 45). Upon closer inspection, this supposed object is not “obvious” at all.

Gilchrist is frequently blamed for “ordering” Lalluji Lal to remove all the Persian and Arabic words. Lalluji Lal’s preface to *Prēm Sāgar* is, perhaps, the source for this contention.

And by order of the revered patron, the gifted conferrer of happiness, Mr. John Gilchrist, in the year [of Vikramāditya] 1860, Sri Lallū Ji Lāl, the poet, a Gujarātī Brāhman, [of the] Sahasra Avadich [family], an inhabitant of Agra, taking the gist of it, rejecting foreign vocables, [and] relating [it] in the pure language of Dehli [and] Agra, has named [the book] Prema-Sāgara. But, by the departure of the revered John Gilchrist, it remained half-done and half-printed.

(*Prema-Sāgara* 1897, 2; see Figure 1 in Appendix for the original)

From this it appears somewhat ambiguous whether Gilchrist merely ordered Lalluji Lal to translate *Prēm Sāgar* into Hindustani, or whether he specifically ordered him to reject the “foreign vocables.” Gilchrist left India in January 1804 before even the first part of *Prēm Sāgar* was published. The whole work was not completed and published until 1810,

therefore it is not possible to establish with certainty whether removing the Persian and Arabic vocabulary was Gilchrist's idea or that of Lalluji Lal himself.⁸ The commission set up, in 1864, to revise the test-books for Lower and Higher Standard Hindustani, inclined to the latter view, noting that "the boast of the writer of the *Prem Sagar* was that every word of Arabic or Persian origin had been banished from his work" (Rangila et al. 2001, n.p.). Like Fatehpuri, who also seems to blame Lalluji Lal himself rather than Gilchrist for this "banishment," Alok Rai has argued that the pandits and munshis of Fort William College found themselves coerced, by the "necessity of justifying their separate institutional existence [as much] as by any intrinsic characteristics of the language itself, into developing two *gradually* divergent registers" [...] (2001, 22). Such arguments are not particularly convincing however. The Hindustani Department at Fort William was all-inclusive, even subsuming Braj and, to a lesser extent, Awadhi. Although, from 1802, Lalluji Lal was employed as the Bhakha pandit, there was never a separate Hindi Department and it was not a case of "two divergent registers" emerging, as will be seen below. More persuasive is the argument that both Insha's work and *Prēm Sāgar* can be viewed merely as "curiosities in the literary history of Hindi-Urdu" (Dittmer 1972, 61).

Alongside the "divide and rule" argument, it has been suggested that the removal of Arabic and Persian words by "the professors of the College" was done "ostensibly to provide the Hindus with a language of their own" (Chand 1944, 57–58). According to Mohammad Din Taseer, Charles Lyall saw "the Hindi form of Hindustani" which, he said, had been "*invented* simultaneously with Urdu prose" by the teachers at Fort William, as being "intended to be a Hindustani for the use of Hindus" (in Ahmad 1941, 224).⁹ Grierson, too, saw the "new Hindi" in these terms.

This Hindī, therefore, or, as it is sometimes called, "High Hindī," is the prose literary language of those Hindūs of Upper India who do not employ Urdū. It is of modern origin, having been introduced under English influence at the commencement of the last century. Up till then, when a Hindū wrote prose and did not use Urdū, he wrote in his own local dialect, Awadhī, Bundēlī, Braj Bhākhā, or what not. Lallū Lāl, under the inspiration

⁸There is nothing in Gilchrist's prolific and unusually candid writings to suggest he ordered the excising of all the Arabic and Persian words and such an action would have gone directly against his belief that the "middle style" of Hindustani was the best.

⁹Taseer is supposedly quoting Lyall but this comment does not appear in Lyall's 1880 *Sketch of the Hindustani Language* and Taseer does not provide a reference.

of Dr. Gilchrist changed all this by writing the well-known Prēm Sāgar, a work which was, so far as the prose portions went, practically written in Urdū, with Indo-Aryan words substituted wherever a writer in that form of speech would use Persian ones. It was thus *an automatic reversion to the actual vernacular* of the Upper Doab. [...] *Then, the language fulfilled a want. It gave a lingua franca to the Hindūs.* It enabled men of widely different provinces to converse with each other without having recourse to the (to them) *unclean* words of the Musalmāns. [...] Hence the language of the Prēm Sāgar became, naturally enough, the standard of Hindu [sic] prose all over Hindostan [...]¹⁰

(1916, 46, emphasis added)

Vasudha Dalmia makes a similar argument.

The institutionalization of Hindustānī and Hinduī as two autonomous linguistic entities came about when the Fort William College was founded in Calcutta in 1800 [...]. With the establishment of the *Bhākbā* department, the foundation was laid for *Hindi* as the language of the Hindus.¹¹

(1999, 166, emphasis added)

This statement is problematic, not only because of the use of the term “Hindui,” but because it seems to suggest that the foundation of Hindi being laid was not khari boli at all but Braj. Dalmia glosses over the importance of whether the “Hindee” referred to was Braj or khari boli. Asserting that Gilchrist used the term “bhasa” or “bhakha” for Sanskrit and Sanskrit-derived languages such as Braj, she says he “now extended it to cover the newly-sanitized variety of Hindustani to be known as khari boli” (*ibid.*, 168). In 1810, some of the works that had been published at Fort William College were listed in Thomas Roebuck’s *Annals*. The extract below clearly demonstrates that the works produced in “Hindi” were not primarily in khari boli.

In the dialects which *are more peculiar to the Hindoo inhabitants of*

¹⁰According to Grierson, not only had a new language been “invented” for them, but, “[w]hen the Prema-sagara was written, Hindus discovered that they had been speaking prose all their lives without knowing it”—a reference to M. Jourdain in Moliere’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of 1670 who exclaims: “*Par ma foi! Il y a plus de quarante ans que je dis de la prose sans que j’en susse rien*” (By my faith, I have been speaking prose for more than forty years without knowing anything about it).

¹¹The use of Hindui here is confusing as Gilchrist used this term for the “old” language of the Hindus and for Braj. Dalmia maintains that what was important was not which particular dialect it referred to, but that for Gilchrist bhakha denoted the original pre-Muslim language of the Hindus (1999, 168).

these provinces, the following works have been undertaken.

1. The Ramayun of Toolsee Das, in the Poorbee dialect, or that used in the provinces situated to the eastward of Dihlee, as Uwudh and Bunarus. It is a popular and admired Poem, on a favorite subject of Hindoo Mythology.
2. The Sut Suae of Biharee Lal, a poem, [...] in the old Hindee or Bruj Bhasha, that is, the dialect that prevails about Muthoora and Agra. [...]
3. A collection of Stories in the Hindoostanee and Hinduvee languages.
4. Grammatical principles of the Bruj Bhasha dialect [...]
5. A continuation of the Prem Sagur [...]
6. Rajneeti, or Admonition to Kings, a work on morality and the principles of government [...] translated into the dialect of Bruj.

The four last mentioned works are the composition of Shree Lulloo Lal Kuvi, the Bhasha Moonshee attached to the Hindoostanee department.

(1819, 257–58, emphasis added)

Despite the fact that Lalluji Lal is chiefly remembered for his one non-Persianized khari boli work it is evident from this that his main output was in Braj.

The contention that the British at Fort William wished to create a language for the Hindus is further undermined by the content of the examination syllabuses at High Proficiency and Degree of Honor level. The fact that these were always divided into “Oordoo” and “Hindee” could, at first sight, be taken as “proof” of a “split.” Whilst it is, certainly, evidence of the confusion, in the minds of the British, as to what exactly constituted Hindi and Hindustani, it is not, however, evidence that they split khari boli into two. From the days of Fort William, until the end of British rule, the Hindi syllabuses included texts such as the *Ramayana* (Awadhi), *Sabha Bilas* (Braj) and *Rajneeti* (Braj).¹² This, again, clearly demonstrates that the Hindus already had a language (and literature) and were, therefore, in no need of the British to create one for them, and that the British themselves were well aware of this. Further evidence that the British saw Hindustani as all-encompassing, and made no attempt to separate it into two, can be found in the 1856 lists of set texts for High Proficiency and Degree of Honor, where *Bāgh-o-Babār* and *Prēm Sāgar* were each listed under both “Hindoostanee” and “Hindee.”¹³

Some of the professors at the College, notably John William Taylor, Thomas Roebuck and William Price, were regarded as partisan towards “Hindee” but correspondence between them and the college authorities

¹²Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century this was, in fact, all they included because (apart from *Prēm Sāgar*) there *was* no literature in khari boli Hindi.

¹³See (India Office Records 1856).

reveals the confusion that existed regarding the use of the term. Taylor, the Hindustani professor, stated in a letter of 1812 to the College Council that he had tried his best to expand the education of “Hindee” at the cost of his health, but had been forced to restrict his mandate to teach only Hindustani (India Office Records 1812). Roebuck, subsequently, in a letter to the College Council, informed them that the “dialect called *Kburee bolee* or *Tenth* Hindee, or that dialect of the Hindoostanee Spoken by the great body of the Hindoos throughout the whole of Hindoostan [...] is not taught in the College as it used to be” (qtd. in Rai 1984, 14). In complete contrast to this it has, however, been argued that “Hindi was not seriously taught until 1815 [...] and did not receive formal recognition as an important vernacular until 1825, only a few years before the College ceased to be a viable educational institution” (King 1994, 27). Dalmia, following Sisir Kumar Das, tells us that “Hinduī or Hindi in the Nāgarī script began to receive enhanced attention only from 1815, when a large number of students from the army took admission in the college” (1999, 169).¹⁴ What Das himself actually wrote, however, is somewhat different, and again highlights the problems which pervade any discussion of what was meant by Hindi at Fort William. He stated,

Braj, though introduced by Gilchrist, was not seriously studied by students. The importance of *Hindi* started to be recognized slowly from 1815, the year a large number of students from the army took admission in the College to study *Hindi*. In 1818 Thomas Roebuck, incharge [sic] of Hindustani Department, asked for a greater measure of support for *Hindi*.
(2001, 66, emphasis added)

If Das’s statement suggests it was Braj rather than khari boli being studied by these military students, Edmonstone’s 1815 Visitor’s speech at Fort William removes any doubt.

It is highly satisfactory to observe, that several of the Military Students have prosecuted with success the study of the Bruj Bhak,ha, under the tuition of Lieutenant Price. [...]

The study of the Hindee [...] becomes important and even necessary to those who may have to maintain an extensive intercourse and personal communication with all classes of the Indian population; more especially it is requisite for the Military Officers of the Company’s Service, because a

¹⁴The archival evidence shows that the influx from the army was, in fact, in 1813 and 1814 when there were a number of supernumerary junior officers. In 1814 the College Council wrote to the Court of Directors regarding an “increase to the College Establishment authorized for the purpose of admitting Military Students in addition to the Civil.” See (India Office Records 1815).

large proportion of the Sepoys of the Army on the establishment of Bengal speak either the Bruj Bhak,ha, or a Dialect of which the Hindee forms a chief component part. It is therefore greatly to be desired, that this Language should become a more general object of study in the College.

(In Roebuck 1819, 448–49)

What is meant by “Hindee,” however, is still unclear. That Braj continued to be taught at the college is evident from the Marquis of Hastings’ comments, at the July 16, 1821 Public Disputation, on the progress made by two more military cadets, in “the Bruj Bhakha dialect as well as in the Hindustani [...]” (“College Examinations” 1822, 54).

In 1824, the Hindustani professor, William Price, wrote to Captain D. Ruddell, the Secretary of the College Council, in an attempt to clear up the “perplexity” which had arisen from “a disposition” to consider “the language of the Upper Provinces” as two separate languages. Price’s account is, however, somewhat contradictory. Initially he stated that “scholars highly proficient in the Oordoo” could not “read a sentence of Bruj Bhakha,” but later asserted that the grammar of the “highest Oordoo and the lowest Bhasha” was the same and that the “slight differences” between the two were “mere provincialisms.” This statement, however, only distinguishes between Braj and Urdu and takes us no further in ascertaining what was meant by “Hindee” (qtd. in Rai 1984, 15–16).

Whatever “Hindee” designated, it is clear that the College began to attach more importance to it in the 1820s. In 1824, in a letter to the Government Secretary, Charles Lushington, Ruddell suggested that Hindoostanee might still “to the Hindoos at large be considered as a foreign language” and requested the Governor General to alter the College Statutes to require every student to acquire, in addition to Persian, “a competent knowledge of either the Bengalee or Bruj Bhakha (also called the Thenth Hindee or Hindooee) instead of the Hindoostanee language” (*ibid.*).¹⁵

It is clear from Lord Amherst’s 1825 speech to students of Fort William College that this suggestion was quickly acted upon.

An alteration in the studies of the College has been introduced within the last year by the enactment of a new statute, requiring of every student, as a qualification for the public service, a knowledge either of the Hindee or of the Bengalee language in addition to the Persian.

Experience had shewn that the students generally attended to Hindoostanee lectures [...].

The study of Bengalee and of the Hindee dialects was in consequence

¹⁵Vedalankar, however, equates khari boli rather than Braj with “thenth Hindi.” See (1977, 44).

greatly neglected [...]. In the general term Hindee are included those vernacular dialects which, with some local variations and modifications, are used by the bulk of the Hindoo population throughout the provinces of Behar and Benares, and in the ceded and conquered provinces. [...]

[...]

I would, therefore, in the strongest manner, inculcate on those who are destined for the western provinces, to make themselves masters of Hindee [...].

(1826, 218–19)

Though, again, it is not clearly defined, this speech indicates that the term “Hindee” designated not only non-Persianized khari boli, but also a variety of other dialects, particularly Braj.

There is a misleading assumption by some of the proponents of the “divide and rule” theory that the materials produced at Fort William College were intended for Indian consumption. There is an equally misleading contention by earlier Urdu literary historians that they should be credited for the rise of Urdu prose.¹⁶ As Faruqi has argued, however, “The works of Urdu prose that the British caused to be produced and published from the College were not intended to be works of literature” but were rather pedagogical material intended solely for a British audience (2008, 6).¹⁷ R. S. McGregor has similarly argued that the “Hindi reading materials adapted from Brajbhāṣā at Calcutta from 1800 to 1810 were at first of use only to the East India Company’s civil servants and to a small number of other westerners (such as missionaries), and not at all to an Indian readership [...]” (1974, 64). And according to Matthews, Shackle and Husain, the Fort William texts were, in their time, “largely ignored by the rest of Urdu-speaking India and until recently lay gathering the dust in the library of the British Museum” (1985, 76). Although they did later find their way into the Indian context, it is doubtful, as Dittmer has argued, whether the “language experiments” at the College could have triggered a movement in literature and language so many decades later (1972, 61), and according to Sadiq (1964, 211–12) Faruqi (2008, 6) and Dalmia (1999, 208–9), such works had little effect on the development of either Urdu or Hindi prose literature.

The Urdu-Hindi controversy was, initially, as Kumar argues, “fought specifically on the matter of script” (2005, 135) and this is another issue which has been cited by those seeking to locate the origins of the contro-

¹⁶For example Saksena (1927) and Grahame Bailey (1932). Later scholars, such as Sadiq (1964) and Faruqi (2008), have played down their contribution to the development of Urdu prose.

¹⁷As Russell (1992, 84) points out, however, they “did in the course of time reach a wider public.”

versy in Fort William College. It has been suggested that Gilchrist’s “identification of language with script” was “problematic” and “opened up a veritable can of worms for both colonial officials and Indian intellectuals” (Orsini 2010, 3–4). Gilchrist, however, did *not* identify language with script. His 1796 *Hindoostanee* grammar, though mostly Romanized in the body of the text, includes examples of both scripts and a key feature (and later a major stumbling block) of the all-encompassing British construct of Hindustani was that it always included both scripts.¹⁸ The early disputations at Fort William College were, in fact, written, not in Persian, but in Devanagari script. Mr. W. Chaplin’s 1803 (*Primitiae Orientales* 1803, 51) and Mr. J. Romer’s 1804 (*Primitiae Orientales*, 1804, 3) *Hindoostanee Disputations* (see Figures 2 and 3 in the Appendix) are not only in Devanagari script, they are on the subjects of sati and Sanskrit, clearly indicating that Hindus, and Hindu culture, were regarded as an integral part of Hindustani.

George Sotheby’s 1809 Degree of Honor Certificate from Fort William College, too, has Persian in Nastaliq, Arabic in Naskh, but *Hindoostanee* in Devanagari (see Figure 4 in the Appendix). For Indians, script was certainly an emotive and divisive issue, and, in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it became an increasingly thorny one for British officials. With regard to the British learning of Hindustani, however, it carried no cultural or emotional significance. For nearly a century the examinations insisted on officers learning both scripts as, from the practical standpoint, being literate in both Persian and Devanagari increased their communicative ability. Several editions of *Bāgh-o-Babār* were published in Devanagari script,¹⁹ and although, from 1895, the British formally equated Hindustani with Urdu, even this did not confine them to the use of Persian script. In the 1930s officers were offered the choice of taking the Lower and Higher Standard Urdu examinations in either script and Devanagari editions of the set texts, *Our Sowars and Sepoys* and *Khvāb-o-Khayāl*, were produced accordingly.

Even in the writings of those who discount a deliberate policy of “divide and rule” on the part of Fort William, however, there is a pervasive view that, though it had no intent to do so, the College produced works in two separate “styles” of Hindustani, thus creating a “split” which intensified

¹⁸Although more of the Hindustani grammars and textbooks produced by the British used Persian script rather than Devanagari, the Devanagari alphabet was very often included and, later, Devanagari editions were produced by authors such as Mohamed Akbar Khan Haidari and Mool Chand Saihgal indicating that, for the British, Hindustani could always be written in either script.

¹⁹A Devanagari edition appeared as early as 1847, and there are other editions in 1852, 1869, 1870 and 1879 (Russell 1992, 263).

as language became increasingly identified with political, religious, socio-economic and cultural factors. Alok Rai, for example, while conceding that the “literary sports” engaged in at Fort William did not have a communal agenda, asserts that “the pedants of Fort William” played around with stylistic variations, “deleting *foreign* expressions” and “using a preponderantly Sanskritic vocabulary” (1995, 138 emphasis added).²⁰ And, in a later work, though acknowledging that it was “clearly absurd to read any great *design* into it,” he argued that one might still “be justified in reading great *consequence*” into the “bureaucratic difference between ‘Muslim’ Hindustani and ‘Hindu’ Hindustani,” which, he maintained, were “institutionalised at Fort William” (2001, 26). Significantly for Rai:

[...] the important thing that emerged from Fort William is the idea of two-ness, of linguistic duality. Fort William College gave institutional recognition to the notion that there were in fact *two* ways of doing Hindustani—one which used the available and mixed language, and another from which the Arabic-Persian words [...] had been removed in order to produce a language [...] more suitable to Hindus.

(*ibid.*, 22)

The assertion that an idea of “two-ness” emerged from the College is unconvincing when examined carefully. Firstly, Gilchrist never maintained there were *two* styles of Hindustani. On the contrary, he observed,

In the Hindoostanee, as in other tongues, we might enumerate *a great diversity of styles*, but for brevity’s sake I shall *only notice Three* here [...] 1st. The high court or *Persian* style, 2d. The middle or genuine Hindoostanee style, 3rd. The vulgar [...].

(1787, xli, emphasis added)

The idea that there were “two ways of doing Hindustani” (Rai 2001, 22) implies two different *kinds* of Hindustani which are *separate* in some way. This is entirely different from Gilchrist’s contention that there were varying styles encompassed *within* Hindustani. For Gilchrist there was never any question of splitting khari boli into two, and the works produced by the college are, themselves, evidence of this. If we look only at a few of the most familiar Hindustani texts which the British used in their lower level examinations, what emerges is a minimum of “four-ness” rather than “two-ness.”

²⁰The works produced at Fort William did not use “Sanskritized” or High Hindi as developed by the Benares school.

Persianized (but not excessively)	Very Mixed	Less Mixed	Non- Persianized
<i>Bāgh-o-Bahār</i>	<i>Sinhāsan Battīsī</i>	<i>Baitāl Pačīsī</i>	<i>Prēm Sāgar</i>

Rai's own description of the language of *Sinhāsan Battīsī*, which he describes as reflecting "the glorious confusion of the common tongue of north India, drawing freely not only from the classical founts of Sanskrit and Arabic and Persian, but also from the hybrid descendants of a whole range of Prakrits and other linguistic influences" (1995, 138) also seems strangely at odds with his later idea of two-ness.

Vedalankar acknowledges the fact that the works written in Hindustani (in both Devanagari and Persian scripts) at Fort William formed a continuum. In her view, *Sinhāsan Battīsī* "contains more Urdu syntax and Persian words" than *Baitāl Pačīsī*, which, in turn, contains more than *Prēm Sāgar* (1977, 60). She goes on to argue that two other works, *Mādhonal* and *Śakuntalā Nāṭak*, are Urdu in syntax and have a large number of Persian words. Having quoted Lalluji Lal's definition that khari boli mixed with Arabic and Persian forms "what is called the Rekhtu or Oordoo"²¹ she concludes that "the language of 'Sinhāsan Battīsī' and 'Baitāl Pačīsī' can be called 'Rekhtā', but that of 'Mādhonal' and 'Śakuntalā Nāṭak' is Urdu" (*ibid.*, 62, 63). This rather puzzling conclusion is rendered questionable by William Price's two volumes of selections, published in 1827. The first volume was in Devanagari and contained extracts from *Sinhāsan Battīsī*, *Baitāl Pačīsī*, *Mādhonal* and *Śakuntalā Nāṭak*. The second volume contained selections "in the Oordoo dialect and Persian character." For Price, therefore, *Mādhonal* and *Śakuntalā Nāṭak* were clearly *not* (as Vedalankar maintains) "Oordoo."

It has been argued that the concept of languages as markers of national and communal identities was not a feature of the Indian intellectual landscape prior to the arrival of the British (Steadman-Jones 2007, 17). This may be true, but to suggest that there was any notion of "divide and rule" along Hindu-Muslim lines in the first few decades of the nineteenth century is to write history backwards. Several binaries have subsequently emerged; the partition into India and Pakistan; the Hindu-Muslim conflict; the Urdu-Hindi controversy; and the battle between Persian and Devanagari scripts. The benefit of hindsight, therefore, has led some writers to see a binary in the works of Fort William, one which simply does not exist. Yet without subscribing to the idea of this mythical "two-ness" it is not possible to attribute the roots of the Urdu-Hindi controversy to Fort

²¹Rekhta and Urdu are used here synonymously.

William. As Abdul Haq rightly pointed out, these should be sought, rather, in the events of 1857–1859 (in Ahmad 1941, 82) which produced a “turbulence” in the fabric of Indian society and forced a reassessment by Hindus and Muslims (and the British) of their relative positions in that society. □

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Appendix

श्री श्रीयुत गुणगाहक, गुणियन सुखदायक, जान गिलकिरिस्त महाशय की आज्ञा से संवत् १८६० में श्री लक्ष्मी लाल कवि ब्राह्मण गुजराती सहस्र श्रवदीच आगरेवालेने, विसका सार ले, यामनी भाषा छोड़, दिल्ली आगरे की खड़ी बोली में कह, नाम प्रेम सागर धरा; पर श्री युत जान गिलकिरिस्त महाशय के जाने से बना अधवना रूप अधरूप रह गया था;

Fig. 1: (*Prema-Sāgara* 1897, 2).

दअवा

ममालिकि हिंदकी कबानोंकी असल
बुनयाद संस्कृत है ॥

लेकिन जो शरक इस दअवेके साबित
करने का इरादः करे उसे हिंदूस्तान
की बअजी कबानि मुर्वज से खूब
वाकिफ़ होना और हासिल करना
जुरूर है गोकि वुह सबसे माहिर
नहो पस मुझे अगर यह बात
खालिम नहोती कि इसबाति दअवेमें

Fig. 2: Mr. W. Chaplin's 1803 Disputation.

वाद

सती होनेकी नीति हिंदूओंमें अपनेपति के
साथ भलमनसी और मयाके यत्नसे वाहन है

क्या ईसत्री क्या और अखरी जातोंके लोग
किसी पंथके होंय जाना जाता है कि मेन
वादके मिटानेको कोई ऐकभी प्रमान
नला सकेगा हे महानाजा मेनी बुद्धिसे
तो यह नीति प्रसिद्ध सांयही जानी जाती है
और यहभी निश्चय कन जानता हू कि इस

Fig. 3: Thesis, Pronounced at the Disputation in the Hindoostani Language, on the Twentieth September 1804. Mr. J. Romer, Student of the College of Fort William.

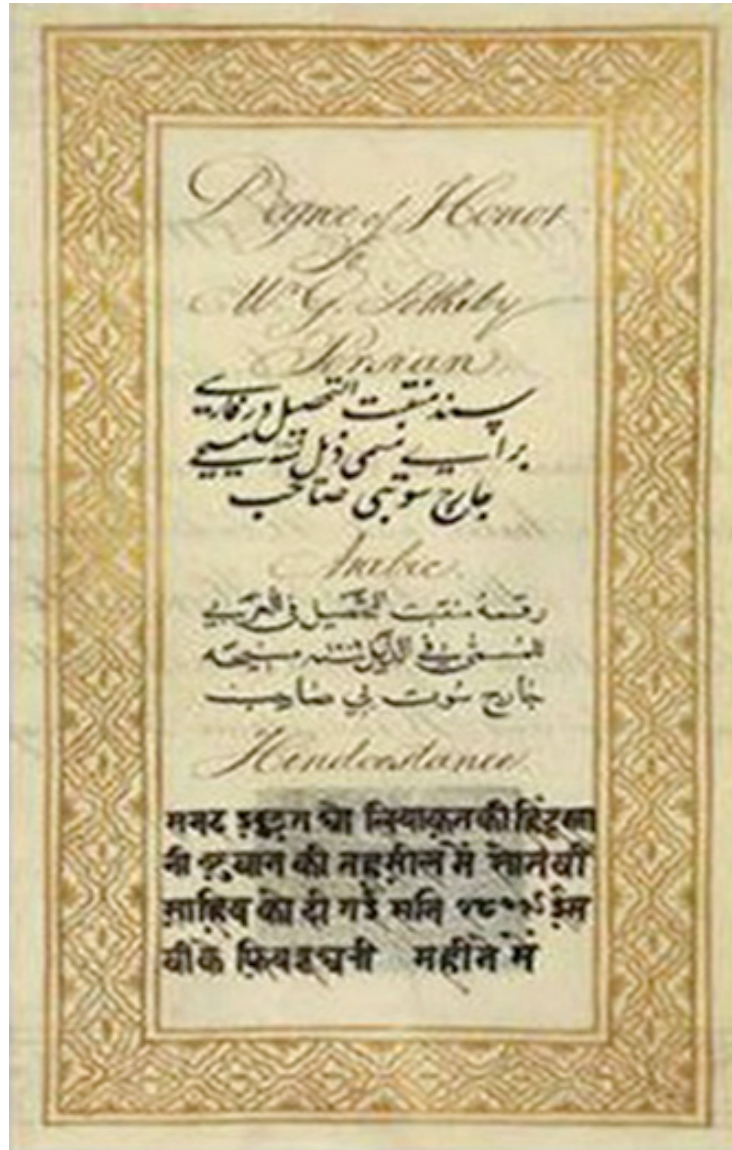


Fig. 4: George Sotheby's 1809 Degree of Honor Certificate from Fort William College.