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Article

Poetry, Politics, and Purity: The Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha Debate in Colonial North India

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha debate in colonial North India as a pivotal episode in the politics of language, where literary choices were deeply intertwined with questions of cultural identity, communal affiliation, and linguistic nationalism. At its surface, the debate appeared to center on dialectal preferences in Hindi poetry—Braj Bhasha, the classical medium of devotional verse, versus Khari Boli, the emerging standard for modern prose. However, the controversy reflected deeper ideological anxieties, shaped by the broader Hindi–Urdu controversy and the colonial state's role in codifying linguistic identities. Supporters of Braj Bhasha viewed the adoption of Khari Boli in poetry as a potential conduit for Urdu's influence, which they saw as threatening the purity of Hindi and its Hindu cultural roots. In contrast, proponents of Khari Boli emphasized its accessibility, standardisation, and modern potential, viewing it as essential for the future growth of Hindi literature. The debate also invoked arguments around the division of poetic and prose registers, the shared linguistic heritage of Hindi dialects, and the perceived encroachment of Persian and Arabic lexicons through Urdu. Figures like Radha Charan Goswami, Shridhar Pathak, and Pratap Narayan Mishra framed these tensions in both cultural and communal terms. Ultimately, the Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha dispute was not merely about literary form but symbolized the contestation over Hindi's identity and its autonomy from Urdu. It reveals how literary aesthetics became a vehicle for negotiating broader social, religious, and political concerns in colonial India's linguistically charged environment.

Keywords: Khari Boli, Braj Bhasha, Hindi–Urdu Controversy, Colonial India, Language and Identity, Literary Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

The Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha debate emerged in colonial North India as a crucial episode in the broader politics of language, where literary form became entangled with questions of identity, tradition, and communal affiliation. While at first glance a dispute over the appropriate dialect for Hindi poetry, the debate reflected deeper ideological tensions—between the sacred legacy of Braj Bhasha, rooted in Krishna bhakti and classical poetics, and the rising prominence of Khari Boli, associated with modern prose, print culture, and linguistic standardisation. This literary disagreement unfolded against the backdrop of the Hindi–Urdu controversy, wherein Hindi and Urdu, once registers of a shared vernacular, were gradually reimagined as markers of Hindu and Muslim identities. As colonial knowledge systems sought to fix linguistic boundaries and assign communal labels, aesthetic debates became political. Advocates of Braj Bhasha saw Khari Boli as a vehicle for Urdu's encroachment, threatening the cultural purity of Hindi poetry. Conversely, supporters of Khari Boli viewed its adoption as necessary for Hindi's modernisation and wider reach. This paper examines how the Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha debate served not only as a literary dispute but also as a symbolic struggle over cultural authority and linguistic purity, revealing the deep imbrication of poetry, politics, and communal anxieties in colonial North India.

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2. THE HINDI–URDU CONTROVERSY AND THE POLITICS OF LINGUISTIC IDENTITY IN COLONIAL NORTH INDIA

The Hindi–Urdu controversy[1], which came to define much of the linguistic and communal landscape of colonial North India, was not merely a debate over language but a complex contest over identity, culture, and power. Though Hindi and Urdu were historically registers of the same Hindustani vernacular[2], differentiated largely by script and lexical preference, colonial interventions[3] gradually solidified them into distinct and oppositional linguistic identities. Under British rule, language was no longer seen solely as a medium of communication; it became a marker of religious and communal affiliation.

A key turning point came with the 1868 memorandum[4] advocating the replacement of Urdu with Hindi in the courts of the North-Western Provinces. For many Muslim elites, this was perceived as an attack on India's shared linguistic heritage and a blow to the composite culture Urdu represented.[5] Conversely, Hindi proponents framed their demands as a rectification of historical injustice and a reassertion of Hindu cultural rights.[6] By the late 19th century, the Hindi–Urdu controversy had hardened into a polarised and asymmetrical conflict. While Urdu partisans often continued to describe Urdu as a shared heritage of both Hindus and Muslims, many Hindi advocates increasingly portrayed Urdu as alien and hegemonic, positioning Hindi as the rightful language of the Hindu nation. What had once been a shared vernacular was now recast as a symbol of civilisational difference. The implications were far-reaching: not only did this transformation reshape North Indian literary culture, but it also played a foundational role in the emergence of modern Indian communalism and the politics of linguistic nationalism. Within this polarised environment, even debates over poetic language—such as the Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha controversy—were refracted through the lens of the Hindi–Urdu divide, as concerns over linguistic purity and cultural heritage became proxies for deeper anxieties about community, modernity, and belonging.

3. THE KHARI BOLI–BRAJ BHASHA DEBATE AND THE POLITICS OF HINDI LITERARY STANDARDISATION

Braj Bhasha, also known as Braj Bhakha, was the primary language of the Braj Mandal region, corresponding to the contemporary Mathura district. It was spoken in the southern region of Mathura, including the Agra district; much of the Bharatpur State; the Dholpur and Karauli States; the western region of Gwalior; and the eastern region of Jaipur. To the north, it extended into the eastern region of Gurgaon, and to the northeast, it covered the Doab region, including Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Mainpuri, and Etah, as well as areas across the Ganges, such as Bareilly, Budaun, and the Tarai parganas. This irregularly shaped tract spanned from the southwest to the northeast, with an average width of 90 miles and a length of 300 miles, encompassing approximately 27,000 square miles.[7] Before the 20th century, Khari Boli was not recognised as a language of poetic expression, and there was no significant effort to establish it as such until the latter part of the 19th century. Instead, Braj Bhasha was the preferred language for poetry in the Hindi region,[8] largely due to the Krishna-centric religious practices prevalent in the Braj area. The Krishna cult played a crucial role in the development of Braj Bhasha as a poetic language. According to Grierson, towards the end of the 15th century, Vallabhacharya, a Tailang Brahman, propagated the Radha-Krishna cult, which gained widespread popularity. This religious tradition was centered around Mathura, known for the youthful Krishna's pastimes. Vallabhacharya's eight prominent disciples, known as the Ashta Chhap, including Vitthalnath and Surdas, established themselves in the region and laid the foundation for the esteemed community of Gokulastha

1 For detailed discussion see, Christopher R. King, One Language, *Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994; Alok Rai. *Hindi Nationalism,* Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2000; Veer Bharat Talwar. *Rassakashi: Unnisween Sadi Ka Navjagran Aur Pashchimottar Prant*, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2017; Ram Gopal, *Swatantrta-purwa Hindi ke Sangharsh ka Itihas*, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 1964; Kripa Shankar Singh, *Hindu Urdu Hindustani Hindu Muslim Sampradayikta Aur Angrezi Raj 1800–1947*, Parasangik Prakashan, Delhi, 1992; Farman Fatehpuri, *Pakistan Movement and Hindi-Urdu Conflict*. Sang-e-Meel, Lahore, 1987.

2 Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*. Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2011, pp.18-19; Shamsur Rahman Faruqi,. *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2021, p.22.

3 Mohd Kashif, and Jawaid Alam. *Colonial Discourse and Linguistic Identity Formation: Hindi and Urdu in British India*. Third Concept: An International Journal of Ideas, vol. 38, New Delhi, 2024

4 *Memorandum: Court Characters, in the Upper Provinces of India,* 1868. The title of this Memorandum was "For Private Circulation". For the detailed account of this memorandum see, Veer Bharat Talwar, *Rassakashi: Unnisvi Sadi ka Navjagaran aur Pashchimottar Prant*, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi 2017, 62-64. Also see, Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement Nineteenth Century North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, 130-31

5 Mohd Kashif and Md. Azharul Haque Mallick, *Bhasha, Rajneeti evam Pehchaan: April Prastaav aur Urdu ka Badalta Paridrishya*, Radha Kamal Mukherjee: Chintan Parampara, Vol 26, Issue 2, 2024; Mohd Kashif, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Transformation: The Hindi-Urdu Dispute and the Genesis of Muslim-Oriented Advocacy*, Synergy: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, Vol 1. Issue 2, 2024.

6 Mathura Prasada Misra, *A Trilingual Dictionary Being A Comprehensive Lexicon In English, Urdu And Hindi, Exhibiting The Syllabication, Pronunciation And Etymology Of English Words, With Their Explanation In English, And In Urdu And Hindi In The Roman Characters*, E. J. Lazarus and Co., Benares, 1865, p.5; *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 2 July 1869, *Hindi Pradeep*, Jild 3, Sankhya 10, June, 1880,

7 Sir George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Volume IX, Part I, Superintendent Government Printing, 1916, p.69

8 Shukla Ramchandra, *Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas*, Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Kashi, 1938, p.414

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Gosains. Their musical compositions resonated throughout the Doab region, and they used Braj Bhasha as the medium of their poetic expression. Consequently, Braj Bhasha has persisted as the sole appropriate language for venerating Krishna and his divine consort.[9]

However, this long-standing dominance came under scrutiny in the late nineteenth century, particularly with the rise of linguistic nationalism—often intertwined with communal anxieties—and the search for a modern, standardised Hindi. The Khari Boli-Braj Bhasha controversy was sparked in 1887 with the publication of Ayodhya Prasad Khatri's work titled "*Khari Boli Ka Padya*." Khatri categorised Khari Boli into five distinct classes:[10]

1. Theth Hindi: A form of Khari Boli devoid of foreign loanwords and complex Sanskrit vocabulary.
2. Pandit's Hindi: A mixture of substantial Sanskrit lexemes with a limited number of loanwords from other languages.
3. Munshi's Hindi: A middle ground between Pandit's Hindi and Maulvi's Hindi, often referred to as "Hindustani" by European scholars.
4. Maulvi's Hindi: Incorporating various Persian and Arabic vocabulary, commonly referred to as Urdu by its users.
5. Eurasian Hindi: Involving the incorporation of English vocabulary into Hindi. Maulvis preferred Persian alphabets, while Europeans favoured English alphabets.

Khatri viewed Urdu as a variant of Khari Boli, but he did not classify Braj Bhasha poetry as Hindi poetry, asserting that Braj Bhasha was distinct from Khari Boli Hindi.[11] The exclusion of Braj Bhasha from the domain of Khari Boli and the incorporation of Urdu sparked a contentious debate. Advocates of Braj Bhasha poetry often argued that using Khari Boli in poetic composition would taint their sacred language with impurities from Urdu lexicons. This debate revolved around several key themes, including the distinction between Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha, the dichotomy of poetry and prose in Hindi writings, the perceived threat of Khari Boli as a potential vehicle for Urdu influence in Hindi poetry, the widely accepted and standardised medium of Khari Boli, and the rich legacy of Braj Bhasha as a language perfected for poetry.

One of the central arguments in the debate was the claim that Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha are not distinct languages but rather dialects of a single linguistic tradition. Radha Charan Goswami asserted that the differences between Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha were negligible and primarily restricted to minor grammatical variations. According to him, Khari Boli is a composite language that integrates elements from various dialects, including Braj Bhasha, Kanyakubj, Shaurseni, Baiswadi, Bihari, Antarvedi, and Bundelkhandi. Therefore, treating them as separate languages was, in his view, inconceivable.[12] Pratap Narayan Mishra echoed this sentiment by arguing that Braj Bhasha and Khari Boli are linguistically connected, sharing a common root in Sanskrit. Mishra emphasised that both dialects belong to the "Arya Desha,"[13] the historical and cultural region that significantly influenced the development of North Indian languages. He insisted that the perceived distinctions between these dialects were artificial and should not detract from their shared heritage. This viewpoint was integral in challenging the growing preference for Khari Boli in literary and academic circles, as it underscored the continuity between Braj Bhasha and Hindi. Another significant theme in the Khari Boli-Braj Bhasha debate was the argument that poetry and prose in Hindi should utilise different dialects, much like classical Sanskrit literature, where Sanskrit was reserved for poetry and refined speech, while Prakrit was used for prose and everyday communication. This dichotomy was proposed as a means to preserve the literary richness of Braj Bhasha while accommodating the growing use of Khari Boli in prose. Radha Charan Goswami argued that Braj Bhasha should remain the language of poetry due to its historical and cultural significance. He believed that using Braj Bhasha for poetry would maintain the literary sophistication and vibrancy that had characterised Hindi literature for centuries. Goswami noted that, like the use of multiple languages in Sanskrit plays to enhance their literary quality, the use of Braj Bhasha for poetry and Khari Boli for prose would enrich Hindi literature. Goswami further argued that Braj Bhasha, despite its age, continued to be a powerful and meaningful medium for poetic expression. He questioned why a language that had proven its worth over centuries should suddenly be deemed impractical for poetry. In his view, the coexistence of Braj Bhasha and Khari Boli within Hindi literature should be seen as an asset that adds depth and variety to the language, rather than as a limitation or inadequacy.[14] Pratap Narayan Mishra supported this argument by highlighting the complementary nature of Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha. He pointed out that while Khari Boli was increasingly used for prose, Braj Bhasha had long been the preferred medium for poetry. Mishra argued that it was a matter of pride for the Hindi-speaking community to have two distinct dialects for different forms of literary expression, unlike many other languages that use the same dialect for both prose and poetry. [15]

The debate also addressed the practical considerations of

9 Sir George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Volume IX, Part I, Superintendent Government Printing, 1916, p.74

10 Shri Shivpujan Sahay and Nalin Vilochan Sharma, *Ayodhyaprasad Khatri Smark Granth*, Bihar Rashrtbhasha Parishad, Patna, 1960, p.112 ; also see, *Saraswati*, Bhag 6, Sankhya 3, March 1905

11 Shri Shivpujan Sahay, Ibid., p.111

12 *Hindustan*, 11 November, 1887

13 *Hindustan*, 21 March, 1888

14 *Hindustan*, 11 November, 1887

15 *Hindustan*, 21 March, 1888

language use, particularly the argument that Khari Boli was more widely accepted and understood than Braj Bhasha. Shridhar Pathak was a prominent advocate of this view, asserting that Khari Boli had become the predominant medium for prose across a much broader geographic area than Braj Bhasha. Pathak pointed out that while Braj Bhasha was confined to a relatively small region, Khari Boli was understood and used across a vast expanse of North India, making it a more effective medium for communication. Pathak criticised Braj Bhasha for its lack of uniformity, noting that regional variations often led to different lexical items being used for the same concept. This inconsistency, he argued, made Braj Bhasha less accessible and harder to standardise for widespread use. He also noted that the number of people proficient in Braj Bhasha was declining, further limiting its utility. According to Pathak, Braj Bhasha was primarily confined to the region stretching from Panipat to Patna and from the Vindhyachal foothills to the Himalayas, making it less comprehensible to speakers of other Indian languages like Bengali, Gujarati, and Marathi. Pathak also pointed out that even within the Braj region, the language was not uniformly understood, especially in its poetic form. He argued that the use of Braj Bhasha in prose was rare and that Khari Boli, with its broader reach and greater comprehensibility, was better suited to serve as the standardised medium for both prose and, eventually, poetry.[16]

Proponents of Braj Bhasha, such as Radha Charan Goswami, passionately defended its role as the preeminent language for Hindi poetry, citing its rich literary heritage and the centuries of refinement it had undergone. Goswami argued that Braj Bhasha had produced some of the most celebrated works of Hindi literature, including classics like the Prithviraj Raso, Sursagar, Tulsidas's Ramayana, Bihari Satsai, and the works of poets like Padmakar, Dev, and Anandghan. Goswami believed that Khari Boli, despite its increasing use in prose, had not yet proven itself as a viable medium for high-quality poetry. He contended that Khari Boli lacked the poetic richness and metrical versatility that Braj Bhasha possessed, and that abandoning Braj Bhasha in favour of Khari Boli would result in a significant cultural loss. Goswami posed the rhetorical question of whether, even after a thousand years, it would be possible to amass a body of Hindi poetry that could rival the magnitude and significance of the works produced in Braj Bhasha.[17] However, Shridhar Pathak offered a counterpoint by emphasising the importance of diversity in poetic expression. While acknowledging the rich legacy of Braj Bhasha, Pathak argued that limiting Hindi poetry to Braj Bhasha alone would restrict its accessibility and relevance to a broader audience. He suggested that incorporating Khari Boli into poetry alongside Braj Bhasha would not only preserve the tradition and heritage associated with Braj Bhasha but also make Hindi poetry more inclusive and understandable to a wider range of readers and listeners. Pathak asserted that just because Braj Bhasha had historically been the predominant language for poetry, it did not mean that future poetry should be exclusively composed in it.[18] He believed that Khari Boli, with its simplicity and wide comprehensibility, could enrich Hindi poetry by making it more accessible without compromising on literary quality.

One of the most contentious issues in the debate was the fear that Khari Boli, if adopted as the primary medium for Hindi poetry, could facilitate the encroachment of Urdu and, by extension, Persian and Arabic influences into Hindi literature. Radha Charan Goswami expressed deep concerns that if poets shifted from Braj Bhasha to Khari Boli, it would inadvertently lead to the promotion and dominance of Urdu poetry. He stated:

> *हम अनुमान करते हैं कि यिद खड़ी बोली हिंदी की किवता की चेष्टा की जाय तो फिर खड़ी बोली के स्थान में थोड़े दिनों में खाली उर्दू की किवता का प्रचार हो जाय।* [19]

Goswami's apprehension stemmed from the linguistic similarities between Khari Boli and Urdu, which he feared could make it easier for poets to transition from one to the other. He warned that a widespread shift to Khari Boli could result in a decline in the production and popularity of Braj Bhasha poetry, leaving a void that Urdu poetry might fill. This, he argued, would threaten the unique traditions and cultural identity associated with Braj Bhasha poetry. Goswami also expressed concern about the potential for Persian and Arabic lexicons to infiltrate Hindi poetry through Khari Boli. He feared that if the trend toward Khari Boli continued unchecked, it could lead to a situation where Urdu, with its Persian and Arabic influences, would gradually overshadow the native elements of Hindi. In response, Shridhar Pathak sought to allay these fears by arguing that as long as Hindi was given due importance and its prestige was safeguarded, Urdu could not overtake it. Pathak insisted that the responsibility for preserving the integrity of Hindi poetry lay with the proponents of Hindi themselves, not with the government. He argued that as long as Hindi writers and poets remained vigilant and committed to promoting Hindi, the language would retain its distinct identity, free from undue Urdu influence. Pathak asserted that

> *खड़ीहिंदी की किवता में उर्दू नहीं घुसने पावेगी। जब हमहिंदी की प्रितष्ठा के परीक्षण में सदा सचेत रहेंगे तो उर्दू की ताव क्या जो चौखट के भीतर पाँव रख सके। सर्कार अपने स्कूलों कीहिंदी में अप्रचिलत उर्दू शब्दों का बर्ताव कराती है, परहिंदी के पक्षपाती तो उसके अनुयायी नहीं,हिंदी के गद्य पद्य की उन्नितहम लोगों पर निर्भर है, सरकार पर नहीं।*[20]

However, Goswami remained sceptical of Pathak's reassurances. He pointed to the increasing use of Urdu words in Hindi prose as evidence of the potential for Urdu to infiltrate Hindi poetry as well. Goswami questioned

16 *Hindustan*, 20 December, 1887

17 *Hindustan*, 11 November, 1887

18 *Hindustan*, 20 December, 1887

19 *Hindustan*, 15 January, 1888

20 *Hindustan* 3-4 February, 1888

https://doi.org/10.63960/sijmds-2025-2265

whether any concrete measures would be taken to prevent this, suggesting that the mere vigilance of Hindi advocates might not be sufficient to safeguard the purity of the language:

जिस प्रकार आज कल के गद्य में बहुधा लोग उर्दू के शब्दों का प्रयोग करते हैं तो पद्य में उर्दू के शब्द आवें इसके लिये क्या कोई ऐक्ट पासि किया जायगा ?[21]

Pratap Narayan Mishra also weighed in on this issue, emphasising the importance of preserving Braj Bhasha and its rightful place in Hindi literature. He reflected on the perceived threat posed by Khari Boli. Mishra questioned:

क्या ब्रजभाषा भीहिंदी नहीं है? अरबी है ? फिर उसका पिररक्षण क्यों न किया जाय ?[22]

On analysing the debate, it becomes evident that it highlights the complex interplay between language, cultural identity, and the broader Hindi-Urdu controversy. This debate was not merely about linguistic preferences but was deeply intertwined with issues of religious, cultural, and the identity in colonial North India, particularly in the United Provinces. The debate served as a microcosm of the broader Hindi-Urdu conflict, reflecting concerns about linguistic standardisation, the preservation of cultural identity, and the potential influence of Urdu on Hindi literature. At their core, both proponents of Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha were motivated by a desire to protect the integrity of Hindi from what they perceived as the encroachment of Urdu. One key argument in the debate was the notion that there was "no significant difference between Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha." This argument aimed to foster linguistic unity among Hindi speakers. Proponents believed that emphasising differences between Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha would only serve to divide the Hindi-speaking community and hinder the development of Hindi as a unified language. By downplaying these differences, supporters hoped to create a sense of linguistic solidarity that would strengthen Hindi against the perceived threat of Urdu. This stance was also a strategic response to the Hindi-Urdu controversy, where unity among Hindi speakers was seen as essential to resisting the dominance of Urdu, which was associated with the Muslim community and held official status under British rule. Partisans of Braj Bhasha, on the other hand, argued for a "dichotomy of poetry and prose in Hindi writings," viewing Braj Bhasha as a language "perfected for poetry." This perspective was deeply rooted in historical usage patterns, where Braj Bhasha had been the dominant medium for Hindi poetry, especially in devotional works. Proponents of Braj Bhasha poetry argued that adopting Khari Boli for poetic composition could potentially incorporate Urdu vocabulary, thereby diluting the purity and distinct identity of Hindi literature. They believed that Braj Bhasha, with its rich poetic tradition and historical significance, should continue to be the primary language for Hindi poetry to maintain the cultural and literary heritage of the Hindi-speaking community. This view was also linked to a broader cultural resistance to Urdu, which was seen by some as embodying foreign (Persian and Arabic) influences that were incompatible with Hindu cultural identity. By insisting on the use of Braj Bhasha for poetry, this faction sought to protect Hindi literature from what they perceived as the "contamination" of Urdu. A significant factor in the opposition to Khari Boli as a language for poetry was "the suspicion that it could serve as a conduit for Urdu's influence." Proponents of Braj Bhasha were concerned that a shift from Braj Bhasha to Khari Boli could lead to the promotion and eventual dominance of Urdu within the realm of Hindi poetry. This suspicion was rooted in the linguistic similarities between Khari Boli and Urdu, which made the former more susceptible to incorporating Urdu elements. This fear was not shared by proponents of Khari Boli, who were confident in their ability to prevent Urdu from encroaching on Hindi. They believed that by maintaining vigilance and actively promoting Hindi, they could safeguard its prestige and keep it free from undue Urdu influence. This divergence in attitudes reflects the broader anxieties and tensions surrounding the Hindi-Urdu controversy, where language was a proxy for deeper cultural and religious concerns. Despite their differences, both factions ultimately shared the same underlying concern: preventing Urdu's encroachment into the realm of Hindi. The opposition to Khari Boli as a medium for poetry was driven by the suspicion that it could facilitate Urdu's dominance, while the support for Khari Boli was rooted in confidence that such influence could be effectively resisted. This shared concern about Urdu reflects the broader context of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, where the boundary between Hindi and Urdu was not just linguistic but also symbolic of the cultural and religious divisions between Hindus and Muslims in colonial India. Thus, the debate over Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha was not merely about language choice but about the preservation of cultural identity and the assertion of Hindi as a distinct and independent literary tradition.

The resistance to Khari Boli as a poetic language was also framed as a form of cultural resistance. Figures like Balkrishna Bhatt and Babu Krishan Das expressed a strong aversion to the "pollution" of Hindi poetry by Urdu elements. Bhatt remarked:

हम अपनी पद्यमवी सरस्वती को किसी दूसरे रंग पर उतार मैली और कलुिषत नहीं किया चाहते ।[23]

Bhatt's comments in the Hindi Pradeep Magazine reflect a fear that bringing Khari Boli into contact with Urdu (or Yavani) words would degrade the purity of Hindi poetry, which they metaphorically described as "Padyamvi Saraswati"—the goddess of poetry. Bhatt commented:

हम अपनी पद्यमवी सरस्वती को मैली नहीं किया चाहते..... पद्य रचना सरस्वती को यवनी संपर्क या साथ न कराके जिस रंग में वह रंगी है वही उसे मोहता है ।[24]

21 *Hindustan*, 30 March, 1888

22 *Hindustan*, 21 March, 1888

23 *Hindi Pradeep*, Jild 11, Sankhya 2-3-4, 1 October-November-December, 1887

24 *Hindi Pradeep*, Jild 11, Sankhya 11, 1 July, 1888

Similarly, Babu Krishan Das's assertion that Hindus gravitated towards Braj Bhasha in response to Muslims adopting Khari Boli as their primary language further illustrates the cultural and religious undertones of this debate. The use of Braj Bhasha in the Vallabhacharya sect's religious practices, where it was considered suitable for devotional services and the use of Yavani terminology was proscribed, also highlights how language choices were deeply intertwined with religious and cultural identities. Babu Krishan Das claimed:

खड़ी बोली को मुसल्मान जित ने अपनी उर्दू बनाकर ग्रहण कर लिया इस लिये हिंदुओं ने विशेष आग्रह व्रजभाषा की ओर किया। इसका दृढ़तर प्रमाण यह है किश्री वल्लभाचार्य जी के सम्प्रदाय में अब तक यह प्रथा है। कि भवगत्सेवा के समय व्रजभाषा का बोला जाना ही उिचत समझा जाता है, यावनी शब्दों का प्रयोग निषद्ध है।[25]

4. CONCLUSION

The Khari Boli–Braj Bhasha debate was not merely a literary dispute over dialectal preference but a significant ideological battleground within the broader politics of language in colonial North India. While framed in terms of poetic aesthetics and linguistic form, the debate was deeply entangled with anxieties about cultural identity, communal boundaries, and the perceived threat of Urdu's growing influence. As this paper has shown, beneath the surface of aesthetic disagreement lay a shared objective: both supporters of Braj Bhasha and advocates of Khari Boli sought to insulate Hindi from Urdu and assert a distinct literary and cultural identity for Hindi. These positions reflected divergent visions of Hindi modernity—one rooted in devotional poetics and inherited cultural traditions, the other orientated toward standardisation, accessibility, and modern literary expression. Ultimately, the debate over poetic language became a symbolic struggle to define the linguistic and cultural boundaries of Hindi itself. It revealed how literary form, far from being neutral, became a means of negotiating linguistic purity, cultural authority, and communal identity in an era of intensifying polarisation.

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Author(s) Contribution

All the Author(s) work equally to prepare the manuscript.

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