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2 **Urdu in Devanagari: Shifting orthographic practices and**
3 **Muslim identity in Delhi**

4 R I Z W A N A H M A D

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9 A B S T R A C T
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11 In sociolinguistics, Urdu and Hindi are considered to be textbook examples
12 of digraphia—a linguistic situation in which varieties of the same language
13 are written in different scripts. Urdu has traditionally been written in the
14 Arabic script, whereas Hindi is written in Devanagari. Analyzing the
15 recent orthographic practice of writing Urdu in Devanagari, this article chal-
16 lenges the traditional ideology that the choice of script is crucial in differen-
17 tiating Urdu and Hindi. Based on written data, interviews, and ethnographic
18 observations, I show that Muslims no longer view the Arabic script as a
19 necessary element of Urdu, nor do they see Devanagari as completely anti-
20 thetical to their identity. I demonstrate that using the strategies of phonetic
21 and orthographic transliteration, Muslims are making Urdu-in-Devanagari
22 different from Hindi, although the difference is much more subtle. My
23 data further shows that the very structure of a writing system is in part socially
24 constituted. (Script-change, Urdu, Urdu-in-Devanagari, Hindi, Arabic script,
25 Devanagari, orthography, transliteration)*
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28 I N T R O D U C T I O N
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30 In the sociolinguistics literature, Urdu and Hindi are considered to be quintessential
31 examples of digraphia—a linguistic situation in which varieties of the same
32 language are written using different writing systems. In ordinary conversational
33 registers, Urdu and Hindi are largely mutually intelligible. Therefore, it is the
34 choice of script that plays a crucial role in making them distinct. Urdu has tradition-
35 ally been written in the Arabic script, whereas Hindi is written in Devanagari. So-
36 cially, the digraphic situation is related to the religious identities of Muslims and
37 Hindus and their social desire for linguistic differentiation. Scholars argue that
38 the Arabic script, because of its association with the Holy Quran, symbolizes
39 Muslim identity, whereas Devanagari, because of its relationship with Hindu scrip-
40 tures written in Sanskrit, represents Hindu identity (e.g. Kelkar 1968; Dale 1980;
41 C. R. King 1994; R. D. King 2001).

42 Analyzing the recent orthographic practices of writing Urdu in Devanagari (hen-
43 ceforth also Ur-Nag), this article challenges the traditional ideology that the choice

44 of script is crucial in differentiating Urdu and Hindi. Drawing on published written
 45 data, interviews, surveys, and ethnographic observations, I show that Muslims in
 46 India no longer view the Arabic script as a necessary, let alone defining, element
 47 of Urdu, nor do they believe that Devanagari is completely antithetical to Urdu
 48 and their Muslim identity. By analyzing Ur-Nag texts, I show that while some fea-
 49 tures of Urdu are being lost, many are being preserved. Using the strategies of pho-
 50 netic and orthographic transliteration (Androutsopoulos 2009), Muslims are
 51 making Urdu-in-Devanagari different from Hindi, although the difference is
 52 much more subtle and nuanced. Theoretically, this study suggests that the social
 53 symbolic meanings of writing systems do not stem from the writing systems them-
 54 selves but are produced and maintained through the orthographic practices in which
 55 users of the writing systems engage.

56 This article further suggests that the structure of a writing system—its graphemes
 57 and the rules that govern how they combine with each other, that is, its graphotactics—
 58 are not a mere technical matter of representing sounds on paper. I argue that the struc-
 59 ture of a writing system is in part constituted by social and cultural factors that involve
 60 issues of identity. I show that Muslims are modifying the structure of Devanagari by
 61 introducing a diacritic called a *bindi* to represent the distinctive Urdu phonemes. They
 62 are also trying to preserve purely orthographic features of Urdu in Devanagari, for
 63 example, the “silent” consonant letter *ain*, <ξ>, which is actually phonemically
 64 empty.¹ They use the schwa-grapheme <ॐ> to represent *ain*. In standard Devana-
 65 gari, schwa is never written after a consonant because it is assumed to be part of it, for
 66 example, the grapheme <क> represents the two phonemes /k/ and /ə/. In Ur-Nag
 67 texts, however, this rule is flouted in order to ensure that the silent Urdu letter *ain* is
 68 represented.

69 This radical change in the orthographic practices of Muslims is reflective and
 70 simultaneously constitutive of a constellation of changes in the social, political,
 71 and educational contexts. First, Urdu in postcolonial discourse became associated
 72 with Pakistan and Muslim separatism.² Second, in Old Delhi, Urdu also became
 73 stigmatized as the language of the poor, uneducated, and ghettoized Muslim com-
 74 munity. Third, although Urdu is recognized in the Constitution of India as one of
 75 the twenty-two scheduled languages, due to the distorted implementation of the
 76 language policy, opportunities to learn Urdu in government schools in North
 77 India are almost nonexistent (Sachar 2006). Finally, literacy practices involving
 78 Devanagari are viewed as patriotic and nationalistic since it is associated with
 79 Hindi.

80 In this article I first give a short sociolinguistic background on Urdu and
 81 Hindi, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework and data. Next, I
 82 discuss the social context of the changing literacy practices among Muslims.
 83 Then I examine Ur-Nag texts and discuss the features that are being lost and
 84 those that are being preserved. I also discuss the transformation in the ideologies
 85 that link the Arabic script and Urdu. Finally, I summarize the results of my study
 86 in the last section.

87 *Background on Urdu and Hindi*

88 Urdu and Hindi belong to the Indo-Aryan subbranch of the Indo-European
 89 language family. On the spoken level, the relationship between them is comparable
 90 to that between two varieties of English. In ordinary conversational registers, Urdu
 91 and Hindi speakers understand each other pretty well.³ This is because Urdu and
 92 Hindi are marked by what Woolard (1998a) calls bivalency—the use of linguistic
 93 elements that could simultaneously belong to more than one language. Bivalency
 94 between Urdu and Hindi permeates all levels of the linguistic systems—phonolo-
 95 gical, morphological, lexical, and syntactic.

96 Urdu and Hindi, however, are written in different scripts. Urdu employs a
 97 modified version of the Arabic script. The modification involved creating gra-
 98 phemes for Indic phonemes such as breathy stops, for which the Arabic script
 99 did not have symbols. A consequence of adopting the Arabic script is that in the
 100 Urdu alphabet, for one and the same phoneme, there is more than one grapheme.
 101 For example, the phoneme /s/ is represented by three graphemes <س>, <ث>, and <ص>. The graphemes <ث> and <ص>, which in Arabic stand for the pho-
 102 nemes /θ/ and pharyngealized /s/, are phonemically empty in Urdu. Other pho-
 103 nemically empty graphemes in the Urdu alphabet are: <ح>, <ذ>, <ض>, <ط>, <ظ>, and <ع>. Urdu has also borrowed the phonemes /f/, /z/, /x/, /ʃ/, and /q/ from Arabic and Persian and has preserved them. These phonemes are quite crucial in differentiating Urdu from Hindi.⁴

104 Hindi, by contrast, is written in the Devanagari script—the script used to write
 105 Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hindus.⁵ Another point of distinction is that
 106 although Hindi has also borrowed words from Persian and Arabic—much less
 107 than Urdu, however—the above phonemes have been NATIVIZED in Hindi. So, for
 108 example, the word for ‘pen’, a loanword from Arabic, is pronounced as /qələm/
 109 in Urdu but /kələm/ in Hindi. The borrowed phoneme /q/ has been preserved in
 110 Urdu but nativized as /k/ in Hindi.

111 Politically, script has been a contentious factor. Muslims and Hindus have
 112 fought battles for the official recognition of their respective languages and scripts
 113 (C. R. King 1989, 1992, 1994; Ahmad 2008a). The struggle for Hindi has been
 114 extensively studied as part of the Hindu nationalism (van der Veer 1994; Dalmia
 115 1997; Zavos 2000; Orsini 2002). I, however, argue that these studies do not go
 116 beyond the nineteenth-century contexts and cannot account for the transformations
 117 in the orthographic practices of Muslims. Moreover, a study of Urdu-in-Devanagari
 118 sheds light on how speakers construct and respond to postcolonial realities.

124
125 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

126
127 Making a departure from traditional approaches to the study of literacy as a socially
 128 neutral, technological skill, recent studies locate literacy practices in a sociocultural
 129 context informed by relations of power and ideology (e.g. Street 1995). Drawing

130 upon this approach, recent sociolinguistic research treats orthographic choices as
 131 sociocultural practices and a means of social positioning. (e.g. B. Brown 1993;
 132 Schieffelin & Charlier Doucet 1994; Balhorn 1998; Sebba 1998a, 2006, 2007; An-
 133 droustopoulos 2000, 2009; Jaffe & Walton 2000). In this body of literature, writing
 134 systems and orthography are treated as ways of constituting and representing (and
 135 often contesting) different identities.

136 Balhorn (1998), for example, argues that nonstandard spellings used to represent
 137 African-American English in literature derive their meaning from their opposition
 138 to the standard orthography. Similarly, Sebba (1998a) shows that Creole writers
 139 choose spelling conventions that show difference and distance from British
 140 English, even in words that are not pronounced very differently in Creole, for
 141 example, *yuh* ‘you’, *duh* ‘do’, and *tuff* ‘tough’. Another good example of how
 142 orthography is employed for identity work is the use of <k> for the standard
 143 <c>, or <qu> in the Spanish subculture as a means of symbolic opposition
 144 and resistance to the mainstream culture (Sebba 2007).

145

146

147 *Data*

148 This article is based on an analysis of a variety of data sources. While written-
 149 language data constitutes the bulk of the study, I also include interviews, surveys,
 150 and ethnographic observations. The written data come from two sources—
 151 *Mahakta Anchal* (henceforth *Anchal*), and *Muntakhab Ahadis* (henceforth
 152 *Ahadis*).⁶*Anchal*, launched in 1993 in Delhi, is a general-interest, popular, family
 153 magazine. In its format, it is modeled on the magazine *Pakiza Anchal*, published
 154 in the Arabic script, which has been in print for a much longer time. The two ma-
 155 gazines do not publish the same set of articles in the Arabic and the Devanagari ver-
 156 sions. However, both are published by the same publishing house and some authors
 157 write for both, which suggests that they may recycle some of their material in differ-
 158 ent issues of the magazines.

159 The editorial of the magazine starts with a translation (and transliteration into
 160 Devanagari) of the Islamic phrase “In the name of Allah, the most Benevolent,
 161 the most Merciful!” This line functions as a framing device for the magazine; it
 162 makes it clear that the contents of the magazine are targeted to a Muslim audience.
 163 All writers of the articles are Muslim, except occasional contributions by Hindu
 164 readers.⁷ Most issues of *Anchal* contain fiction, especially short stories and novel-
 165 ettes. They also contain Urdu poetry, articles on health and beauty, matrimonial ad-
 166 vertisements, and quotations, and stories from the Quran and Hadith.⁸ Some issues
 167 of the magazine also carry a column called *zāban (Urdu) sud^harē* ‘Improve your
 168 (Urdu) language’. The name of the column suggests that the producers of the ma-
 169 gazine believe that the text of the magazine is Urdu despite the fact that it is written
 170 in Devanagari. I return to this issue later.

171 *Ahadis* is a religious book containing narrations of Prophet Mohammad, pub-
 172 lished originally in the Arabic script, which has recently been transliterated into

173 Devanagari.⁹ The transliterated version is extremely popular among the younger
 174 generation of Muslims. During my fieldwork, I discovered that many bookstores
 175 in Old Delhi carry both Arabic and Devanagari versions. I also noticed that
 176 many mosques in Old Delhi have copies of the book in both scripts.

177 In addition to these sources, I also analyze some data from online Hindi news-
 178 papers to show the contrast in the representation of the distinctive Urdu phonemes.
 179 The textual and quantitative data is supplemented with observations and insights
 180 gained from an ethnographic study that I conducted in 2005 and 2006. I also
 181 include some interviews with participants who produce and use Urdu-in-Devana-
 182 gari texts. Also included is a survey examining the attitudes of speakers and
 183 writers of Hindi regarding the spelling innovations introduced by Muslims in the
 184 structure of Devanagari.

185
 186

187 SOCIOLINGUISTIC TRANSFORMATION OF OLD
 188 DELHI

189

190 Four major factors are relevant to understanding the transformation of the ortho-
 191 graphic practices of Muslims. First, after the Partition of India and the creation of
 192 the Muslim state of Pakistan in 1947, Urdu became stigmatized in India as the
 193 language of Muslim separatism. Urdu, before the Partition, was not categorically
 194 indexical of any ethnic identities; it indexed a broader urban, educated, middle
 195 class identity. Second, in Old Delhi, because of the mass migration of middle-
 196 class Muslims to Pakistan, Urdu began to be seen as the language of poor, unedu-
 197 cated, ghettoized Muslims. Third, Urdu is not available in most government
 198 schools, which makes it difficult for Muslim students who might be interested to
 199 learn it. Finally, since Devanagari is the official script for writing Hindi, literacy in-
 200 volving Devanagari is often viewed as patriotic.

201 The Partition brought about two important changes related to the symbolic
 202 meanings of Urdu. First, on the national level, in the postcolonial discourse,
 203 Hindus began to see Urdu as the language of Muslims and often as the language
 204 of separatism associated with Pakistan. Purushottam Das Tandon, a leader of the
 205 Congress party remarked in 1948:

206 The Muslims must stop talking about a culture and civilization foreign to our
 207 culture and genius. They should accept Indian culture. One culture and one
 208 language will pave the way for real unity. URDU SYMBOLIZES A FOREIGN
 209 CULTURE. Hindi alone can be the unifying factor for all the diverse forces in
 210 the country. (Khalidi 1995:138, emphasis mine)

211
 212 Here one can see the establishment of the iconization of Urdu with lack of patrio-
 213 tism and foreignness and Hindi as the language of nation-building. Metcalf
 214 (2006:66) notes the consequences of the Partition for Urdu in India: "In any
 215 case, the fact that Urdu then became the national language of Pakistan, a country

216 established on the grounds of the religion of the population, made the position of
 217 Urdu in its own homeland even more difficult.”

218 The local impact of the Partition on Old Delhi was that, because of the mass
 219 migration of the middle-class Muslims, the city was reduced to a ghetto community
 220 of poor and uneducated Muslims. According to Pandey (2001:124), by the end of
 221 October 1947 about 350,000 Muslims, which was 70% of the total Muslim popu-
 222 lation, had left Delhi. As a result, the proportion of Muslims to the total population
 223 of Delhi dropped from 32% in 1931 to 6% in 1951 (Bakhshi & Sharma 1995:121).
 224 Scholars believe that a majority of Muslims who migrated to Pakistan belonged to
 225 the middle class. Singh (2006:39) notes, “Partition depleted the Muslim commu-
 226 nity of a major segment of the middle classes, elite, professionals, and enterprising
 227 population, and left the community impoverished in economic and social terms.”

228 Consequently, in the postcolonial imaginary of Hindus, Muslims of Old Delhi
 229 stood for poverty, backwardness, and lack of education. Many Muslim research par-
 230 ticipants shared with me the embarrassment they often felt telling outsiders that they
 231 were from Old Delhi. They told me that they would often lie to outsiders about their
 232 residence. These factors combined to create a condition where young Muslims feel
 233 ashamed of their identity and its linguistic expression through Urdu. Since the
 234 Muslim youth does not have a command of the Urdu alphabet, Urdu-in-Devanagari
 235 texts are created FOR them BY the older generation Muslims, who know both the
 236 Arabic and Devanagari scripts. The Ur-Nag texts therefore cannot be described
 237 as subcultural youth vernacular.

238

239 *The Arabic script: The crumbling shibboleth*

240

241 The Arabic script was the most critical element in differentiating Urdu from Hindi.
 242 Although some scattered attempts were made in the past to write Urdu in the Roman
 243 script, it has mostly been written in the Arabic script. The use of the Roman script
 244 was championed by British missionaries and colonial officers. In the first half of the
 245 nineteenth century, some missionaries translated the Bible into “Roman Urdu”. Ac-
 246 cording to G. Brown (1854), editions of the Bible were printed in Roman Urdu in
 247 the nineteenth century. Later, British civil servants encouraged its use, and some
 248 pedagogical books were written using the Roman script.¹⁰ Urdu speakers them-
 249 selves, however, have not used the Roman script because of the social values at-
 250 tached to the Arabic and Roman scripts. Note also that during the entire Muslim
 251 rule, the official language of India was Persian written in the Arabic script. So, lit-
 252 eracy in the Arabic script was socially quite valued.

253 After the Independence of India in 1947, Hindi written in Devanagari became an
 254 official language. Since Urdu and Hindi are quite similar languages, Devanagari
 255 has been presented as an alternative to the existing Arabic script. Suggestions
 256 have come from both within the Muslim community and from without. Rahi
 257 Masum Raza, a noted Urdu novelist, argued in an interview in 1990 that unless
 258 the Urdu classics were converted into Devanagari, they would become inaccessible

259 to the future generation. He also suggested that Urdu speakers should adopt Deva-
 260 nagari for writing Urdu (Russell 1999).¹¹

261 However, Muslims have resisted Devanagari not because of the pragmatic diffi-
 262 culties that the switch might involve, but because they believe that this would mean
 263 suspending the distinctions between Urdu and Hindi (Dalvi 1971; Khan 1997;
 264 Moghni 1998; Sahar 2001). Dalvi argues:

265 These days, proposals are being made to change the script of Urdu, because it is
 266 being described as a non-scientific script. ... Although Turkish, Indonesian and
 267 Malay have abandoned their scripts. ..., the same will be detrimental to Urdu. The
 268 languages that have changed scripts are isolated languages of the region, and
 269 therefore they do not risk being merged into other languages. The ecology of
 270 Urdu is completely different from those languages. IF THE SCRIPT OF URDU
 271 WERE TO CHANGE, URDU WOULD NOT ONLY LOSE ITS DISTINCT IDENTITY BY MERGING
 272 INTO HINDI, BUT THE WHOLE LITERATURE SPANNING SEVERAL CENTURIES WOULD GO
 273 TO WASTE. (1971:364, emphasis mine)¹²

275 A more recent voice of opposition to the proposal comes from Faruqi (2006). Ac-
 276 cording to him, the boundary between Urdu and Hindi cannot be maintained
 277 without the Arabic script.

279 The situation today is that, in practical terms, IT IS ONLY THE SCRIPT THAT SEPARATES
 280 URDU FROM HINDI... IF URDU ADOPTS THE NAGARI SCRIPT, IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY
 281 LOSE ITS IDENTITY. HINDI WOULD SOON ABSORB URDU INTO ITSELF... The magnificent
 282 literary treasure of Urdu will have been reduced, through the conversion of these
 283 glorious classical treasures, into Hindi literature within no time.... Soon, this
 284 treasure will be beyond the reach of those Urdu people who are not familiar
 285 with the Nagari script. (Faruqi 2006:137–38, emphasis mine)

287 During my fieldwork, I met with a retired professor of Urdu who lives behind the
 288 Grand Mosque in Old Delhi. While discussing the issue of Urdu in general and the
 289 script in particular, he told me how furious he was during the annual Hajj pilgrim-
 290 age in Mecca when he saw a fellow Muslim pilgrim holding a book of supplication
 291 written in Devanagari. He told me that he felt like saying '*allah ki lanat ho tum par*'
 292 'May the curse of God fall upon you!'. For this Urdu speaker, it was almost blas-
 293 phemous for a Muslim to read Urdu in Devanagari.

294 Since the issue of script has been quite crucial for Urdu speakers, it was dis-
 295 cussed at the fourth International Urdu Conference held in London in June 2006.
 296 The panel that discussed the issue of script unanimously agreed that the adoption
 297 of a new script would be detrimental to Urdu (Senrai 2006). This shows that
 298 there exists a wide rift between the ideologies and practices of the older generation
 299 Urdu-speaking elite and the younger generation of ordinary Muslims. Despite such
 300 a strong opposition from scholars, writers, and poets, many Urdu speakers have
 301 already started to use Devanagari.

URDU IN DEVANAGARI

The adoption of Devanagari for Urdu has the potential to obliterate the distinctions between Urdu and Hindi. On the surface level, while Urdu-in-Devanagari looks completely different from Urdu in the Arabic script, it looks quite similar to Hindi. In this section, I discuss the strategies that Muslims are adopting to make Urdu-in-Devanagari different from Hindi. However, a terminological clarification is in order. Ur-Nag texts are not TRANSLATION from Urdu into Hindi but rather TRANSLITERATION (Androutsopoulos 2009) from the Arabic into Devanagari script.¹³ Below is a paragraph in Urdu in the Arabic script and in a Devanagari script, followed by a transliteration and English translation in (1).

- (1) mādina se tis pāētis mil dur **fīmal mʾafriq** mē hāra b^hāra **nāxlistan** t^ha. f^hoṭisi ek ḡ^hil, ḡ^hil ke kīnare k^haḡur ke peṛō kā ḡ^hunḡ aur **sāhrai paude lāq-o-dāq** tāpte huwe is **sāhra** mē **ḡānnat** ka **sāmā** paida kīye huwe t^he. ye **nāxlistan** is **regzar** mē yū lāgta t^ha ḡāse dāhakte huwe āngarō mē ek p^hul k^hīla huwa ho. (Altamash 2005:3)

‘About thirty to thirty-five miles North East of Madinah, there was a fertile oasis. A small pond, a group of date palm trees on the banks of the pond, and other desert plants had created a semblance of the Heaven in the scorching desert. This oasis in the desert looked like a flower that had blossomed in a sea of flames.’

The above extract is from the novel *hejaz kiād^hi* ‘The storm of Hejaz’ by Enayatullah Altamash. It is clear from the example that the Devanagari version is not a translation from Urdu into Hindi. No words or phrases of the original Urdu have been translated; in a typical translation, Urdu words (shown in bold above) such as *fīmal* ‘north’, *mʾafriq* ‘east’, *nāxlistan* ‘oasis’, *sāhrai* ‘desert-like’, and *regzar* ‘desert’ will be replaced with their Hindi equivalents. In some Ur-Nag texts, however, some minor changes are often made, which involve replacing obscure and archaic words with common Urdu words.

Lost in transliteration

An analysis of the Ur-Nag texts shows that there are two processes of transliteration at work—phonetic and orthographic (Androutsopoulos 2009). While the phonetic transliteration allows Muslims to represent in Devanagari the phonemes that make Urdu distinct from Hindi (see the next section), it also results in the loss of historical Urdu spellings containing the phonemically empty graphemes <ث>, <ح>, <ذ>, <ص>, <ض>, <ط>, <ظ>, and <ع> (see BACKGROUND ON URDU AND HINDI).¹⁴ Many advocates of script reform including Khan (1971), who calls these graphemes “dead corpses,” have argued in the past that in order to make the Urdu alphabet more “scientific,” they should be discarded from the Urdu

345 alphabet. These suggestions, however, have never been implemented. The Urdu
346 Script Reform Committee, which was constituted in 1973 to look into the Urdu
347 orthography noted:

348 The different letters that correspond to the same phoneme [phonemically empty
349 graphemes] have become part of our LINGUISTIC INHERITANCE. It is by virtue of
350 these [graphemes] that we have received thousands of valuable words, which
351 are an integral component of our language. (Narang 1974:26, emphasis mine)
352

353 The Committee's view clearly indicates that although these graphemes may be pho-
354 nemically empty to script reformers, they are pregnant with meanings to Urdu
355 speakers. The Committee values these graphemes as part of the linguistic inheri-
356 tance and thus worthy of maintenance. This again provides a good example of
357 the need for an ideological model of orthography, which goes beyond the technical
358 aspects of writing systems and incorporates the social and cultural practices within
359 which they are embedded.

360 However, this "linguistic inheritance" is not preserved in Urdu-in-Devanagari
361 (see THE REPRESENTATION OF THE URDU GRAPHEMES for two notable exceptions
362 <ح> and <ع>). In both *Anchal* and *Ahadis*, for example, all three graphemes
363 of standard Urdu orthography <ث, س, ص> that stand for the phoneme /s/ are rep-
364 resented by one single Devanagari grapheme <स>. The same holds true of the
365 graphemes <ذ, ض, ظ, ز>, which stand for the phoneme /z/. The result is that the
366 orthographic difference in standard Urdu orthography between the words
367 <نظر> <nəzər> 'sight' and <نذر> <nəzər> 'gift' has been neutralized in
368 Devanagari as <नज़र>. ¹⁵

369 Table 1 gives examples that show the loss of these graphemes in Urdu-in-Deva-
370 nagari. A possible reason for the nonrepresentation of these graphemes could be
371 that the writers may not have access to the original Arabic orthography if they do
372 not know the Arabic script already. I return to this in a later section and explain
373 some of the variation in Urdu-in-Devanagari. The principle of phonetic translitera-
374 tion is more robustly visible in the representation of the distinctive Urdu phonemes,
375 which contributes to making Urdu-in-Devanagari distinct from Hindi.
376

377 *Representation of the distinctive Urdu phonemes*

378 As discussed above, in addition to script, Urdu is distinguished from Hindi by the
379 phonemes /f/, /z/, /x/, /ʃ/, and /q/ borrowed from Arabic. These phonemes are seen
380 as the defining features of Urdu on the spoken level. Khan (1997:245) underscores
381 the significance of these phonemes by noting that "on the spoken level, Urdu can be
382 identified by the following borrowed phonemes from Arabic and Persian: *qaf*, *fe*, *ze*,
383 *ʒe*, *xe*, and *ʔain*." Khan here refers to the phonemes by the names of their letters,
384 *qaf*, *fe*, and so on, in the Urdu alphabet.
385

386 These phonemes are socially quite salient. Knowledge of Urdu is often
387 measured in terms of their correct pronunciation. If someone does not pronounce

TABLE 1. Nonrepresentation of Urdu graphemes in Devanagari. [colcnt = 7]

Phoneme	Urdu grapheme	Devanagari grapheme	Urdu example	Ur-Nag example	IPA	Gloss
/s/	<ث>	<स>	<تائیر>	<تاسیر>	/tasir/	'effect'
	<س>		<رسول>	<رسूल>	/rəsul/	'prophet'
	<ص>		<منصب>	<منسب>	/mənsəb/	'position'
/z/	<ذ>	<ज>	<ذکر>	<जिक्र>	/zɪkr/	'mention'
	<ز>		<زمین>	<जमीन>	/zəmin/	'earth'
	<ض>		<حاضر>	<हाजिर>	/hazır/	'present'
	<ظ>		<نظر>	<नजर>	/nəzər/	'gift'
/h/	<ح>	<ह>	<حکمت>	<हिकमत>	/hɪkmət/	'wisdom'
	<ه>		<ہمت>	<हिम्मत>	/himmət/	'courage'
/t/	<ت>	<त>	<کتاب>	<किताब>	/kɪtəb/	'book'
	<ط>		<خطاب>	<खिताब>	/xɪtəb/	'address'

these phonemes correctly, other Urdu speakers often comment that they have not gotten their *fin* and *qaf* correct—referring to two of the letters of the Urdu alphabet. In fact, the correct pronunciation of these sounds is so iconic of the “authentic” Urdu speaker that even Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938), who is considered to be one of the tallest figures of Urdu poetry, was ridiculed by Urdu speakers for not being able to pronounce them correctly. Iqbal was from the province of the Punjab and, like most Punjabi-Urdu speakers, pronounced *qaf*, the phoneme /q/, as *kaf*, /k/.

During my fieldwork, I came across some articles in Urdu newspapers that lament the loss of the phonemes among young Urdu speakers and equate it with the loss of the Urdu language. In an article published in the *Rashtriya Sahara*, one writer gives specific examples of how the Urdu phonemes /q/ in words such as /diqqət/ ‘trouble’ and /x/ as in /xərʃə/ ‘expenditure,’ are being pronounced incorrectly as [dɪkkət] and [kʰərʃə] by the younger generation (W. Rahman 2006). He appeals to Urdu speakers to make sure that they pronounce them correctly.

Since these phonemes are not Indic, Devanagari does not have graphemes for them. In Urdu-in-Devanagari they are represented with a diacritic dot—a *bindi*—placed under Devanagari graphemes. For example, a *bindi* is placed under the Hindi grapheme <फ> <p^h>, which stands for the phoneme /p^h/ to represent the Urdu phoneme /f/. Table 2 below shows the original Devanagari graphemes and the modified ones to represent the distinctive Urdu phonemes.

Although the use of the *bindi* for representing the distinctive Urdu phonemes has been available since the nineteenth century, it has been historically contested. In 1930, Madan Mohan Malaviya, a very prominent Hindu leader and a staunch supporter of Hindi, wrote an editorial in his weekly newspaper *Abhyudaya* entitled “*hindi mẽ bindi kyõ?*” ‘Why use *bindi* in Hindi?’, arguing against the use of the

TABLE 2. Devanagari graphemes and their modifications. [colcnt = 4]

Distinctive Urdu phoneme	Closest Hindi phoneme	Devanagari grapheme	Modified bindi grapheme
/f/	/p ^h /	<फ>	<फ़>
/z/	/ɖʒ/	<ज>	<ज़>
/x/	/k ^h /	<ख>	<ख़>
/ʒ/	/g/	<ग>	<ग़>
/q/	/k/	<क>	<क़>

diacritic in Hindi for the distinctive Urdu phonemes (Mehrotra 2005). In practice also, the bindi diacritic is not used in Hindi publications.

It is interesting to note that in Hindi the bindi is used over some graphemes to represent nasal consonants and nasalized vowels, for example, <चंद्र> [tʃəndr] ‘moon’ and <माँ> [mā̃] ‘mother’. The diacritic is also used underneath some graphemes to represent retroflex sounds, for example, <ड>, /ɖ/ and <ढ> /ɖ^h/. So the issue is more ideological than technological. Shahid Amin, a renowned Muslim historian, describes his frustration with Hindi publishers regarding the use of the bindi: “I have written a little bit in Hindi and every time it [the manuscript] comes back from the publisher all the bindis have systematically been taken off” (Mehrotra 2005:189). Many of my Muslim research participants were unhappy that their Hindu friends did not place a bindi under the Hindi graphemes for the distinctive Urdu phonemes in their names.

The practice of not using bindis for the distinctive Urdu phonemes can be seen in Hindi books, magazines, and newspapers published from India. None of the most widely read Hindi newspapers use a bindi for these phonemes. I studied five online newspapers published from North India, including *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, which, according to the 2006 report of the National Readership Studies Council, recorded the highest readership among all newspapers published in India. *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, published simultaneously from several cities in North India have a readership of 21.2 and 21 million respectively.¹⁶

The following extract from *Dainik Jagran* shows that although the newspaper uses some words containing these phonemes, the bindi is not used to represent them.¹⁷ The phonemes /x/, /z/, /f/, and /q/ in the words <खालिदा> <k^halida>, <जिया> <ɖʒiya>, <माफी> <mafi>, and <तारिक> <tanik> are not marked with the bindi diacritic. To help the reader identify these graphemes, the words containing them are bolded in the example below.

- (2) खालिदा जिया के बेटे ने आरोप स्वीकारा
ढाका। हिरासत में रखे गए बांग्लादेश की पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री खालिदा जिया के बड़े बेटे तारिक
रहमान ने भ्रष्टाचार में शामिल होने की बात स्वीकार करते हुए इसके लिए माफी मांगी है।

474 ... रहमान खालिदा की बांग्लादेश नेशनलिस्ट पार्टी (बीएनपी) के संयुक्त महासचिव हैं।
 475 उन्हें ढाका छावनी इलाके में स्थित उनकी माँ के घर से गिरफ्तार किया गया था। बाद में
 476 उन्हें खुफिया एजेंसियों के हवाले कर दिया गया।¹⁸

477
 478 In contrast to the convention prevalent in Hindi language newspapers, publi-
 479 cations in Urdu-in-Devanagari represent the distinctive Urdu phonemes with the
 480 bindi diacritic quite religiously. Both *Anchal* and *Ahadis* are categorical in the rep-
 481 resentation of the distinctive Urdu phonemes using the bindi diacritic. Given below
 482 is the contents page of the July 2005 issue of *Anchal*.

483 Each line in the extract contains the distinctive phonemes represented by the
 484 bindi diacritic, circled above for better visual clarity. For example, the very first
 485 line below the heading contains two distinctive Urdu phonemes /q/ and /z/ in the
 486 words <मुकाबला> <muqabla> ‘competition’ and <ज़बान> <zəban>
 487 ‘tongue’, and both have been marked with the bindi diacritic. Other examples are
 488 /f/ in the word <अफसाने> <əfsane> ‘stories’, /z/ in <जायके> <zaeqa>
 489 ‘taste’, /x/ in the word <खास> <xas> ‘special’, <Ɂ> in the word <Ɂəzle>
 490 <गज़लें> ‘poetry’, and /q/ in <qimət> <कीमत> ‘value’.

491 The use of the bindi diacritic makes Ur-Nag texts visually distinguishable from
 492 Hindi texts. I argue that in the absence of the Arabic script, the bindi serves as an
 493 orthographic contextualization cue for readers that the text in question is Urdu
 494 and not Hindi; the bindi has now become invested with the meaning that was indi-
 495 cated by the Arabic script before.

496
 497 *The representation of the Urdu graphemes baRi he <Ɂ> and*
 498 *ain <Ɂ>*
 499

500 The principle of orthographic transliteration to create distance and distinctions from
 501 Hindi is evidenced in the representation of two Urdu graphemes *baRi he* <Ɂ> and
 502 *ain* <Ɂ>. These are two of the phonemically empty graphemes of the Urdu alpha-
 503 bet. Since these graphemes do not have corresponding phonemes, there do not seem
 504 to be any linguistic reasons why they should be represented. However, my data
 505 shows that they are represented in Devanagari, although not as categorically as
 506 the distinctive phonemes.

507 As shown in Table 1, the Urdu phoneme /h/ is represented by the grapheme *baRi*
 508 *he* <Ɂ> and *chhoTi he* <ə>, which stand for /h/ and /h/ in Arabic. Since Urdu
 509 does not make a phonemic distinction between /h/ and /h/, *baRi he* is not pro-
 510 nounced, although it is preserved in Urdu orthography. In Urdu-in-Devanagari,
 511 both of these graphemes are represented generally by the grapheme <ह>. In
 512 some texts, however, *baRi he* is represented differently from *chhoTi he* by
 513 placing the bindi diacritic underneath <ह>. Table 3 gives examples of words con-
 514 taining *baRi he* with and without the bindi diacritic.

515 The variation in the representation of *baRi he* is related to the genre of the text. In
 516 *Anchal*, which largely contains secular texts, *baRi he* is NEVER represented with the

TABLE 3. Variation in the representation of baRi he <ح>.[colcnt = 6]

WITH the bindi diacritic			WITHOUT the bindi diacritic		
BaRi he	<ह> grapheme	Gloss	BaRi he	<ह> grapheme	Gloss
<حقیقت>	<हकीकत>	'truth'	<اصلاح>	<इस्लाह>	'reform'
<صحیح>	<सहीह>	'authentic'	<حصول>	<हुसूल>	'find'
<حدیث>	<हदीस>	'sayings'	<محمود>	<महमूद>	'name'

525
526

527 *bindi* diacritic. In *Ahadis*, which is a religious text, however, words containing *baRi*
528 *he* are often written with the bindi diacritic, although with some variation. This
529 suggests that the ideologies of the people involved in the process of transliteration
530 of religious texts are more conservative. This may be motivated by their desire to
531 preserve in Devanagari, as much as possible, the Urdu-ness of the original text.
532 This could also be a strategy to command religious credibility and authority of
533 the Devanagari texts. Since the difference between these graphemes is not phone-
534 mic, only people of religious learning have access to the historical spelling of words
535 containing *baRi he*. Here one can see the use of orthographic transliteration as a
536 resource to construct authority and credibility.

537 Another example of the use of orthographic transliteration to create distinctions
538 and distance is the representation of *ain* <ع> in Devanagari. The letter *ain* in
539 Arabic stands for the pharyngeal fricative consonant /ʕ/. In Urdu, *ain* does not
540 have a corresponding phoneme; in some contexts, however, it influences the pro-
541 nunciation of the preceding vowel. Muslims have chosen the Devanagari schwa-
542 grapheme <अ> to represent *ain*. Before discussing the innovation and the
543 impact it has on the graphotactics of Devanagari, I give some possible reasons
544 why <अ>, a vowel-grapheme, has been chosen for *ain*, which is a consonant.

545 Unlike Arabic, the letter *ain* is not pronounced in Urdu in word-initial and word-
546 final positions. Many old manuscripts, written in the Arabic script from as late as the
547 seventeenth century, show spellings in which word-final *ain* is dropped. In his
548 classic book *Sabras* Mulla Wajhi, a seventeenth century Urdu poet from Deccan,
549 spells words such as <وضع> <wəzəʕ> 'look' and <نفع> <mənaʕ>
550 'benefit' without the final *ain* (Shirani 1966:260–61). In later developments of
551 Urdu, the letter *ain* in such words was restored in order to conform to the original
552 Arabic spellings. The data in Table 4 show the zero pronunciation of *ain* in word-
553 initial and word-final positions.

554 In word-medial positions, however, although *ain* is not pronounced, it impacts the
555 pronunciation of the preceding vowel by making it long. This is similar to the well-
556 known linguistic phenomenon of compensatory lengthening.

557 This may give a false impression that *ain* is vowel-like. This probably is the
558 reason why Urdu speakers have chosen <अ> to represent the consonant *ain*.
559 This additional use of the schwa-grapheme, in addition to its normal use as

TABLE 4. Zero pronunciation of ain. [colcnt = 5]

Urdu	Spelling	IPA	Gloss	Phonemic value
<عرض>	<ʕərz>	[ərz]	‘offer’	ʕ > φ
<عمر>	<ʕəmr>	[əmr]	‘age’	ʕ > φ
<وسیع>	<wəsiʕ>	[wəsi]	‘wide’	ʕ > φ
<موضوع>	<mauzuʕ>	[mauzu]	‘topic’	ʕ > φ

TABLE 5. Compensatory lengthening of vowels due to ain. [colcnt = 5]

Urdu	Spelling	Pronunciation	Gloss	Phonetic value
<نعت>	<nəʕt>	[nat]	‘eulogy’	əʕ > a
<بعد>	<bəʕd>	[bod]	‘distance’	ʊʕ > o
<نعمت>	<nɪʕmat>	[nemat]	‘blessing’	ɪʕ > e

schwa, however, conflict with each other. In order to understand the conflict, it is necessary to discuss briefly some properties of Devanagari.

Devanagari alphabet

An important feature of the Devanagari writing system is that all consonant-graphemes have an inherent schwa in them, and therefore there is no need to write it separately from the consonants. For example, the grapheme <क> stands for /kə/, the consonant /k/, and the schwa /ə/. A consequence of this is that the schwa-vowel <अ> is written only word-initially, for example in words such as <अचेत> [əʕet] ‘unconscious’, <अकाल> [əkəl] ‘famine’. All other vowels have two allographs, positional variants—one is free and the other is bound. The free allograph is only used in word-initial positions; the bound one, which must occur with a consonant, is used word-medially and word-finally.

Table 6 gives examples of some Hindi vowels and their positional variants with the consonant <क> <kə>, as an example.

Notice that there is no bound form for the schwa-grapheme <अ> (since it is assumed to be part of consonant graphemes). This feature of Devanagari allows one to write many words of Hindi without writing vowels overtly, for example, the word [kəməl] ‘flower’ can be written just by writing the consonant graphemes <क>, <म>, and <ल>, one after another as <कमल>. This is of course not possible if the word contains vowels other than schwa.

The use of the schwa-grapheme <अ> to represent the Urdu letter *ain* <ʕ> conflicts with its original use as a symbol for the vowel schwa /ə/. I mentioned above that the distribution of the schwa-grapheme <अ> in Devanagari is limited to the word-initial position. The Urdu letter *ain* <ʕ>, however, is not

TABLE 6. Positional variants of some Devanagari vowels. [colcnt = 5]

Free form	Bound form	IPA	With <क> <k>	IPA
<अ>	None	/ə/	क	/kə/
<आ>	ा	/a/	का	/ka/
<इ>	ि	/i/	कि	/ki/
<ई>	ी	/i:/	की	/ki:/

restricted; it occurs in all positions, for example, <عمر> <ʕomr> ‘age’, <نعت> <nəʕt> ‘eulogy’, and <وسیع>, <wəsiʕ> ‘wide’. The word-initial *ain* fits well with the occurrence restriction of <अ> in Devanagari, and therefore it is written like other words. The *ain* in word-medial and word-final positions however does not agree with the distributional restriction of <अ>, which is that it can only occur word-initially.

However, this rule of standard Devanagari is flouted by writers of Urdu-in-Devanagari in order to ensure that *ain* is represented. Table 7 shows examples of words taken from *Anchal* and *Ahadis* containing the schwa-grapheme <अ> in word-medial and word-final positions, shown in columns 2 and 5 respectively. Both the word-medial and word-final occurrences of <अ> are unlicensed because a schwa-grapheme is never written word-medially or word-finally in standard Devanagari orthography.

However, for Urdu-in-Devanagari writers, the schwa-looking grapheme in Table 7 is not the regular (Hindi) schwa but the Urdu consonant *ain*. Urdu speakers have re-analyzed <अ> as a symbol for both the schwa-vowel and the consonant *ain*.

In order to ascertain that the use of the schwa-grapheme in word-medial and word-final positions indeed violates the basic properties of Devanagari, I conducted research among Hindi speakers, all of whom were Hindu except one. I administered a survey to nineteen students doing their Master’s degree in the Hindi language and literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The reason for selecting graduate students was that writing is a learned skill, and therefore students studying Hindi are more likely to be aware of the writing conventions than ordinary speakers of Hindi.

The goal of the survey was to understand how the innovations introduced into Devanagari by Urdu speakers are perceived by Hindi speakers. One of the questions

TABLE 7. Word-medial and word-final use of अ. [colcnt = 6]

Urdu	Ur-Nag	Gloss	Urdu	Ur-Nag	Gloss
<نعت>	<नअत>	‘eulogy’	<وسیع>	<वसीअ>	‘wide’
<تعلق>	<तअल्लुक>	‘relation’	<توسیع>	<तोसीअ>	‘expansion’
<معنی>	<मअनी>	‘meaning’	<موضوع>	<मौजूअ>	‘topic’

646 in the survey was whether they had seen words containing the schwa-grapheme
 647 word-medially and word-finally, such as <नअत> and <वसीअ>, in print
 648 before. The result of the survey shows that 75% or more of the respondents had
 649 NOT seen such words before. This suggests that Hindi speakers are not aware of
 650 the innovations introduced by Muslims in the Devanagari script.

651 The second question was if the spellings of the Urdu-in-Devanagari words con-
 652 taining word-medial and word-final schwa were correct according to standard De-
 653 vanagari conventions. A majority of the respondents judged such words to be
 654 incorrect. In response to the question why they thought the word was written incor-
 655 rectly, most respondents wrote that in Hindi <अ> is never written after a conso-
 656 nant. Vikas, one of the respondents expressed this convention very clearly: “In the
 657 Devanagari script, a vowel is not written in an independent form in the middle of
 658 consonants. The vowel <अ> is already inherent in consonants, and therefore
 659 there is no need to write it separately.”

660 It is worth pointing out that this unlicensed use of *ain* makes the pronunciation of
 661 such words abstruse to Hindi speakers, because of the “awkward” graphemic clus-
 662 ters. In such cases, it becomes impossible for them to predict the pronunciation
 663 based on the written representation. I asked the participants how they would pro-
 664 nounce the words containing the schwa-grapheme in word-medial and word-final
 665 positions. For the word <नअत> <nəʃt>, which is pronounced in Urdu as
 666 /nat/, a one-syllable word, taking a cue from the orthography, a majority of them
 667 said that they would pronounce it as /nə.ət/, as if it had two syllables. Some of
 668 them also said that they did not know how to pronounce it at all. Similarly, for
 669 the word <वसीअ>, a two-syllable word, which is pronounced in Urdu as /və.si/,
 670 a majority of them indicated that they would pronounce it as /və.si.ə/ as if it were
 671 a three-syllable word.

672 The data discussed above suggest that Urdu speakers and writers violate the ortho-
 673 graphic constraints of Devanagari in order to preserve the orthographic features of
 674 Urdu. Although the letter *ain* is not pronounced in Urdu in many positions, Urdu
 675 speakers still wish to represent it because they would like to transfer the orthographic
 676 features of Urdu into Devanagari regardless of their phonemic significance or lack of
 677 it. Motivated by the desire to preserve the orthographic integrity of the Urdu
 678 language, Urdu speakers have reanalyzed the Devanagari schwa-grapheme in such
 679 a way that it stands for both the schwa-vowel and the Urdu consonant *ain*. In other
 680 words, Muslims have turned the schwa-grapheme into a homograph—two
 681 graphemes that have the same orthographic shape. If we adopt this hypothesis,
 682 then what appears to be a violation of standard Devanagari conventions no longer
 683 remains so.

684 The evidence in support of the claim comes from the practice of using *hal/viram*,
 685 the “vowel killer” diacritic. A *hal* is used in Devanagari to eliminate the schwa-
 686 vowel inherent in each consonant grapheme. For example, the grapheme <क>
 687 stands for [kə], but if a *hal* is placed under it, as in <क्>, the schwa is eliminated;
 688 it now stands only for the consonant [k]. If Urdu speakers have reanalyzed the

TABLE 8. अ with hal. [colcnt = 8]

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697

Word-medial <अ>	Arabic script	Roman	Gloss	Word-final <अ>	Arabic script	Roman	Gloss
वसीअतर	وسیع تر	wasi'tar	'wider'	मौजूअ	موضوع	məuzuʃ	'topic'
मअदूम	معدوم	məʔdum	'extinct'	मनाफेअ	منافع	mənafiʃ	'benefit'
तअदील	تعديل	təʔdil	'change'	तवाजुअ	تواضع	təwazəʃ	'humility'

698 schwa-grapheme as a symbol for the consonant *ain*, then we should find instances
699 where a *hal* is placed on <अ>. This indeed is the case. The examples in Table 8
700 taken from *Ahadis* support this. Column 1 shows words containing <अ> word-
701 medially with a *hal* underneath it. Column 4 shows words containing <अ>
702 word-finally with a *hal* underneath it.

703 The use of *hal* clearly suggests that this <अ> is not the schwa grapheme; it is the
704 consonant grapheme *ain*. So, if <अ> is replaced with any consonant grapheme in
705 the above examples, the resulting words would be correct graphotactically. Another
706 reason why <अ> in the above examples must be a consonant grapheme is that *hal*
707 is not used on the schwa-grapheme. It won't make sense to write a schwa-vowel and
708 then get rid of it by placing a *hal*—vowel-killer—on it.

709 The representation of *ain*, unlike the distinctive phonemes discussed above
710 shows some variations. Two of them are worth noting. For example, the word
711 <دعوت> <dəʃwət> 'invitation', which contains the letter *ain*, should have
712 been written like <दअवत> with the schwa in the middle for *ain*, but it is
713 written like any other Hindi word with a long vowel <दावत>. This means that
714 authors use the orthographic and phonetic transliterations inconsistently in repre-
715 senting the letter *ain*. This variation is typical of any emerging, yet-to-stabilize
716 orthographic practice (see e.g. Palfreyman & al-Khalil 2003; Androutsopoulos
717 2009).

718 The second variation is more interesting because it is related to the genre of the
719 text. In *Ahadis*, which is a religious text, the schwa-grapheme for *ain* is marked with
720 an additional bindi diacritic underneath, similar to the representation of *baRi he*, to
721 distinguish it from <अ>, the vowel-grapheme. Remember that in Urdu-in-Deva-
722 nagari in general, the schwa-grapheme is a homograph for the schwa and the con-
723 sonant *ain*. In *Anchal*, for example, the word-initial occurrence of *ain* <अ> is not
724 different from the schwa-vowel occurrence. In *Ahadis* many occurrences of the letter
725 *ain* are additionally marked with the bindi diacritic under <अ>. Table 9 gives
726 some examples comparing *Anchal* and *Ahadis*. Notice that column 1 has <अ>
727 without the bindi, whereas column 2 has bindi-modified <अ>.

728 The above examples suggest that religious texts reveal a more conservative ap-
729 proach to transliteration than secular ones. Like *baRi he*, this may be a strategy to
730 command religious credibility and authority of the Devanagari texts. Remember
731 that Devanagari traditionally has been associated with Hinduism and therefore

TABLE 9. Variation in the representation of ain. [colcnt = 4]

<i>Anchal</i>	<i>Ahadis</i>	Spelling	Gloss
<जमाअत>	<जमाअत>	<çəmafət>	'group'
<अमल>	<अमल>	<ʕəməl>	'work'
<इआनत>	<इआनत>	<ianət>	'help'

the writers of Urdu-in-Devanagari must feel the pressure to make it look different from Hindi and assert that the text in Devanagari is as credible as the one written in the Arabic script. Again, the orthographic transliteration is used as a resource to construct authority and credibility.

To sum up, it is clear from this discussion that Urdu speakers are innovating strategies to mark Urdu-in-Devanagari as distinct from Hindi. I discussed two such major strategies: (i) the use of phonetic transliteration as a strategy to represent the distinctive Urdu phonemes, and (ii) the use of orthographic transliteration as a means of representing the Urdu letter *ain* and *baRi he*. If my claim about Urdu-in-Devanagari as being distinct from Hindi is valid, then we should find evidence from those who are involved in the production and consumption of Urdu-in-Devanagari texts.

Data from *Anchal* suggests that the readers and publishers both believe that the language of the magazine is indeed Urdu. The co-editor of the magazine, Talib Rampuri, writes a column entitled *zəban (Urdu) sud^harē* 'Improve your language (Urdu)' quite frequently. This column publishes a list of "mispronounced" or "misspelled" Urdu words with their correct pronunciation or spelling and meanings provided by the editor. Obviously, the Urdu words and their meanings are all written in Devanagari, but the assumption of the editors, indicated by the title, is that through that column, readers can improve their knowledge of Urdu. In fact, many readers in their letters to the editor acknowledge that they are either learning Urdu by reading the magazine or that their knowledge of Urdu is improving. Vasant Kumar, a reader from Munger in the state of Bihar who is most likely to be a Hindi speaker, writes, 'Sister! I love poetry, and that is why in order to learn Urdu and improve my language, I have been regularly reading *Mahakta Anchal* and *Khubsurat Andaz* for many years. My problem is that none of my *ghazals* have been selected for publication...' (Kumar 2005:76). Similarly, another reader, Malti Devi, in the April 2006 issue wrote to the editor that she is learning Urdu by reading *Anchal*.

In fact, the editors of the magazine suggest that those who are interested in learning Urdu correctly should benefit from the magazine. In response to an angry letter from a reader who was disappointed with the use of the Urdu plural markers /ē/ and /ō/ on the English loanword 'letter', the editor explains the reason for the use of Urdu suffixes on English loanword by arguing that the beauty of Urdu lies in the diversity of its words and phrases. She further argues that Urdu is quite generous and welcomes words and expressions from other languages, and then she suggests

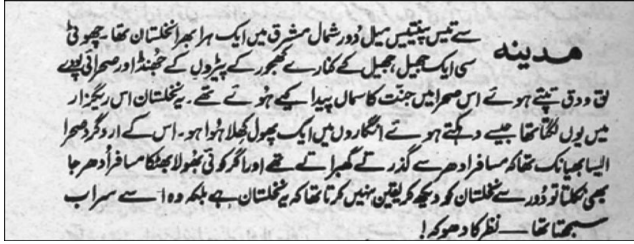


FIGURE 1. Urdu in the Arabic script.

that those who are interested in learning Urdu should read *Mahakta Anchal* regularly.

Another piece of evidence comes from Sukaina, a young woman from Old Delhi, who reads *Fazael-e-Amal*, another religious book transliterated into Devanagari.¹⁹ She represents the younger generation of Muslims who disaffiliate from Urdu and the symbolic meaning it carries. In an interview, when I asked her about the language of the transliterated version of *Fazael-e-Amal*, she said, “bolne mē to wo Urdu hi hæ, lekin dek^hne mē hindi hai” ‘it is Urdu when you speak it, but it looks Hindi [on paper]’. To Sukaina, despite the change of scripts, the language of the book remains Urdu.

The last piece of evidence that supports my claim comes from Mohammad Suhaib, a middle-aged man who was born and raised in Old Delhi. He is self-employed as a publisher of Urdu books. When his publishing work is dull, he also does transliteration from the Arabic script into Devanagari. He has transliterated many literary works including a number of novels based on Islamic history such as *The storm of Hejaz*, from which I give an extract in Figs. 1 and 2 and in (1). Our conversation about the language of the transliterated novel is shown below in (3).

- (3) MS: Mohammad Suhaib, RA: author
 MS: to Usko sirf convert kiya hæ hindi mē.
 ‘So, (we) have just converted it into Hindi.’
 RA: æʃ^ha.
 ‘OK.’
 MS: is mē koi changing nāhī ki hæ hæm ne.
 ‘We have not made any changes to it.’
 RA: æʃ^ha koi changing nāhī ki hæ?
 ‘You have not made any changes?’
 MS: koi changing nāhī ki hæ is mē!
 ‘We have not made any changes to it!’

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मदीना से तीस-पैंतीस मोल दूर शिमाल मशरूक में एक हरा-भरा नख़िलस्तान था। छोटी सी एक झील, झील के किनारे खजूर के पेड़ों के झुंड और सेहराई पौदे लको-दक तपते हुए इस सहरा में जन्नत का समां पैदा किए हुए थे। यह नख़िलस्तान इस रेगज़ार में यूँ लगता था जैसे दहकते हुए अंगारों में एक फूल खिला हुआ हो। उसके इर्द-गिर्द सेहरा ऐसा भयानक था कि मुसाफ़िर इधर से गुज़रते घबराते थे और अगर कोई भूला भटका मुसाफ़िर इधर जा भी निकलता तो नख़िलस्तान को देख कर यकीन नहीं करता था कि यह नख़िलस्तान है बल्कि वह इसे सराब समझता था। नज़र का धोका!

FIGURE 2. Urdu in Devanagari.

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जुलाई 2005 की झलक

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- मुक्तिबला लव लेटर • दिल की जुबान • इनआमी डायलाग
- नाविल • नाविलिट • कहानियां • अफसाने • ग़ज़लें • मेकअप
- गुनगुनाती दोस्ती • मैं और मेरा दोस्त • वाह क्या शेर है • जाश्नके

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खास तोहफे

सिलसिलेवार नाविल :-

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- खुशबू है हम सफ़र (रिफ़ात सिराज)
- धूप छांव (इकरा एस अहमद)
- तेरी खुशी की खातिर (इकरा एस. अहमद)
- मुकम्मल नाविल, नाविलिट, कहानियां
- मुझे कुछ नहीं चाहिए (निगहत अब्दुल्लाह)
- इस शहरे मुहब्बत में (नाज़िया कंवल नाज़ी)
- तुम एक चराग़ (समरा बुखारी)
- स्वाहिशों के शहर में (आमना नसीम)

- अन्धेरों के मुसाफ़िर (हुमेरा राहत)
 - मैं तुम से मुहब्बत करता हूँ (रूख़ चौधरी)
 - जादू उतर गया (नबिय नकवी)
 - भरपाई (बुशरा अहमद)
 - नुम हंसती अच्छी लगती हो (फ़रहत इस्तियाक़)
 - हुस्नों सेहत: कीमती टिप्स (डा० आसिया राशिद)
 - लीची: गर्मियों का खास फल (शमीम जहां)
 - वाह क्या शेर है! (वसीम बरेलवी)
- और बहुत कुछ..

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FIGURE 3. Contents page of *Mahakta Anchal*, July 2005.

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Suhaib believes that in doing the transliteration, all he has done is change scripts. Other features of Urdu—for example, the words or the distinctive phonemes—which to him are arguably more critical than the script, have been preserved in Devanagari. He therefore has no doubts that the language of the text in Devanagari is Urdu. Notice that he holds on to his position even after I turned his statement into a

861 question. His ideology about what defines Urdu is drastically different from the tra-
 862 ditional view that equates Urdu with the Arabic script.

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864 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

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866 In this article, I have demonstrated that the adoption of the Devanagari script by
 867 Muslims for writing Urdu, which has been written in the Arabic script for
 868 several centuries, challenges the traditional view that the choice of script is critical
 869 in differentiating Urdu and Hindi. Analyzing the recent orthographic practices of
 870 writing Urdu in Devanagari, I show that Muslims in India no longer view the
 871 Arabic script as a necessary, let alone defining, element of Urdu, nor do they
 872 believe that Devanagari is completely antithetical to Urdu and their Muslim identity.
 873 In addition, while Muslims have adopted Devanagari, they have not suspended
 874 the difference between Urdu and Hindi. Using the strategies of phonetic and ortho-
 875 graphic transliterations, Muslims are making Urdu-in-Devanagari different from
 876 Hindi, although the difference is much more subtle and nuanced.

877 The adoption of Devanagari for writing Urdu clearly demonstrates that the ideol-
 878 ogies about the Urdu language and its traditional Arabic script are also undergoing a
 879 major transformation. The Arabic script, which hitherto was believed to be THE dif-
 880 ferentiating element between Urdu and Hindi on the written level, is no longer ideo-
 881 logized as such. The changed socio-political contexts of postcolonial India have
 882 contributed to a re-evaluation and revision of what defines the Urdu language.
 883 The innovations introduced by Muslims into Urdu-in-Devanagari allow them to
 884 rationalize that the text written in Devanagari still remains sufficiently distinct
 885 from Hindi. I show that the consistent use of the *bindi* diacritic and the novel use
 886 of the schwa-grapheme as a symbol for the Urdu consonant letter *ain* make
 887 Urdu-in-Devanagari distinct from Hindi.

888 This article further suggests that the structure of a writing system—its graphemes
 889 and the rules that govern how they combine with each other, that is, its graphotactics
 890—are not a mere technical matter of representation of sounds on paper. I argue that
 891 the structure of a writing system is in part constituted by social and cultural factors
 892 that involve issues of identity. I show that Muslims are modifying the structure of
 893 Devanagari by introducing a diacritic called the *bindi* to represent distinctive Urdu
 894 phonemes. They are also trying to preserve orthographic features of Urdu in Deva-
 895 nagari, for example, the “silent” consonant letter *ain* <ɛ>, which is actually pho-
 896 nemically empty. Although the choice of <अ> for representing *ain* results in
 897 unlicensed graphemic clusters in Urdu-in-Devanagari, Muslims still use it in
 898 order to ensure that the silent Urdu letter *ain* is represented.

899 The emergence of Urdu-in-Devanagari raises an interesting question. Is this a
 900 subcultural phenomenon taking place on the margins of the Muslim society?
 901 Will the phenomenon fade away with time or will it stabilize? Linguists do not
 902 like to make predictions, especially about sociolinguistic situations. Based on the
 903 current practices, however, I strongly believe that the phenomenon will stabilize

904 and Urdu will acquire a new outfit in the form of Devanagari. It, however, will
 905 undergo a makeover to suit the sociolinguistic needs of Muslims. I further
 906 believe that the phenomenon is not marginal because, although Urdu-in-Devana-
 907 gari is being produced FOR the Muslim youth, others, especially the middle-genera-
 908 tion, is involved in the process of transliteration because they master both the
 909 Arabic and Devanagari scripts. In addition, by looking at Urdu-in-Devanagari pub-
 910 lications, it is clear that both secular and religious texts are being transliterated. In
 911 fact, a large number of them are religious texts, including *Muntakhab Ahadis* and
 912 *Fazael-e-Amal*. The goal of such books is to bring the youth closer to the
 913 Muslim culture and heritage at a time when many older Muslims believe that the
 914 youth are drifting away from their values and traditions. Urdu-in-Devanagari is
 915 thus a means to inculcate compliance to the cultural norms and values rather than
 916 their subversion.

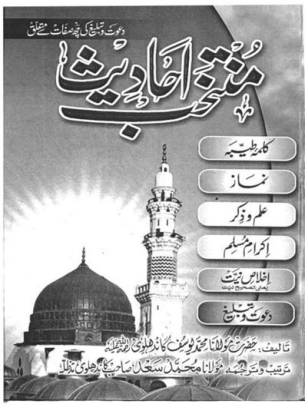
917 Finally, a word about the macro social and political contexts within which the
 918 orthographic practices discussed above are taking place is in order. The Indian Con-
 919 stitution not only gives minorities the right to maintain their languages and scripts
 920 but also obligates the states and local authorities to provide the necessary support
 921 and institutional structure for their maintenance and growth. These constitutional
 922 provisions notwithstanding, the Indian government has failed to create conditions
 923 —social, political, and educational—in which the language and script of the
 924 Muslim minority can survive and flourish. This gap between the beautiful consti-
 925 tutional provisions and the pathetic educational and linguistic realities on the
 926 ground clearly indicates that minority languages and scripts can become margina-
 927 lized and eventually die out in the shadows of the very constitutions that claim to
 928 sustain them.

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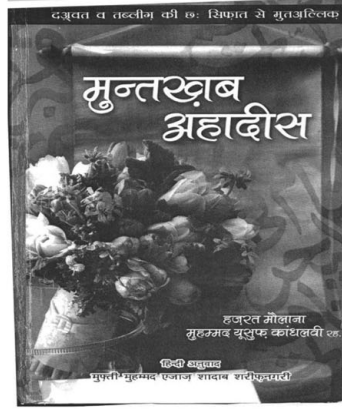
APPENDIX

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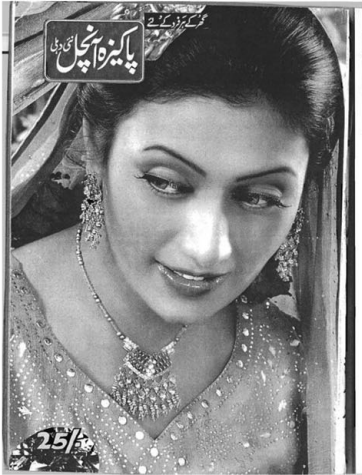
Muntakhab Ahadis in the Arabic script



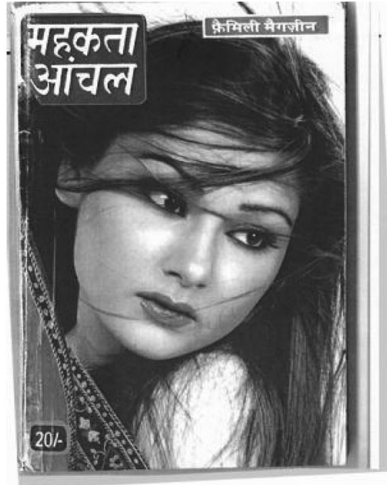
Muntakhab Ahadis in Devanagari



Mahakta Anchal in the Arabic script



Mahakta Anchal in Devanagari



NOTES

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 992 of Michigan, for hosting me as a Visiting Scholar, which allowed me access to University resources,
 993 without which the revision would not have been easy.

994 ¹The shape of Urdu letters changes depending on their position in the word; the shape given here is the
 995 isolated form.

996 ²See Ahmad (2008b) for the multiplicity of indexicality of Urdu in India.

997 ³In many registers, however, they can become quite incomprehensible. See Russell (1999).

998 ⁴I do not include the phoneme /ʒ/ since it only occurs in a handful of literary words borrowed from
 999 Persian.

1000 ⁵In the past, Sanskrit was written in many scripts including Brahmi, Kharoshthi, and Bengali.

1001 ⁶See the title pages of the texts in the appendix.

1002 ⁷In North India, most names clearly reveal the ethnic identities of Muslims and Hindus.

1003 ⁸*Hadith* refers to the sayings of Prophet Mohammad.

1004 ⁹*Hadis* is the Urdu variant of the Arabic word *Hadith*. The plural of the word is *Ahadis*.

1005 ¹⁰Some important textbooks are Yates (1836), Ranking (1895), A. Rahman (1923), and Sharma
 1006 (1937).

1007 ¹¹See Shahabuddin's (1999) opposition to the adoption of Devanagari in his response to Russell's
 1008 article.

1009 ¹²Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

1010 ¹³Although works of some famous Urdu poets such as Ghalib (1797–1869) and Mir Taqi Mir (1723–
 1011 1810) have been rendered into Devanagari in the past, the practice of using Devanagari for writing Urdu
 1012 on a large scale is quite recent in India. Urdu magazines and general books were never published in De-
 1013 vanagari before.

1014 ¹⁴This is not inevitable though; Muslims have made a choice not to represent these letters in Deva-
 1015 nagari. The journal *The Annual of Urdu Studies* uses a transliteration system that has a one-to-one
 1016 mapping of Urdu letters, including phonemically empty ones, into Roman.

1017 ¹⁵Beesley (1998) considers this transcription rather than transliteration, because it does not involve
 1018 one-to-one mapping of letters from the Arabic to Devanagari script. Following Androutsopoulos
 1019 (2009), however, I use the term 'transcription' for the representation of speech on paper and 'transliteration'
 1020 for the conversion of graphemes from one script to another.

1021 ¹⁶The key Findings of the National Readership Studies Council 2006 can be found on the website of
 1022 *The Hindu*: <http://www.hindu.com/nic/nrs.htm> (accessed May 15, 2007).

1023 ¹⁷Many news websites published from outside of India show conflicting norms regarding the use of
 1024 the bindi. The BBC Hindi service uses the bindi to represent Urdu sounds, whereas the Voice of America
 1025 website does not.

1026 ¹⁸This example was taken from the 2007 article खालिदा जिया के बेटे ने आरोप स्वीकारा [Khalida Zia's
 1027 son confessed charges] in *The Dainik Jagran Kanpur*. Online: <http://www.jagran.com/news/details.aspx?id=3388443> (accessed May 20, 2007).

1028 ¹⁹*Fazael-e-Amal* is considered to be a *vade mecum* of the Islamic movement of spiritual renewal
 1029 called Tablighi Jama'at. See Metcalf (1993) and Masud (2000) for more about the movement.

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