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## Findings

This study establishes that the Hindi–Urdu conflict in the United Provinces (UP) between 1867 and 1923 was not a transient linguistic quarrel but a deeply consequential process that transformed language into a marker of communal identity. The findings underscore the pivotal role of colonial discourse and policy in shaping this polarization, while also highlighting indigenous responses that further entrenched the divide.

First, the research demonstrates that colonial knowledge-production and policies created the very framework within which Hindi and Urdu came to be understood as separate, religiously inflected languages. British administrators and Orientalists, in codifying and classifying Indian languages, constructed Hindi as a “pure,” indigenous language of the Hindus and Urdu as a “hybrid,” Persianized language associated with Muslims. This artificial dichotomy, grounded in philological and administrative convenience rather than linguistic reality, institutionalized communal associations of language and generated hierarchies that were subsequently internalized by native elites.

Second, the thesis shows that the origins of conflict in the UP can be traced to the 1867 petition for vernacular higher education. This moment crystallized competing identifications—Hindus increasingly shifted allegiance to Hindi, while Muslims defended Urdu as the legitimate vernacular. Far from being an incidental dispute, the petition initiated a decades-long process whereby linguistic preference became a test of communal loyalty. Movements like the Nagari Script agitation reinforced this process, tying Hindi to Hindu revivalism and situating Urdu as the threatened preserve of Muslim cultural achievement.

Third, the MacDonnell Resolution of 1900 emerges as a crucial turning point. While it recognized the Nagari script in administration alongside Urdu, the policy had unintended communal consequences. Hindus hailed it as a long-overdue recognition of their linguistic heritage, whereas Urdu-speaking Muslims interpreted it as a state-sponsored erosion of their

privileged position. The protests led by figures like Mohsin-ul-Mulk reveal how the resolution fostered a sharper Muslim identification with Urdu. Although many Muslims continued to uphold Urdu as a shared language of Hindus and Muslims, the official sanction of Hindi altered perceptions and sowed seeds of alienation.

Fourth, the study finds that the conflict persisted well into the early 20th century, contrary to the conventional historiographical view that the MacDonnell Resolution settled the matter. By the 1910s and 1920s, Hindi's rising prominence in nationalist discourse—as a candidate for Rastrabhasa—intensified Muslim anxieties about Urdu's survival. This coincided with the broader Hindu–Muslim cleavage, meaning that linguistic debates were never merely cultural but increasingly political, feeding into the communal divide that marked late-colonial India.

Finally, the research highlights the lasting consequences of colonial discourse and local mobilization. The Hindi–Urdu conflict embedded itself in the institutional structures of education, administration, and politics, shaping Hindu and Muslim identities in mutually exclusive terms. While Urdu had historically embodied a syncretic tradition, colonial categorization and subsequent Hindu and Muslim responses eroded this perception. By 1923, the recognition of both Hindi and Urdu in UP universities symbolized an uneasy compromise but did not heal the deeper fissures. Instead, the period under study reveals how linguistic contestation both reflected and accelerated communal polarization in colonial north India.

In sum, this thesis finds that the Hindi–Urdu controversy was not simply a matter of scripts or vocabulary. It was the product of colonial epistemologies, contradictory policies, and indigenous mobilizations that transformed language into a battlefield of identity. Its legacy extended beyond 1923, shaping nationalist visions, communal politics, and the enduring entanglement of language with religion in modern India.