

Hindiphiles and the Hindi Leaf Plate

Mudrarakshas

The Hindi original appears on pp. 82–86 of *Mathurādās kī dāyari*. This translation © 2020 Robert A. Hueckstedt.

In Hindi these days some Hindi wallahs have made an unconscionable mess. Even though writing in Hindi, they make a case for the use of other languages. Real Hindiphiles find such people, who make holes in the very leaf plate they eat off of, to be evil sinners.

The idea of the Hindiphile seems to be this: The true lover of Hindi should eat from his own plate but make holes in the plates of others. That proverbial expression leaves Mathuradas confused. For such Hindiphiles Hindi has now become nothing more than a plate made of leaves. They use Hindi neither in their writing nor in their conversation. Having stitched leaves together with pieces of straw, they've turned Hindi into a throwaway leaf plate on which they mix their rice and lentils into a paste. What an excellent use of language!

The truly intelligent Hindiphile not only makes leaf plates out of Hindi, whenever he can he turns it into a register of contributions. Make a contribution to a conference on Hindi. Such conferences perform a great service to the language. For example, one can get a car, a fine home and now and then even an all expenses paid trip abroad. The conference that can give such pleasure to a Hindiphile performs no ordinary service to Hindi. So Hindi can now assume more than one form, a throwaway leaf plate and a register of contributions.

Mathuradas has a neighbour. He's a fanatical Hindiphile. He sends his three children to the Humpty Dumpty Convent School. When Mathuradas occasionally visits him, the first thing he does is have his children recite a poem:

bah bah blacksheep...

One of his children also learned “*Twinkle twinkle little star*”. After that entertainment, his neighbour would put Naziya Hasan’s disco music on his beat up cassette recorder, real loud. He’s a very committed Hindiphile, but he never buys a book in Hindi. Once, Mathuradas asked him, “Why don’t you ever buy a Hindi book?”

“What Hindi book can be bought, saheb? What is there in Hindi? Who knows what the Hindi wallahs are writing!” Despondently, he said, “Just look. Here’s an English book I bought—*The Godfather* by Mario Puzo. What fun the writer’s had with the Mafia there! We’ve got a Mafia, too, right? But what are our writers doing?”

Mathuradas thought, Yes, there’s a Mafia here, too, but it consists of people like him, who spread Hindi leaf plates out all over and enjoy the sweets. Hindi has become the leaf plate of all leaf plates, and they’re sitting at it eating sweets. One Mafia is the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, another is the Nagari Pracarini Sabha. Both are enormous leaf plates, neither of which has a connection with either Hindi or literature. A few days ago an amusing incident took place. Two men sat down to eat at the same leaf plate. A tug of war took place. Of course, it didn’t take long for the leaf plate to split in two. Now each side is happy with its own half. They don’t make holes in the plate they eat off of, they just rip it up.

Enemies of Hindi, like Mudra Rakshasa, perforate the plate they eat off of. They, too, should make a serious attempt to advance to the level of ripping. That, obviously, is true service to Hindi.

Actually, Mathuradas is charmed by the Hindiphile’s definition of Hindi. Their dictionary says:

Hindi: a plate made of leaves on which Hindiphiles eat but which they do not perforate.

Who knows what Nirala ji or Prasad ji would say if they were to see this Hindi leaf plate. Hindiphiles have such a ridiculous approach to Hindi. For them Hindi is a medium for neither composition nor conversation. It’s just a source of food and drink. Nirala ji would say, “If Hindi is a leaf plate, then I’ll take meat on mine, and when I’m through I’ll crumple it up and throw it in the garbage.” Which is exactly what the Hindiphile does. After having his meal on it, he doesn’t poke holes in it, he folds it

up and throws it in the garbage, where you'll see Hindi today, like a leaf plate smeared with leftover grease and bits of food.

If you don't believe me, then look at the Hindi Departments in the Universities. There you'll find all the used, greasy leaf plates you'll want. For a sample taste, how about some of the Research being done in those places. It's a wonderful example of what we mean by *jūṭhan*, leftover food that pollutes. Here are some current topics of Research: "The Female Characters of Premchand", "The Female Character and Premchand", "Women in the Novels of Premchand", "The Novelist Premchand and His Description of Female Nature", "Women in the eyes of Premchand", "Women and the Viewpoint of Premchand", etc. etc. Only Hindiphiles have enough depth of spirit to be able to write mammoth tomes on such subjects and get a doctorate for each one.

Nevertheless, another miracle of Hindiphiles is that they often proclaim that "technical literature" does not exist in Hindi and to produce it in Hindi will be very difficult.

Making such a proclamation is very beneficial. The sweets eaten from the Hindi leaf plate, then, are tastier and more satisfying. If it is maintained that "technical literature" can be written in Hindi, the Hindiphile will get upset because then he'll have to write original works in science, philosophy, sociology, law, etc.

Translating is much easier than original writing. Translation into Hindi is a cottage industry providing its managers 100% profits without any loss. It has also generated a number of auxiliary industries, such as the construction of a technical vocabulary and the production of textbooks. Those industries used to be in the private sector. They are now in the public sector. The state of these industries is the same as that of other factories run by the Government. It has taken twenty years so far, but they are now beginning to put together a dictionary of technical terms. When that's finished, translations could then be produced without any mistakes.

Mathuradas wonders: Which *Glossary of Technical Terminology* was used by Kanad, Panini, Shankara, Patanjali, Nagarjun, Bhaskar, Carak, etc.? Maybe during Vyas ji's time, too, an institute existed like the Central Hindi Directorate today.

So Hindiphiles are waiting for the dictionary of technical terms to be finished before they begin their original writings. In the meantime they spread out their leaf plates and enjoy the fried bread of translations and the chutney of deprecating other languages.

Throughout the country Anglophiles have established schools, be they Convent Schools or Public Schools. Hindiphiles only run the city schools or private “institutions” such as Lala Changamal’s Pathshala. They have no faith in good education, which is why they let others run the Convent Schools and they never open Hindi schools, preferring the relish of licking their leaf plates.

Hindi speakers now number about 300 million, but only about three thousand copies of the books of Hindi’s greatest writers are sold in a year. The books of great writers in other languages are printed in runs of fifty thousand copies each. The average print run for a good book in Hindi is two thousand. Hindi’s leaf plate theorist buys nose rings and ankle bracelets for his wife, not books. The Government of Uttar Pradesh once had a Minister of Fertilizers and Supplies. As long as he held that position he never gave a speech on fertilizers and supplies. All he ever talked about was the lamentable state of Hindi. He would usually say, “A great injustice is being inflicted on Hindi.” He openly wept for the crimes being perpetrated against Hindi, but he never bought Hindi books. He was a servant of Hindi, but he never wrote anything in Hindi. To serve Hindi well one need neither write it nor read it. All you need to do is make the biggest leaf plate you can and spread it out.

Mathuradas has often wondered what it really means to be a servant of Hindi. How is it done? Now he knows. Hindi is automatically served when one joins a Committee. Hindi is served by taking part in a Hindi Conference abroad on the money given you here for other purposes. It used to be said that a man was able to cross the Vaitaraṇī by holding on to the tail of a cow. Servants of Hindi aren’t dumb. Instead of Hindi herself, they look for her tail. The devotees of cows establish Societies for the Protection of Cows but abandon cows to wander the streets and live off garbage. While service to cows is noble, it also involves an expense. A Society for the Protection of Cows, however, provides the cow protector only with profit, never with any expense. It’s for that very reason that the servant of Hindi never lets the tail of Hindi slip out of his hand. Often a fight even occurs over it. It happened in the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Now there’s a court case going on over who has the real tail. Does this case have anything to do with the writing of good literature or with doing good research projects? No. It resembles a dispute over property, an ordinary, banal civil suit. That is service to Hindi.

Panini never understood the benefits of such a service to language.

Otherwise, instead of writing his Sanskrit grammar he would have run the Sanskrit Sahitya Sammelan. It would have had an annual convention. All its delegates would have been non-writers. The convention would have been inaugurated by the Chief Counsellor of the Kingdom of Kaushal, and it would have been chaired by the King of Magadh. Having organized all that, Panini then would have sat on many committees. If he had ever come up with the idea of a World Sanskrit conference, he could have been rolling in money instead of probably dying after eating only *sattu* his whole life.

Mathuradas has an idea. What Hindi really needs now is for someone to write a wonderful volume that would be entitled *Leaf Plate Rahasya*. It would contain a detailed description of the amazing secret of turning a language into a leaf plate. Not only that, it would then describe the various things that could be eaten on that plate and the manner in which each should be taken. Actually, those who are smart in the world of Hindi are involved in that very thing; it's the dumb ones who wear themselves out trying to learn how to read and write well. Anybody can read and write; only a few are able to display the miracle of the leaf plate of Hindi.