



# ‘Hindi has expanded but its soul has shrunk’

Mrinal Pande traces the history of Hindi journalism in her new book

**Seema Chishti**

**M**rinal Pande is an iconic figure in Hindi journalism. An author, pioneering woman-chief editor and a Padmashree, Pande has worked in print and audio-visual mediums, and was also chairperson of Prasar Bharati. She started out as an English lecturer but flung herself into life as a journalist very early in life. In a freewheeling conversation with journalist Seema Chishti over her new book, *The Journey of Hindi Language Journalism in India – From Raj to Swaraj and Beyond*, Pande explains why she feels vibrant Hindi journalism is under threat. Edited excerpts.

**Question:** Why do you say Hindi journalism is going through ‘re-feudalisation’?

**Answer:** ‘Re-feudalisation’ is basically an India harking back to a past it thought it had left behind. As I explain in the book, the feudal houses were the first to bring out papers, mostly to show themselves as great proponents of Hindi. They were not the editors, but their names were displayed prominently. They had to cast their

net for it, and the net always found Brahmins, Thakurs at best. So these were the early habits. Now if you analyse the media, you find the same tendencies, the feudal masters have resurfaced and they are getting subtle political sanction. In the 1990s, there was an upsurge of demands for reservations and people had begun to question the gender and caste component, but no longer. All feudal tendencies which we thought we had left behind have resurfaced.

**Q:** You write very convincingly of the early period, how Hindi enriched English journalism, with its many dialects.

**A:** Around the 1920s, when India became conscious of its right in the world as a possible democracy, it also became conscious of language

as a mark of its identity, and then you see a very interesting demarcation of lines between journalism in the west up to Lucknow and journalism east of Lucknow. Raja Ram Singh of Kalakankar was in favour of Sanskritised Hindi and said we must invent new Hindi words from Sanskrit roots. In contrast, Raja Shiv Prasad Sitare Hind of Banaras said language has to be *milijuli-zubaan*, Hindustani. These two thought patterns become very visible in journalism. And then you suddenly have a journalist like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi who said, to hell with quibbling about language, let us get across to people, get into the *bastis* and help people to physically come out of this mindset of the Hindu-Muslim divide.

For a long time, we were all in denial, we thought that we had purged Hindi and Hindustani and the heartland of casteism, communalism and Brahminical values, and of gender-based discriminations, but these were all strongly grounded pillars of a patriarchal society which supported each other.

**Q:** Hindi journalism experienced a near-renaissance moment after the

**Changing context** ‘Until the late 1980s, print media was constantly adding new idioms and creating new genres for the Hindi it inherited, and very interestingly, they borrowed languages and dialects from all over,’ says Mrinal Pande. (R.V. MOORTHY)

*Emergency with Dharmayug, Saptahik Hindustan, Dinman and Gyanodaya edited by literary greats. But it suddenly died out, why?*  
**A:** Like the dialects and *bolis*, what was also feeding a rich part of Hindi journalism were the magazines and periodicals. They introduced many writers who went on to become editors. There was Shrikant Verma, Kamleshwar, Dharamvir Bharati, Agyeya himself. Until the late 1980s, print media was constantly adding new idioms and creating new genres for the Hindi it inherited, and very interestingly, they borrowed languages and dialects from all over. All of them translated and got translated.

That movement died out somewhere around the late ‘80s, as a need was felt because of the changing context to do hard news. When these senior writers died or retired, those who replaced them gradually excised social and cultural issues which actually threaded together the political and national perspective – this is when Hindi journalism began to go downhill. Ironically, that was also the time when neo-literate north India threw up new readers and the major politicians were all from the Hindi belt and didn’t speak English. So Hindi’s footprint kept extending and its soul kept shrinking. The myriad streams that fed it, the socio, economic reporting, the kind of long, lingering serialised travelogues they published, came to a halt, *bolis* were also thrown out on grounds that there must be a standardised Hindi.

**Q:** You invoke Jurgen Habermas’ idea of the ‘public sphere’ with journalism as a necessity for a healthy democracy. Do you see any signs of hope?

**A:** We need cross-pollination all over – in language, caste, social interaction, political party building and coalition building. We need new hybrids to come up. These hothouse plants which have been genetically sealed from each other, are now reaching their end. It is time that we once again become the throbbing hybrid, which threw up all kinds of aberrations, but which were also delightful to read and informative. The new medium is hungry for hybrids that will survive, genetically sealed plants are destined to die. So hybridise, or die.

*This journalist-writer is based in New Delhi.*



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