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Hindustani News Bulletins, the Second World War, and the “Indian Masses”

Following the outbreak of Second World War, the colonial government in India became increasingly preoccupied with ensuring that news of the war as it developed in Europe reached the Indian public. The colonial administration pushed staff from All India Radio and the British Broadcasting Corporation to increase broadcasts of news bulletins in vernacular languages, especially Hindustani. One British administrator wrote that to reach the “the masses of the population” radio news of the war must be in “simple Hindustani.” In this paper, I analyze the concept of “the Indian masses” as understood by the colonial government and its relationship to radio and to Hindustani. Why did the colonial government believe that radio was the ideal medium to convey news of the war to the “masses”? Why did the colonial government believe that Hindustani was the best language to reach the “masses of the population”? To answer these questions, I consider the qualities and abilities the colonial government attached to the medium of radio and explain their relationship to language politics in India as they developed during the last years of British rule.