

Tej K. Bhatia: *Colloquial Hindi: the complete course for beginners*. vii, 343 pp.
[with two 60-minute cassettes] London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

The unequivocal definite article in the title of this excellent new book comes very close to being deserved. Dr. Bhatia's introduction to Hindi is clear, authoritative and engaging, well founded in modern pedagogy while also helpful in demonstrating many sociolinguistic aspects of the contemporary Hindi-speaking world. The grammar instruction follows brief Hindi dialogues with their translations; and while this pattern is found in other similar courses also, Bhatia's dialogues have a more authentic tone than has generally been managed elsewhere. Any artificiality of register or usage is scrupulously avoided in the pursuit of a genuinely colloquial voice; English loanwords are freely admitted, and rampant Sanskritization is kept at bay. Individual utterances in the dialogues are brief, and hence learnt, and hence very useful to the learner. The organisation of the material allows readers to acquire the basics of Hindi without having to learn the Devanagari script, should they so wish (although the complexities of Bhatia's innovative transliteration system may make Devanagari seem the simpler option). Ten conversation-based units are followed by six script units; a representative section of material is included on the cassettes, which form an essential adjunct to the book. One or two grammatical explanations are somewhat confusing: the causative is explained as meaning 'to cause to do' rather than 'to cause to be done'; and a failure to distinguish between grammatical and logical subjects leads to such misleading statements as 'Hindi verbs such as *pasand honā*, 'to like', and *cāhiye*, 'to want', select the *ko* postposition with their subject' (p. 72). But such confusions are the exception, the grammatical exegesis mostly being clear and precise, especially in the useful 28-page 'reference grammar'. The author sometimes resorts to slang terminology in an attempt to make the learning process accessible; this is somewhat patronising, and furthermore, terms such as 'nerd nouns' ('i.e. those [masculine nouns] that do not end in *ā* and the feminine nouns that do not end in *ī*' — p.54) may mystify non-American readers. A rather large number of literals has got through the editorial net of this first edition; and there are numerous discrepancies between the printed and taped material. But all in all this is a most (if not necessarily *the* most) welcome addition to the arsenal of Hindi-teaching materials.

Rupert Snell