

LINGUISTIC REGIONALISM IN INDIA

Language is closely related to culture and therefore to the customs of people. Besides, the massive spread of education and growth of mass literacy can only occur through the medium of the mother tongue. Democracy can become real to the common people only when politics and administration are conducted through the language they can understand.

Hence language plays an important role in the social and economic development of the region.

Since independence in 1947, linguistic affinity has served as a basis for organizing interest groups; the "language question" itself has become an increasingly sensitive political issue. Efforts to reach a consensus on a single national language that transcends the myriad linguistic regions and is acceptable to diverse language communities have been largely unsuccessful.

The language policy of India is basically embodied in part XVII of the Indian Constitution along with the 8th schedule in reference to articles 344 and 351 (which specify the languages of India for purposes mentioned in these 2 articles), and the articles concerning Fundamental Rights regarding language, education, and culture etc.

The language policy gives full freedom to the states to choose any language or languages spoken in regions as their regional languages and to have one or more of them as official languages by different states. However, for the Union, the Constitution prescribes Hindi in Devanagari script for official purposes along with English as an associate official language. The Language Policy of India relating to the use of languages in administration, education, judiciary, legislature, mass communication, etc., is pluralistic in its scope. It is both language-development oriented and language-survival oriented. The policy is intended to encourage the citizens to use their mother tongue in certain delineated levels and domains through some gradual processes, but the stated goal of the policy is to help all languages to develop.

Language and Regionalism

Many Indian nationalists originally intended that Hindi would replace English the language of British rule (1757-1947) as a medium of common communication. Both Hindi and English are extensively used, and each has its own supporters. Native speakers of Hindi, who are concentrated in North India, contend that English, as a relic from the colonial past and spoken by only a small fraction of the population, is hopelessly elitist and unsuitable as the nation's official language. Proponents of English argue, in contrast, that the use of Hindi is unfair because it is a liability for those Indians who do not speak it as their native tongue. English, they say, at least represents an equal handicap for Indians of every region.

English continues to serve as the language of prestige. Efforts to switch to Hindi or other regional tongues encounter stiff opposition both from those who know English well and whose privileged position requires proficiency in that tongue and from those who see it as a means of upward mobility. Partisans of English also maintain it is useful and indeed necessary as a link to the rest of the world, that India is lucky that the colonial period left a language that is now the world's predominant international language in the fields of culture, science, technology, and commerce. They hold, too, that widespread knowledge of English is necessary for technological and economic progress and that reducing its role would leave India a backwater in world affairs.

Determining what should be called a language or a dialect has taken a political angle and initiated a sense of regionalism attached to it.

Anti-Hindi agitations erupted in Tamil Nadu in 1937, a decade before India obtained independence, and much before Hindi was even declared the country's official language. In that year, the Indian National Congress Party came to power in the Madras Presidency (modern-day Tamil Nadu). Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari, heading the Congress, introduced Hindi as a compulsory language in the Presidency's public schools. This order was immediately met with opposition by social activist Periyar E.V Ramasamy, leader of the opposition Justice Party (Dravida Kazhagam) and advocate for a separate Dravidian State. His denunciation triggered massive resistance against the mandatory instruction of Hindi in schools. C. Rajagopalachari's insistence that, Hindi must be learnt in public schools was related to the acknowledgement that Hindi was the primary language used in the government; he encouraged South Indians to learn Hindi as it would greatly help them in obtaining offices, and consequently a voice, in the government. Despite the growing protests, his administration issued a government order in 1938, making the teaching of Hindi compulsory in 125 schools of the Madras Presidency. Viewing his insistence as an effort to undermine and destroy the Tamil language and its culture, a large-scale movement arose, marked by fasts, demonstrations, protest-marches, processions, and the destruction of public property. The protests only subsided in 1940, when the government withdrew its initial order and instead made the teaching of Hindi optional rather than compulsory.

The next decade was embedded with similar agitations, that erupted most often in relation to education; whenever the Congress government tried to institute a change in the curriculum by making Hindi compulsory during certain academic years, or by introducing a minimum mark qualification in Hindi for promotion to higher classes, the leaders of the Dravida Kazhagam initiated protests all over the state. Every time the protests abated, the administration would try to re-institute Hindi in schools, triggering yet another round of demonstrations. The movement was characterized by a growing Anti-brahminism and incorporated not only Anti-Hindi elements in some cases, but also Anti-English ones; some leaders of the movement, members of the DK, turned their eyes and ambitions towards a separate Tamil state.

As the day (26 January 1965) of switching over to Hindi as sole official language approached, the Anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in Madras State with increased support from college students. A full-scale riot broke out in the southern city of Madurai, sparked off by a minor altercation between agitating students and Congress party members. The riots spread all over Madras State, continued unabated for the next 2 months, and were marked by acts of violence, arson, looting, police firing and lathi charges. The Congress Government of the Madras State, called in paramilitary forces to quell the agitation; their involvement resulted in the deaths of about 70 persons (by official estimates) including 2 policemen. To calm the situation, Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri gave assurances that English would continue to be used as the official language as long the Non-Hindi speaking states wanted. The riots subsided after Shastri's assurance, as did the student agitation.

The agitations of 1965 led to major political changes in the state. The DMK won the 1967 assembly election and the Congress Party never managed to recapture power in the state since then. The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 by the Congress Government headed by Indira Gandhi to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as official

languages. This effectively ensured the current "virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism" of the Indian Republic. There were also 2 similar (but smaller) agitations in 1968 and 1986 which had varying degrees of success.

One of the greatest concerns of the students in Madras was that any prominent use of Hindi in the government services would disadvantage them for employment within those services. They also felt it was unfair that they would have to learn Hindi and English, whereas native speakers of Hindi would need only learn English. In response to this, the 'Three Language Formula' of education was instated so that the educational load would be more fair. People from Non-Hindi areas were to study their regional language, Hindi, and English (or another European language). Hindi speakers were to study Hindi, English, and another language. It seeks to accommodate the interests of group identity (mother tongues and regional languages), national pride and unity (Hindi), and administrative efficiency and technological progress (English)."

Like so many things, this was fine in theory, but it was not followed in practice. Hindi states did little to enforce this curriculum. Despite the fact that Hindi classes were not seriously taken in Tamil Nadu, the Anti-Hindi DMK government in Madras decried the northern states' lack of implementation of the Three Language Formula and removed all teaching of Hindi from schools in Tamil Nadu. The Three Language Formula has proven a failure in India as a whole though in some areas, it has worked well.

Further in 1986, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the "National Education Policy". This education policy provided for setting up Navodaya Schools, where the DMK claimed teaching of Hindi would be compulsory. [The Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) led by M. G. Ramachandran (which had split from the DMK in 1972), was in power in Tamil Nadu and the DMK was the main opposition party. Karunanidhi announced an agitation against the opening of Navodaya Schools in Tamil Nadu. On 13th November, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution demanding the repeal of Part XVII of the constitution and for making English the sole official language of the union.

Rajiv Gandhi assured Members of Parliament from Tamil Nadu that Hindi would not be imposed. As part of the compromise, Navodhaya schools were not started in Tamil Nadu. Currently, Tamil Nadu is the only state in India without Navodaya schools.

The following factors played a major role in consolidating the movement:

1. South Indians felt that a new language was being pushed down their throats much against their wishes.
2. Since the North Indians would not have to put any effort (because they already knew Hindi), the South Indians felt that they were being enslaved into this.
3. South Indians felt that getting Government jobs (which would use only Hindi) would almost be impossible for them. Also, if the most coveted Civil Service Examinations were only in Hindi, the South Indians would stand no chance and it would alienate them in their own country.

Recent Controversy

NDA government's proposal to give prominence to Hindi in official accounts in social media has met with stiff opposition in Tamil Nadu with Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and even BJP allies

joining DMK chief Karunanidhi in slamming the move, voicing fears of "imposition" of the language on Non-Hindi speaking sections. People located in 'Region C' with whom the Government of India's communication needs to be in English, will not have access to such public information if it is not in English. This move would therefore be against the letter and spirit of the Official Languages Act, 1963.

The controversy was sparked by two Home Ministry circulars. The official language department had issued a circular asking all Ministries and Departments, public sector undertakings and banks to give prominence to Hindi on official accounts in social media.

"All officers and employees who operate official accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Google, YouTube should use Hindi and English languages. Prominence should be given to Hindi," Director, official language, Avadesh Kumar Mishra wrote in the directive.

Another circular announced prize money of Rs 2,000 to 2 employees who do their official work mostly in Hindi. Rs 1,200 and Rs 600 will be given to the second and third position holders respectively.

This has again initiated scuffle between North and South India but the issue get resolved unanimously.

Issue of Linguistic Minorities

In India issue is not only of multilingualism, but also with the rights of many millions of speakers of lesser used minority languages. As the political and cultural context privileges some major languages, linguistic minorities often feel discriminated against by the current language policy of the Union and the States. The general political and cultural context of India's society at large favours the major languages as Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati etc., which are generally and officially recognized in several States as state languages, but countless speakers of smaller, Non recognized languages feel discriminated against by the linguistic policy as efficient regulations for their protection are very rare.

The Scheme of the Safeguards for the linguistic minorities includes the provision for instruction through mother tongue at the primary stage of education; teaching of minority languages at the secondary stage of education; registration of language preference of the linguistic minority pupils to facilitate inter-school adjustments; provision for text-books and teachers in minority languages; translation and publication of rules, regulations and notices, etc. in minority languages where their speakers constitute 15% or more of the district/ tehsil population; declaration of minority languages as additional Official language in districts, where their speakers constitute 60% or more of the district population; receipt of, and reply to representations for redress of grievances in minority languages; use of minority languages in recruitment tests to the State Services; setting up of proper machinery for effective implementation of the safeguards for the linguistic minorities at the State and District levels; issue of publicity material in minority languages detailing the Safeguards available to the linguistic minorities, etc.

States have been accused of failure to fulfill their obligations under the national constitution to provide for the education of linguistic minorities in their mother tongues, even when the minority language is a Scheduled Language. Although the constitution requires that legal documents and

petitions may be submitted in any of the Scheduled Languages to any government authority, this right is rarely exercised.

Under such circumstances, members of linguistic minorities may feel they and their language are oppressed by the majority, while people who are among linguistic majorities may feel threatened by what some might consider minor concessions. This may lead to linguistic regionalism.

Hence steps should be taken to place language as a source of unity of the country by recognizing linguistic diversity and initiating tolerance for each culture.