
WHAT SHOULD THE COUNTRY SPEAK? AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE ISSUE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Language is basic to human civilization although words were not. Language cannot be categorized solely on the basis of any word or any particular way of speaking, it is rather the will of people to materialize their expressions, gestures and synchronise them to elicit responses. Any community existence depends primarily on the ability of the members to share their thoughts and desires with each other and in doing so they need a medium to communicate. That is the rudimentary root and beginning of language. With mankind's evolution and diversification, different groups developed their unique way of speaking or rather conversing and thus laid the foundations of linguistic development. As the groups moved away from one another, the diversification continued along specifications of words, alphabets and letters. Although it seems simple, but reality shows a very different picture when such differences are made to coexist into an uniform unit. While uniformity claims homogeneity, Indian society is clearly not that. The diversity in India has become a challenge with respect to consolidation on the basis of language and the occasional spurts that it leads to.

Keywords: Language, Diversity, Uniformity, India, Mankind, Society, Identity.

LANGUAGE – THE FIGHT GOES ON TO RECOGNISE AND RECONCILE

The fight for linguistic identity has been an ardent struggle almost as valiant as the very roots of freedom struggle had been. While its not just about a dialect or an accent in which people communicate, rest their cultural roots upon, it is invariably the strongest base on which a person identifies one's dignified existence in a group. Solidarity plays an important role in binding people of the same linguistic group together and in the face of an heterogenous society like that of India whose melting pot culture obviously poses some questions of insecurity and majoritarian threats to those groups who are not in the population comfort zone. Man is not born with a language but is born into a linguistic culture and that socializes him as well as any secondary socializing agency does. The group knows its material facts and history, communicates and conducts itself on the unity of language. When this linguistic group assumes hegemony in a hetero-linguistic domain, there are obvious conflict of interests.

In the Indian case, while Sanskrit had always been the most predominant of all, shaping its essence into historical records and administrative dictates, linguistic intermixing continued with Pali being another one. Sanskrit became the hegemony of Aryans over the indigeneity of local tribal groups, in the very same way Urdu became the ruling elite with Islamic Rule in India. With the advent of British colonial rule however all the regional diversities and Indian Languages came to be subdued in the face of a growing English culture. Language had always enjoyed its fair share of importance in the sphere of unifying people, but this trend took a sharp bend with the growing politicization of the same when different groups started drawing boundaries on the basis of linguistic identification and the number game developed into linguistic chauvinism.

The Constitutional assembly was segregated into groups. Most of the assembly members Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, Subash Chandra Bose, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, demanded Hindi would be a national language. As they demanded, some of the non-Hindi speakers opposed as it is unfair to inflict something as their language which is not. It also affects the people in their employment, public services, education etc. There was also another group wanted to make Sanskrit as an official language as it is considered as the mother of all languages.¹

¹ Ramya, Language problem in India – Responses of the constitution and law, Available at Legal Bites : <https://www.legalbites.in/language-problem-india-responses-constitution-law/>, Last seen on 12/01/2022

The debacle in the Constituent Assembly led to the acceptance of the Munshi-Ayyangar formula which was adopted without dissent. It was a half-hearted compromise because no group got what it wanted. According to this formula, English was to continue as the official language of India along with Hindi for a period of fifteen years but the limit was elastic and the power of extension was given to the Parliament. A statute titled ‘Official Languages Act, 1963’ was enacted when the period of fifteen years was about to expire in an attempt to prevent agitation in the non-Hindi speaking States. But the provisions of the Act could not satisfy the views of the protestors.²It is quite evident that a compromise cannot quell protests. The idea of Independent India walking on the lines of English was an idea modelled on colonial lines. It cannot be doubted that English worked as a cementing bond in a disparate country of multilingual communities, but an overemphasis and imposition of the same naturally neglected the indigeneity in our culture.

One interesting story which explains such a conflict post-independence, is the Telegu-Hindi battle that took galloping leaps to turn into a mammoth controversy. Madras was a presidency town – the largest colonial city in south India with Telugus, Tamils, Kannadigas and Malayalees all living here. As the struggle for independence intensified, the formation of States on linguistic principles became imminent. Telugus were among the first to raise the demand for the need of a separate province. Andhra with a Telegu majority came into direct conflict with Tamils and their language. Matters came to a flash point in 1952 when Potti Sreeramulu, a Gandhian who was fasting for an Andhra province and the inclusion of Madras, died. Sreeramulu, was born in Madras. He quit his well-paying job in the Railways in 1930 to join Gandhi in his Sabarmati ashram. Later, after independence, he took up social work. On October 19, 1952, Sreeramulu decided to indefinitely fast in support of the Andhra issue. His fast neither altered the position of the national Congress or the Madras government. After 51 days, Sreeramulu died. His death sparked violent protests across Telugu-speaking areas of the Presidency. Nehru appealed for calm and assured people that the issue would be settled soon. Following this, in January 1953, the government appointed Justice Wanchoo to look into the formation of the Andhra province. The Wanchoo committee identified boundaries of the new State, but concluded that Madras could be the temporary capital for three to five years. If that was not possible, until a permanent city was found, Guntur or Vishakhapatnam could the

² Language issues in post Independence of India, available at- <https://journalsofindia.com/language-issues-in-post-independence-of-india/>

temporary capital, the committee suggested.

It was important to note that linguistic reorganization of states began solely with one moot question – similarity and cohesion of linguistic similarity. While people wanted their language to be grouped into polities of federal statehood, it was often impossible to dissect the areas due to increasing cosmopolitan trends in the populace. Beyond this aspect of integrative harmony lies deeper issues to introspect –

1. Initial diversity dotted Indian culture that had a plethora of cultures and languages
2. No consensus in the Constitutional Assembly debates.
3. Hindi as a national language had its own North Indian support base while proving it to be very disadvantageous to South India
4. Hindi was roughly and aggressively opposed in southern states which grew even more paranoid with an outright exclusion of their mother tongue over another favored language.

INTERESTING TWISTS AND REPERCUSSIONS OF LANGUAGE FORMULA

While having Hindi as the rather emphasized language became the bone of contention for other regional linguistic groups, there has not been a well accepted and conclusive solution of the same. The issue has, hence developed into a volatile agenda to be used in electoral debates.

These factors led to a confabulated path ahead for filling gaping wounds in the language formula with political indictments. Today we find the language factor being a dominant factor in marking political rallies and victories. One such example would be Bengal Legislative Assembly Elections 2021 –

1. Ruling party being indigenous to the state and speaking Bengali portrayed the image of cultural and linguistic homogeneity.
2. Slogans emphasized Bengali speaking political parties to be the State's bonafide contestants
3. Hindi based parties and even Hon'ble Prime Minister was snubbed as "outsider" in a Bengali driven state.
4. Results yielded similar results too.

For the purpose of adding a better empirical element to the language question, 10 respondents

were selected by random sampling and 5 questions were asked to them . On the basis of their responses that were collected through telephonic interviewing, an analysis can be drawn out –

1. Maximum respondents (7/10) preferred to get instructions in educational and technical institutions on their mother tongue.
2. Maximum respondents (8/10) felt safe and secured in interacting in their mother tongue
3. Divided responses (5/10) on having Hindi as the ascribed national language for the purposes of national unity.
4. Meagre support (2/10) in favor of ruling out regional languages from the public domain in the country.
5. Maximum respondents (8/10) identified situations of linguistic advantages and disadvantages.

The study simply highlights what we face every day in the country. The platonic and superficial idea of unity in diversity falls short of the reality that is bitter and uncouth. In practice, the scramble for having language and minority sentiments and insecurities get fueled by their language identity marks and political parties advance electoral malice on the foundation of these fears. We need a regime that would progressively associate diversities and paint the “idea of India” that every citizen dreams to reside in.