

Historical Background of the Problem Created by Language in Indian Politics:

But language created a great problem in post-independent era and continues to be one of the heavy weights on country's political system. During the days of freedom struggle national leaders always promised the masses that Indian languages will be fully developed in free India and even states will be reorganised on the basis of languages, so that each language got full opportunity to develop and grow.

But when Constituent Assembly discussed the problem of national language for India it found that the task was not easy. In the country there was a strong section which believed that English should be continued as the national language of India, while almost all provinces claimed that in their language there was so much of rich material that alone could take the pride place of being the national language of India.

Dar Commission (1948):

When the Constituent Assembly was still deliberating a Linguistic Provinces Commission was set up under the Government. In its report submitted in 1948 the Commission reported that immediate formation of linguistic states was not desirable. In its opinion country was faced with such serious problems as economic instability and foreign aggression, etc.

It also pointed out that even princely states have not been properly integrated and that the country was faced with many other serious problems than this one. The Commission also was of the view that for the country it will be difficult to bear economic and administrative cost of the new provinces.

J V P Committee Report:

In 1948, Congress party also appointed a committee to consider Dar Commission report.

It consisted of:

- (1) Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru.
- (2) Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, and
- (3) Pattabhai Sitaramaya.

The Committee in its report came to the conclusion that there was need for linguistic redistribution of provinces but recommended that in view of economic and administrative reasons such reorganisation should be postponed for the time being.

Any immediate reorganisation will not only stand on the way of consolidation but dislocate administration and economy.

It, however, made an exception in the case of Andhras, where it favoured the formation of linguistic state. Accordingly, new state of Andhra Pradesh came into existence on October 1, 1953.

After examining the problem from all angles the Constituent Assembly came to the conclusion that Hindi in Devnagri script should be the national language of India. It was, however, not easy to immediately replace English by Hindi and as such it was provided in the Constitution that English will be continued for official work for a period of 15 years.

It was also provided, that during this period Hindi will be fully developed so that it could take the place of English. Since then language problem has become so heavy weight on Indian politics that its solution does not appear to be in sight. Non-Hindi speaking southern states feel that this provision of the constitution is imposition of Hindi imperialism on the South India.

Language has created such serious problems that it has resulted in demonstrations in some parts of the country and also stands on the way of emotional and national integration. B.N. Rau perhaps rightly said that, "One of the most difficult problems in the framing of India's new constitution will be to satisfy the demand for linguistic provinces and other demands of a like nature."

M.C. Chagla, ex-Union Education and then Foreign Minister, who resigned from union cabinet on language issue said, "**Language, more than anything else with the exception of religion, excites the deepest emotion.**"

Constitutional Provisions about Language:

The Constitution of India contains several provisions about language. The Constituent Assembly had before it the recommendations of Dhar Commission, which had worked under the Chairmanship of Justice Dhar of Allahabad High Court.

As said above the Commission was of the view that reorganisation of states on linguistic basis was not conducive in the national interest and likely to stand on the way of spread of national language on the one hand and national feelings on the other.

The Assembly took cognisance of the fact that in spite of all that had been done by the rulers to spread English language, vast majority of Indian population continued to

correspond and communicate in its own language, therefore, language policy was formulated in this background.

As a result of their labour constitution today contains several provisions about language. Article 343 of the constitution provides that Hindi in Devnagri script shall be the language of the Union of India but English will continue to be used for official purposes for a period of 15 years, but the Parliament can extend this period, if need be.

Article 344 of the constitution deals with the appointment of a Commission for the development of languages. It is provided that first such Commission shall be appointed after 5 years of the commencement of the constitution whereas gap for the appointment of subsequent Commissions shall be ten years.

The Commission shall have representatives representing different languages as specified in the constitution. It shall be the responsibility of the Commission to make recommendations, to the President about the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes of the Union and also suggest what restrictions should be imposed on the use of English language for any of the official purposes of the Union.

It may also recommend the language to be used for any of the purposes in the Supreme Court and form of numerals to be used in the Union.

It may also recommend on any other matter, which may be referred to it by the President. The same Article provides that while making its recommendations, the Commission will see how far India has culturally and scientifically advanced and what are the expectations of non-Hindi speaking states, i.e., to which extent they are willing to accept Hindi in their respective states.

It has been provided that the Parliament will set up a committee which shall consist of 30 members, out of whom 20 will be from the Lok Sabha and remaining 10 from the Rajya Sabha. It shall be the responsibility of this Committee to examine the report of the Commission and make recommendations to the President.

Article 345 of the constitution leaves it to the states to adopt one or more language(s) for official use in the state. But unless that is so provided English shall continue to be used for all purposes for which it was being used before the commencement of the Constitution.

Article 346 of the Constitution also deals with official language to be used for communication between two states and between a state and Union Government. It is provided that English shall be channel of communication. If, however, two states agree, that Hindi should be the channel of communication between them, these shall be quite free to do so.

The President has been authorised by Article 347 of the constitution to direct a state to use a particular language as official language provided a substantial population of the area has made a representation that that language may be introduced there for all or for certain specific purposes.

Article 348 of the constitution has categorically specified that English shall be used in:

- (a) All proceedings in the Supreme Court;
- (b) All proceeding in the state High Courts;
- (c) Authoritative texts of all bills to be introduced whether in Parliament or state legislature;
- (d) All amendments which might be moved to the bills introduced in the Parliament or state legislature:
- (e) All acts passed by Parliament or state legislatures;
- (f) All ordinances to be promulgated by the President or state Governor; and
- (g) All orders, rules, regulations and bye-laws to be issued under any law made by Parliament or state legislature.

Article 349 of the constitution has provided that no bill effecting Art 348 of the constitution shall be introduced in the Parliament for the first 15 years from the commencement of the constitution, without prior permission of the President.

It has also further provided that while giving his consent the President shall take into consideration the recommendations of the Language Commission and the committee of members of Parliament set up for the purpose.

Then it is provided by Art 350 of the constitution that the citizens of India shall have a right to make a petition to any authority in the state or to the central government in any language specified in the constitution.

It has also provided for the appointment of a special officer by the President for investigating and finding out the extent to which interests of linguistic minorities have been protected. It is also the responsibility of the Union Government to promote Hindi throughout the country, so that it could become lingua franca for the whole of India.

Creation of Andhra Pradesh:

In spite of all what the constitution has provided for the promotion of languages, from the very beginning language began to put pressure on politics. In several states, almost from the very beginning agitation started that states should be created on lingual basis.

In 1952, Sriramula went on fast unto death for pressing his demand for the creation of a separate state of Andhra where Telugu speaking people could develop their own language and culture. The government accepted the demand and created Andhra Pradesh. But this was beginning of the pressure of language on the politics and this heavy weight began to exert more and more pressures on Indian politics.

Establishment of Official Language Commission:

The Constitution had provided for the establishment of Official Language Commission, five years after the commencement of the constitution.

Accordingly a 21 member commission headed by B. G. Kher was set up in 1956. It submitted its report in 1956 which was made public in 1957. Terms of reference of the Commission were the same as specified in the constitution.

The Commission recommended that Hindi should be increasingly used for official purposes in place of English, but felt that it should not be possible to say whether this language shall be in a position to replace English by 1965, as provided in the constitution.

The Commission was of the view that in future English should be taught in secondary schools principally as a language of comprehension and not as a literary language, except where it was taken voluntarily.

Its other recommendations were:

(i) English should be continued as an alternate medium for competitive examinations for All India Services and in the courts of law.

(ii) Hindi should be made compulsory for recruitment to All India Services.

(iii) At the time of change over entire Statute Book of the country should be in Hindi.

(iv) Regional language may be retained for judicial and administrative purposes in the state. But in inter-state communications the channel should be in Hindi.

(v) Primary education should be in a language of the region, but at the secondary stage instruction in Hindi should be made compulsory.

(vi) A National Academy of Language should be set up, preferably at Hyderabad for the development of 14 languages of India, as specified in the constitution.

But the Report of the Commission was not unanimous. Two members of the Commission, namely, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and Dr. P. Subramayan were of the view that there should not be any unnecessary haste in the changeover as that was likely to create confusion and most likely adversely effect the process of national integration.

States Re-Organisation Commission:

Real trouble on the political scene on the language issue started with the setting up by the government of the Re-organisation Commission. When the official language Commission was still working, the Government of India decided to set up States Reorganisation Commission. Main purpose of this Commission was to recommend to the President the basis on which states should be reorganised.

This three member Commission headed by Fazel Ali, with H.N. Kunzuru and K.M. Panikar, as its members, was of the view that states should be reorganised on the basis of language. The people speaking same language should be included in one state. Most of the recommendations of the Commission were accepted and States Reorganisation Act was passed in 1956, on the basis of which states were reorganised.

Thereafter language pressure on politics began to increase. The Commission had not recommended the bifurcation of Bombay state. But both Gujarati and Marathi speaking people wanted to be separated on the basis of language.

There were riots in the state creating serious law and order situation and language won the battle when in 1960, the central government decided to divide composite Bombay state into two separate states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Meanwhile strong and chain reaction to Language Commission report also started. In Punjab, state Legislative Assembly passed a resolution providing that Panjabi in Gurmukhi script and Hindi in Devnagri script will be official languages of the state in Punjabi and Hindi speaking regions respectively. In order to promote Panjabi language, in 1962 the state set up Panjabi university at Patiala.

There was wide spread violent agitation throughout the state demanding creation of separate state of Punjab, where Panjabi language could fully develop. This time language also won the battle and government was forced to agree to the creation of separate states of Punjab and Haryana in 1966.

In 1957, fifty MPs from non-Hindi speaking states demanded that Hindi should not take over English by 1965, as provided in the constitution and that such a step should be taken only in 1990. In January, 1958 Madras Government came out with the suggestion that in the constitution a provision be made that Hindi will not replace English unless all the states concurred to it.

In 1958, Bengal Legislative Assembly passed an unanimous resolution by which it was provided that English should be retained as the official language, instead of Hindi. In 1961, it passed another resolution providing for the adoption of Bengali in place of English by November 10, 1963. But this date had to be deferred by another two years due to practical difficulties which state government faced.

In Assam, state Legislative Assembly passed a resolution by which Assamese was made as the official language of state. This led to an agitation in the state by Bengalis settled there, who wanted that Bengala should also be made official language.

There were wide spread riots in the state, resulting in the loss of life of several people. Many Bengalis had to leave the state. There was also civil disobedience movement in the state resulting in hartals and general strikes. There were incidents of looting and firing as well. In order to satisfy Bengalis settled in Assam, Official Language Act was suitably amended in 1960 to pacify their feelings.

Meanwhile emotions in southern states had risen high. Non-Hindi speaking states were getting agitated over constitutional provision about introduction of Hindi by

1965 all over India, which they were not prepared to tolerate. Language was creating law and order problem in every non-Hindi speaking state.

Ultimately in order to satisfy the people of these states, the then Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru said in January, 1958 at Gauhati Session of Congress "I am all in favour of study of English being continued and even made more wide spread. But, confess that I do not understand how we can lay down for the future that English should be our all India language ... In any event I see no reason why we should hustle any decision or fix strict time limits in a matter of this kind."

Again in September 1959 he said that English will continue as an alternate language as long as people require it and that the decision to replace English by Hindi will be taken by non-Hindi rather than Hindi speaking states.

The Official Language Commission had recommended that Hindi should be compulsory language for recruitment to All India Services.

In order to satisfy agitated non-Hindi speaking states the then Home Minister G. B. Pant announced in 1960 that the Government of India was not accepting this recommendation of the Commission. In April, 1960 central government, however, issued instructions making teaching and training of Hindi obligatory for central government employees.

National Integration and Language:

In 1961, National Integration Conference met in the background of serious riots which had broke open in Aligarh and spread in many parts of the country. The conference gave three language formula.

In the view of the conference three languages should be compulsorily taught in the schools. In non-Hindi speaking states the languages taught should be Hindi, English and a regional language whereas in Hindi speaking states also all the students should be taught a regional language of their choice.

It recommended that English should be replaced by regional languages at the university level. Hindi should gradually replace English as link language.

Keeping in view the sentiments of non-Hindi speaking states in May 1963, Parliament passed Official Languages Bill. The main provisions of the Bill being that English will be continued as official language in the Union for transacting all official business, in addition to Hindi.

But a state which adopts a language other than Hindi and English as official language of state will also have to publish both Hindi and English versions of the Acts of legislature passed by it. Governor of a state, with the prior assent of the President may authorise the use of Hindi in the state for the purposes of issue of orders, judgments and decrees, provided English translation of the same is appended to that.

Hindi should replace English with the assurance to non-Hindi speaking states that change over will not create any handicap for those who did not know Hindi and that that will be in accordance with the spread of knowledge not only in Hindi but non-Hindi speaking states as well.

The people of non-Hindi speaking states were, however, not satisfied with what the government was doing for them. The result was that they intensified their struggle against the alleged imposition of Hindi on them. DMK Government in Madras felt that the Official Languages Bill was a calculated move of the Hindi speaking states to reduce the people of the South to the position of second rate citizens.

The government in 1963, decided to launch an agitation against the Bill. In fact, in November of that year an agitation was actually launched which continued for one month. During this period members of DMK party courted arrest and central government offices located in the state were picketed and damaged.

In addition, copies of that part of the constitution which dealt with the language were burnt. Students also joined the agitation which became violent and there were instances of looting and destruction of public and private property. Agitation against this Bill spread in Andhra Pradesh as well where state legislature passed a resolution for the continuance of English after January 1965.

The Government of West Bengal also decided to continue English, in addition to Hindi and Bengala, in the state. There were agitations against the Bill in Kerala, Mysore and Pondicherry. In Bengal, though the agitation was peaceful, yet it was so tense that screening of Hindi films was stopped.

While non-Hindi speaking states were thus agitating Hindi speaking states were also not spectators. These were demanding that Hindi should immediately be given the place of English and there should be no delay on this account.

Shastri Assurance and Official Language Act:

Violent agitation and destruction of public and private property very much agitated the minds of the people. In a bid to satisfy the people of non-Hindi speaking states Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri assured the people of these states that English would continue to remain as official language of India as long as they liked.

When should English be eventually replaced by Hindi, this decision will be taken by non-Hindi rather than Hindi speaking state. Every Bill passed by the Parliament will have both English and Hindi versions and English version will not be removed, unless non-Hindi speaking people liked that.

In December, 1967 Official Language Act was amended and these assurances got legal recognition and then Incorporated in the amended bill.

National Integration Conference had recommended and the Government had accepted the adaptation of three language formula to promote integration in the country. But neither Hindi nor non-Hindi speaking states were serious about the implementation of this scheme.

The result was that in 1966, Government of India set up Education Commission, commonly known as Kothari Commission. The Commission was to suggest how far should three language formula be amended.

The Commission was of the view that:

- (a) In addition to the regional language either Hindi, or English or another modern Indian or European language should be taught.
- (b) Regional languages should be adopted within a period of ten years in the universities.
- (c) All India institutions should continue the use of English for the time being; and
- (d) In course of time Hindi may be introduced in all India institutions as well.

These recommendations of the Commission, however, received nationwide reaction. Efforts were made to arrive at an agreed formula at national level but all efforts ultimately failed. Dr. Triguna Sen, the then Union Education Minister announced in the middle of 1967 that in all the universities English will be replaced by regional languages in all subjects within next 5 to 10 years.

He, however, made it clear that changeover will be gradual and vary not only from university to university but from one institution to the other in the same university. He also stressed on the importance of English language and said that it will be continued in all India Institutions, scientific, technological and medical institutions, as well as in research institutions.

But this did not satisfy many. M. C. Chhagla, who had by then been shifted from Education to External Affairs, resigned from the cabinet on language issue. He felt that this proposal was against unity of India and, **“The time limit proposed to be set for the changeover in the universities of five years for under-graduate studies and ten years for all stages is hopelessly impracticable and unrealistic.”**

More or less at the same time Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai pleaded that as soon as possible Hindi and regional languages should be used in the courts of law and Acts of Parliament should be translated into regional languages in next 5 to 10 years.

M. C. Chhagla also disagreed with this view and felt that by this proposal judiciary will be completely smashed. He was joined by former Chief-Justice of India and the then attorney General, C. Daphtary. But in spite of this in December 1967, Union Law Minister declared on behalf of the government that it will not stand in the way of introducing regional languages in High Courts or lower courts.

Agitation Again:

This new language policy of the government created wide spread resentment and invited disturbances, since both the Hindi speaking and non-Hindi speaking states did not like it.

In the North India there were violent disturbances resulting in loss of huge property in the states of U.P., Bihar, M.P., Maharashtra and Rajasthan, whereas the centres of reaction in non-Hindi speaking states were Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where the reaction was again violent.

Tamil Nadu demanded that all the fourteen regional languages mentioned in the constitution should be declared as national languages, with English as the link language.

The state governments also decided that Hindi shall not be taught in die schools of Tamil Nadu. But in spite of these wide spread disturbances the new Education

Minister V.K.R.V. Rao declared in November, 1970 that there would be no departure from previously announced policy of the government about introducing regional language as medium of instructions in the universities and till that is done, English will continue to be studied. He accepted the need of English for understanding world and growing knowledge.

In 1973, National Integration Panel was set up by the National Council of Educational Research and Training to look into the problem of national integration vis-a-vis language policy of the government.

The Panel on National Integration was of the view that:

(a) Central Government should take effective steps for the spread of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states, along with one modern Indian language, within a period of next 15 to 20 years;

(b) Three language formula should be more vigorously followed; and

(c) Linguistic minorities should be given text books at reasonably low rates and free if possible.

In 1976, while nation was under emergency and faced with many problems, even at that time Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi made it clear that the Government of India will not impose any language on any state but it was committed to develop Hindi as the link language.

In 1977, Janata Government came to power at the centre and also in several Northern Indian states. The poll clearly indicated that whereas North was with Janata Party, South was opposed to it. There was a fear that Hindi will be imposed on the South.

Some in the country propagated that chances of such an imposition were bright because Jan Sangh was a constituent of the ruling party and there were very few Ministers from the South in the Union cabinet to effectively present the view point of Southern states.

In April, 1977 Prime Minister Morarji Desai made it amply clear that Hindi will not be imposed on any state and non-Hindi speaking states should have neither any fears nor doubts on that account. He, however, said that there was great need to develop Hindi as the link language and for this state will have to endeavour and make every effort.

In 1980, Congress (I) came to power at the centre and since then it has been the policy of the government that there will be no imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states. English will continue as long as non-Hindi speaking states will like it. But language is still a very explosive issue and can be exploited at any time by local and national leaders to meet their narrow selfish ends.

Problem Persists:

India got her independence in 1947 and about 50 years have passed but language problem still persists. It is still a heavy weight on Indian political system and the issue is so sensitive that it can be exploited at any time by selfish politicians to serve their ends and purposes, In fact, many politicians do not hesitate to make language as an issue as and when need arises.

Southern states have not gone much ahead in popularising Hindi in schools and other educational institutions. Most of the work in central government is being done in English and all high ups in the society send their children and wards in schools with English as medium of instructions.

There is glamour for English speaking everywhere in metropolitan cities, and chances of employment for those who have command over English are many more than those who have expertise in Hindi. Not only regional languages but regional loyalties are on the increase.

Elite of the society, both in business, politics and bureaucracy all are wedded to English and for them sending their children to Hindi medium schools and other educational institutions is out of question. English medium educational institutions have far more facilities to provide than those available to Hindi or regional medium educational institutions.

Even today job opportunities for English knowing people are much more than what these are for the others. The problem is persisting because non-Hindi speaking states still resist the idea of adopting Hindi as national language.

But for the continuance of this problem, to some extent, the policy of the government is also responsible. The Government of India has so far failed to convince non-Hindi speaking states that in the long run use of Hindi is in the interest of the people of the states. In addition, these states have not been clarified as to what standard of Hindi will serve the purpose.

Then another difficulty is that politics has been interwoven with language. Language controversy is either raised by the politicians themselves or as soon as controversy some-how, some-where arises, politicians immediately jump in and bring forth politics to the front and take extreme postures.

In spite of the fact that the country had monolithic political system for a very long time, whereas other problems were given priority, language was not accorded that high priority, which it deserved. All this resulted in continued agitations and demand of inclusion of more languages in the Schedule.

In 1986, there were language riots in Karnataka. Similarly in 1987 there were agitations in Goa, where ultimately Konkani was declared as official language along with Gujarati and Marathi.

There was a persistent demand that Nepali, Bhojpuri, etc., should be included in the Schedule of languages of the Constitution and recognised as languages to be developed by the central government. Sindhi and Nepali have since been added to Eighth schedule of the constitution.

In case it is desired that this problem should cease to exist for that more than anything else an atmosphere will have to be created under which non-Hindi speaking states will be made to realise that learning and specialisation as well as expertise in Hindi will be in the interest of the people of the state.

It is also desirable that a code of conduct be developed and strictly imposed on politicians by which exploitation of language at the time of elections or with election in view should be strictly forbidden.

Provision should be made for declaring election of a candidate won by exploiting language, as invalid and declaring his seat immediately vacant. When such a situation arises it is only then that the problem will find its solution, otherwise it will continue to persist in spite of passing all types of laws and giving all types of assurances which the Government may give from time to time. Hindi should be so much developed that there is general realisation that it can replace English in any sphere.