Chapter 8
The Language Question: Politics, Policy and Possibility of Multilingualism in India

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Abstract

The Indian subcontinent has seen diverse political mobilisations around the language question; claiming a fairer share of federal power, demanding a more respectable position in the educational process, as a space for political assertion as well as a medium of tactical negotiations. Since the recommendations of the University Education Commission of 1949 till the latest National Education Policy of 2020, the conflicted terrain of language has contributed to the power struggles amongst the varied politico-linguistic interests across the nation. This paper attempts to look into the evolution of the language policy in India, focusing on the relationship between the regional political assertion for states and marginalisation of minor languages within these states.

Introduction

In his *Critique of Violence*, Walter Benjamin raises the question: "[I]s any non-violent resolution of conflict possible?". He answers this question with the help of languages, which according to him is part of 'the sphere of understanding', 'in courtesy, trust and sympathy', 'which is not accessible to violence' (1996: 244-5). Influential scholars like Habermas, while rethinking the public lives in the West and the embedded complexities have shared this idea of language being the most significant medium of reconciliation and mediation, of rational and non-violent negotiations, as opposed to the use of brute force and confrontation. As he poignantly puts it "[R]eaching an understanding is the inherent telos of human speech" (1984: 287). Habermas states on language that 'what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know:

language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us' (1971: 3). Scholarship in socialisation and multiculturalism also have shown that the ability to speak, which makes human beings foundationally distinct from animals create the possibilities of rational, non-violent communication and conflict resolution and hence language rights are central to the larger paradigm of ethno-cultural rights (Kymlicka 2003). Even those who critique the Western liberal notions of consensus based on language, can hardly undermine the significance of language as the complex matrix of human existence. In this essay, we shall address a peculiar political- historical trajectory of 'the language question' as part of a claim of distinctness and uniqueness as well as at the centre of a series of (violent and not-so-violent) political mobilisations in post-colonial India.

The Indian subcontinent has seen some of the most heated debates on federal power-sharing, in the form of reorganisation of states on linguistic lines and on conferring the official language status on a chosen language that could represent India as a nation, both internally and externally. Moreover, the language question was pertinent as the medium of instruction in education since the initial years of independence and it is far from being resolved. These three issues, one pertaining to the role of language as the uniting factor in a postcolonial nation, wounded by partition and massive violence evident in the search for the official language, second, as a distinct identity, strong and coherent enough to demand federal reorganisation of the modern nation-state, and finally the significance of the complex relationship between education and language as a medium of instruction will be discussed here.

Paul R Brass (1990) identifies three major aspects of the 'language question' in post independent India; that of the official language, of linguistic state reorganisation and minority languages within states (significantly their status in education). He argues that the language policies of the Nehruvian regime were less-interventionist, yet consistent with the challenges of the time. They created a centre and margins within each state, through the linguistic state reorganisation. The pluralist policies of Nehruvian state were mostly restricted to the national level, and states were free to resolve their internal conflicts about minor languages in the spirit of federalism. Brass goes onto argue that the post-Nehruvian governments were interventionist, manipulative, and centralising in language policies like in most other political questions. This approach of the Centre in turn aggravated the preferential treatment of certain regional languages over others which directly contributed to the crises of the 1970s and 80s, as evident in the case of Assam.

This chapter focuses on the interlinkages between the three aspects of Brass' delineation of the language question. We ask how the question of finding a balance between Hindi and English (also see how Sanskrit was looked upon) in their tussle for the official language status influenced the movement for

language-based political movements for state reorganisation and in turn how the political compromises the centre and states entered into on the resolution of this crises gave rise to what this paper argues as the aggressive standardisation and rigid classification of regional languages thereby further marginalising the 'minor mother tongues', especially belonging to different Tribal communities under dominant linguistic assertions. These minor languages, with or without a history of writing, suffered the brunt of modernisation of the dominant vernaculars that tried to encompass maximum cultural might to argue its case against the potential hegemony of a 'national language' like the one the advocates of Hindi proposed.

Moreover, the more recent attempts towards 'internationalisation' of the curriculum in the higher education sphere, while 'imposing that "the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language" (NEP 2020, 13) will intensify the existing disparities. Hence, the relationship between language rights and equity within a multicultural polity pose a formidable challenge to political thinkers. We would like to situate this relationship in the conceptual matrix of 'Indian multiculturalism' and evaluate the tensions and possibilities the margins might present.

In other words, this chapter argues that the relationship between language and power – as it translates into access to resources, prestige, and well-being in general – in post-independent India is a complex issue, interlinked with historical, economic, political and cultural negotiations between different elite groups and reflected in the language policy. The ability to mobilise themselves into viable and formidable political communities that can assertively enter into electoral and legal bargains with state power is the most determining factor in the development of any minor linguistic groups. We will look at the dominant approach to this policy in transition, from the three-language formula (TLF) to the National Education Policy-2020.

The official narrative of language policy surprisingly has not changed substantially since its inception in the form of the workings of the University Education Commission in 1948 until the latest draft of the New Education Policy in 2020. Are there any insights available in the interactions between the official narratives and the regional political mobilisation (or a stark absence of it) on language – both on its official recognition and on the status of medium of instruction – for 'Indian multiculturalism'?

Indian Multiculturalism: What do Languages Say?

At first, let us draw a short map of the phrase 'Indian multiculturalism', placed in quotation marks to emphasise it's contested nature and varied depictions in academia. Scholars of multiculturalism disagree on whether India

can legitimately be called 'multicultural' as it is neither a recognised concept by the constitution nor does the perpetual and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts seem fundamentally different to the 'political' varieties of multiculturalism seen in the West in the modern era as a response of large-scale immigration. Multiculturalism presupposes the procedural and normative engagement about diversity between the state and civil society whereby diversity is respected and sanctions made available to curtail any discrimination based on cultural identities.

Other scholars have recognised the longer-standing encounter of multicultural identities in the non-West, especially in India than in most Western societies. This line of engagement has come from the liberal academia that aims to rectify the colonial interpretations of Indian history and the oriental gaze, by acknowledging the diversity in India as an organically evolved phenomena that enables the particular nation-building strategies, rather than a historical hindrance to the growth and development. However, most vehemently this argument of exceptionalism (Madan, & Nandy, 1998) surfaced in the works of some of the post-colonial cultural critiques whereby it is impossible, if not unethical to study the multicultural diversity of the region using 'Western principles' like equal citizenship and secularism that suffer from a rather short-term and procedural approach to 'the immigrant problem'.

Rochana Bajpai calls out this argument of multicultural exceptionalism of India for its limitations and argue that Indian society has undergone several of the constraints on multicultural policies that are mapped out in the case of the West (2011, 2015). She points to a 'normative deficit' in the constitutional framework of India, while addressing the questions of group-rights on the basis of religious, linguistic and other cultural differences as opposed to the notion of 'backwardness' with regard to caste and class. Moreover, she argues that this 'normative deficit' that can be traced back to the Constituent Assembly debates themselves continues to influence Indian politics significantly and this is a central reason as to why "a resurgent Hindu right" has been criticising the state assistance to minority cultures "as an illegitimate concession motivated by electoral considerations" (Bajpai 2015: 2).

Disagreeing with the postcolonial approaches to the problem of Indian multiculturalism, Bajpai provides a distinct argument that the liberal approach of the early years 'inherently lacks the normative-ideological resources required for the accommodation of group-differentiated rights' (Bajpai 2015). She argues that in India, like many other postcolonial nations, the challenge has been the inability of the state to construct a stable 'normative-ideological' structure to spell out the multicultural rights, without overtly restricting them on the basis of national integration. This structure needs to overcome the fears of 'Balkanization' and leave behind the disrepute vis-à-vis the recognition of group rights that colonial rule instilled in terms of their divide and rule policies.

The nation-state needs to embrace the notion of multicultural diversity from a normative approach to democratic rights of minorities rather than as a vote-bank concern or as a reason for India's backwardness. Bajpai points out the fear and mistrust embedded in the usage of the term minority in post-independent India, primarily referring to those communities that pose potential threat to the nation's integrity and most importantly to the majority community i.e. the Hindus. The current debates about the Uniform Civil Code proposals in India unravels many of these underlying discomforts and resistances.

A different approach to the question of Indian multiculturalism, not based on state policies rather from the arena of language practices like literature comes from UR Ananthamurthy who argues that the organic evolution and co-existence of cultures has made many regions in India multilingual by default. Poets and philosophers wrote in languages as well as *bhashas*, the common tongues of masses. He points out that this syncretism was reflected in the critical consciousness of Bhakthi movement long before the advent of Western ideas through colonialism. Democratisation of faith and god happened during this phase, primarily through the choice of people's *bhashas* over Sanskrit or Persian. What he calls 'an egalitarian passion' passed through these *bhashas*, eventually transforming religion, politics and society. Ananthamurthy calls Gandhi as the last of these 'critical insiders' who held onto the significance of common languages in living sovereign lives (Ananthamurthy, 2000 pp. 39). This multilingualism was compromised during the colonial period due to standardisation and homogenisation of languages. It is important to perceive unity in diversity, a much cliched phrase, as a process according to Ananthamurthy as disproportionate stress on one aspect will bring the other to forefront, unleashing contestation. Difference and hybridity are key to languages, expressed best in literatures (Ananthamurthy, 2000). In light of the above discussions, we will proceed to look at the possibility of a normative framework for the language question in India focussing on the triad of group rights, language rights and equity.

Will Kymlicka (2001) has argued that minorities face a greater challenge in realising the rights given to them in any institutional setting as their requirements for a meaningful public and private life does not fall under the 'normal' or 'mainstream'. In India as well, it is still unclear to what extent the group-rights could be unpacked as positive rights based on state involvement or as negative rights based on non-intervention by the state. Hence, any provision by the state to ensure these rights could be interpreted as 'appeasement policy' or 'vote-bank' politics.

Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out that there was a renewed interest towards language policy and language education in the 1990s, which can be attributed to the growing focus on minority communities within nation-states and their disadvantaged position. Especially, in the post-Soviet nations, the need to 'solve' the emerging problems of linguistic identities was strong. The attempt focussed

on creating a 'unifying national language' along the lines of the western countries as it was assumed that attaining 'public linguistic homogeneity' is central to modernization and development, understood as the sole trajectory available to any aspiration for modern nationalism.

[The official language] is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language… The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses… this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. (Bourdieu 1991, 45)

In order to overcome the totalising and homogenising tendency of this approach, Bourdieu talks about an approach of 'embeddedness' i.e. accepting the 'social and political contexts of language policy and language education' instead of looking at languages in isolation; at their linguistic structure alone. This unravels a significant aspect of the foundational violence associated with the emergence of the modern nation-state that is translated for political negotiations and governance into the 'language problem'.

This is more complex and subtle in the case of language policies in India. On the one hand, the linguistic state-reorganisation provided an infrastructure for vernaculars to become tongues of power and dominance through official status and educational status. It could be argued that despite the tentative tone of the Constituent Assembly debates on regional languages, pursuing vernacular language development and in turn the cultural identity associated with a language is seen as a legitimate endeavour in the Indian variant of multiculturalism. Multilingual education (henceforth MLE) based on TLF became the cornerstone of this idea though it brought about significant political challenges from the Southern regions[8]. Many argued that MLE is not simply the presence of multiple languages in the curriculum as long as these languages are placed in power-hierarchy. In MLE, the relationship between language has to be reworked from a notion of building symmetrical power relations between the instructors and the learners. As Paulo Freire has articulated, if the ultimate purpose of education is to build critical consciousness in the learner, one first of all needs to internalise his/her position as a critic.

In India, this power hierarchy and its consequences have to be understood not only as a tussle between Hindi (especially in its official form devoid of Urdu or Arabic) and other dominant languages like Tamil, Bengali or Telugu, but also (even more importantly so) as the marginalisation of minor languages[9] (tribal

8 We will discuss this in detail in the following sections.

9 Moreover, a distinction between minority languages like Konkani and Tulu, which are endowed with a socially and economically influential community and the minor languages of most tribal groups, without such an affluent community is important here. This paper focusses on the latter as minor languages.

languages for instance), without the resources for political mobilisation has to be kept in mind as we delve into the history of this question.

The Language Question in India: A Historical Account

Lachman Khubchandani (2007) argues that postcolonial nations in South Asia have adopted a comprehensive planning that envisages 'education for all' and in the Indian case, it is evident from the constitutional provisions for minority languages and cultures. Yet, their colonial inheritance of the elitist approach of 'selective education' along with the contestations in the postcolonial polity for representation and power, made the unfolding of these provisions rather complex. (Khubchandani 370).

He maps 'the Great Debate' between Anglicists and Orientalists, about the prominence to be given to Indian languages in relation to English in education and culture. While Orientalists were sympathetic towards the native languages, especially, Sanskrit and Urdu, the Anglicist position, as represented in the famous Minutes on Education by Thomas Babington Macaulay of 1835, made English the primary medium of instruction, citing its superiority over the native language and literature. Subsequent colonial policies have noted that the vernaculars need to develop first to qualify as medium of instruction in education and medium of communication in administration. Gandhi has opposed this later and provided the alternative of imparting basic education in the mother tongues alone[10].

In the post-independence period, Constituent Assembly debates (CAD) on the question of language took place during 12-14 September 1949 and it was revisited during the final reading of the Draft Constitution on 18 November 1949[11]. Paramjit S Judge (2021) notes that it was one of the last questions to be debated upon as the Congress could not reach any internal consensus on the issue and it turned out to be one of the most contentious issues in the Assembly. After heated debates, it was finalised that there will not be any national language for India, only official languages including Hindi written in Devnagari script, English (on a provisional basis for fifteen years) and a number of languages spoken in various regions across, to be part of the Eighth Schedule as recognised languages for official communication. Most of the representatives were clear about the relationship between these clauses and the imminent demand for linguistic reorganisation of the territory. Hence, they were cautious as to re-

10 Khubchandani argues that in all these debates the focus was squarely on the medium of education and much less about the content to be taught. However, in the recent years, the content has become a turf of political polarisation and ideological battle, and are being proactively changed by the state.

11 All references to the CAD here, are accessible on https://www.constitutionofindia.net/debates/10-sep-1949/

strict the official languages to only the two former ones i.e. Hindi and English. This will further lead to the issue of choosing a language as the medium of instruction across the nation and these are interrelated issues as far as policies are concerned.

The CAD did not finalise on the issue of linguistic state reorganisation or language as the medium of instruction and these issues became pivotal in Indian politics in later decades. Yet, disproportionate stress was given to the long-term plan of making Hindi capable of becoming the official and popular language of India. More interestingly, the future of the provisional status of English as an official language became predictable according to Judge (2021) as the non-Hindi speaking regions vehemently opposed any attempt to remove English and make Hindi the sole official language. The multitude of issues that stemmed from this tussle are beyond the scope of this paper[12].

Now let us trace the origins of the official language policy in India briefly, starting from the colonial period and closely looking at the University Education Commission Report-1948-9 and mapping up to the recent National Education Policy-2020, for there is an active, at times unpredictable relationship between the implementation of these policies and the political mobilization at the grassroots.

University Education Commission Report-1948-9: The official language debate

The plan discussed in the CAD to gradually assimilate all the regions to Hindi and to make Hindi capable of integrating the major aspects of these regional languages was passionately opposed and the linguistic assertion movements proclaimed to dissociate with the approach even before the official policy was passed. Several intense and even violent episodes of protests took place across the region, making it difficult to revisit the issue of the provisional status of English as the official language.

A significant fallout of this issue was the question of education and the medium of instruction from the primary classes. The TLF prescribed by the University Education Commission in 1948 and later taken into consideration by the Nehru government identifies the 'national language problem' in India, in the context of deciding upon the medium of instruction in higher education. A closer reading of the Report will unravel some of the challenges faced by the nascent postcolonial nation and the rationale provided for the choice of the official language and a gesture towards the medium of instruction.

12 One of those issues are the communal interpretation of the making of the Hindi, 'cleansed off' its Urdu connections and the legacy of a syncretic language of the common people called Hindustani.

The Report acknowledged English to be a colonial vestige and the 'alien tongue'; at the same time, the linguistic diversity is formidable and how to reconcile it with the larger ideal of unity was the challenge. The report notes that all the chief languages 'having literatures of their own' were to be worthy to become the medium of instruction in the respective regions. According to the Statistical Handbook published by the Constituent Assembly in 1947, and based on the census of 1931, there were 12 chief languages (with 4 divisions within Hindi, all seem to be inadequate as loans are significant in all four) out of which English, Hindi and Sanskrit's statuses were primarily debated upon.

The process to develop a federal language seemed very difficult and a range of arguments were presented in favour and against each candidate. In order to become the official language of the state any individual language had to fulfil a minimum of requirements; the ability to function as the language of business (both national and international), the depth to comprehend and disseminate philosophy and science globally, and most importantly to impart the highest teaching and research in all modern academic disciplines. The Report (1948) proposed a few yardsticks for identifying and verifying the ideal language to become the official language of the Indian state. Firstly, the ability to retain its originality even while adopting from other languages or the potential for assimilation and second, organic inclusiveness towards words from European languages which cannot be purged due to peculiar historical trajectory.

As already mentioned, there were efforts to 'purify' Hindi of all influences other than that of Sanskrit and the Report deemed this to be a dangerous tendency as this move would amount to artificially cleanse the language of its long-standing history whereas variety is essential for natural flexibility and suppleness of the language. A problem faced by all provincial languages was that most of the technical and scientific terms were on loan and reaching an economical consensus seemed impossible due to the rivalries and competition. A common opinion among Indian educationists was to loan technical terms solely from English as it will lead to international approach in sciences.

The emphasis on the ability of the language to enable and enhance scientific education is evident in these discussions and it is unsurprising given the Nehruvian approach towards remedying the scientific backwardness 'at the fastest pace' by spreading the 'international character of science' for which, language is just like scientific symbols[13]. This is to pacify those who approach English as a colonial tool or alien language by underlining the fact that all the other European languages have also adopted English terms for scientific research. The Report revisits the Recommendations of the Central Advisory

13 This opinion is proposed by Dr Mahajani, Vice-Chancellor of the Rajputana University by pointing out Newman's distinction between science and literature. In science, unlike in literature the language does not hold any ethical connotations, rather they are like any other symbols.

Board Committee of 1944 about higher education in sciences, which point towards a distinct possibility of using common terms in English for international purposes, alongside terms borrowed and adopted from other Indian languages.

The advocates of English argued that it could be a platform for unity, nationalism, national sentiments as modern civilization was brought to the subcontinent in English and it is also medium of international relations owing to its growing status as an international language. Others retorted that it would be a negation of the nascent democracy and it would divide the nation into two entities namely the rulers and the ruled. Also, as the primary medium of instruction, English would create conflicts in the mind of the future learner between the ordinariness of the mother tongue and complexity of learning school subjects in English. 'The nation will develop and split consciousness – "the Babu mind"', according to Dr Hans, Lecturer in Comparative Education in the London University (Report: 276-7).

The other aspect of the discourse focussed on Sanskrit as the utmost refined classical language of ancient India. Though the historical and ideological force of Sanskrit was evident from its resurgence during the freedom movement, it was agreed upon by most that it would not enable an easy and efficient spread of the sciences and it might not be beneficial for the new generation to converse in the international realm and hence not suited to become the official language. It is important to note the word of caution presented by the members of the Commission against the 'revivalist' tendencies among some groups, with regard to Sanskrit.

We must also beware of revivalist ideology. Recovery of antique virtue or antique culture is not in accord with the laws of history. Sir Walter Moberly who was for many years chairman of Universities Grants Commission of Great Britain says in his challenging book The Crisis in the University, "archaism is impracticable; what is revived is never more, than a simulacrum. It is also undesirable, since the past always has grave faults, the revival of which would be unpardonable. (Report: 272)

Thus, it was finalised that a version of the Hindi/Hindustani/Khari Boli was the only option for the official language of the nation as it was spoken by the greatest number of Indians, and it was argued that '[w]hen Hindi assimilates terms in popular usage and adopts scientific and technical terms which are used internationally it will grow richer and fuller than it is today' (Report: 278).

It is important to keep in mind that a different notion of Indian nation was still alive at this point, a federation with equal units and this decision by the University Education Commission, 1948-9 would mean that these federating units would have to learn Hindi to participate in the official life of the Federation. This way, the native speakers of Hindi would invariably have immense advantage over the citizens from non-Hindi speaking provinces as the

access to resources invariably would depend on the quality of political communication between the government and the people.

The Report includes a few pointers towards the selection of official language in federal units/provinces for official communication and education. It ought to be a language that will satisfy the two requirements that of 'federal unity and local variety' (Report: 279). Hindi shall not overpower regional languages as it would compromise the linguistic and cultural diversity of the land. This is the ideational point of origin of the TLF that could resolve this conundrum, according to the Commission. The first two languages across the nation will be English and the respective mother tongues and, in the Hindi-speaking regions, another Indian language could be the third language and for non-Hindi regions, Hindi will be the third language. We can recover a sense of urgency to move beyond English in the Report, to replace it with a federal language. Yet, it also realises, within the spirit of the times, the ethical and practical issues related to imposing Hindi across the territory. However, as we already pointed out the expectation was that 'ultimately English will disappear from the scene as the language of the State, Central or Provincial' through a planned, stage-wise approach of the federal government (Report 283). Now let's narrow the discussion down to the three-language formula in detail, focussing on the conflicted terrain of language as a medium of instruction.

Language as the Medium of Instruction: Political Life of the Three-Language Formula

Though the Three-Language Formula was introduced in the Report as early as in 1949, owing to the protests on the question of the official language it was not implemented until the later 1960s. In this section, we will look at the life of the three-language formula in India, as an attempt to solve the question of which language should function as the medium of instruction. We will try to trace the impact and political repercussions of the implementation of the policy, with a special focus on the southern states, as the policy had the most sweeping effects on their education systems.

The subsequent National Education Commission, popularly known as the Kothari Commission was set up in 1964 and it submitted its report in 1966. The Commission made several recommendations towards the standardisation of basic education in India starting from the pre-primary stages up to the twelfth standard. The Commission recommended a revised version of the three-language policy, which assumed that the languages recognised in the Eighth Schedule are equivalent to mother tongues. The TLF was only a strategy and not a national language policy until it was adopted by the Indian parliament in 1968 and the National Education Policy of the government carried it as

"Hindi, English and [a] modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the Regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States" (NEP1968).

The TLF mandated that a pupil needs to have 'sufficient control over three languages' by the completion of lower secondary stage as a minimum requirement of languages in school education. Mother tongue, English and a non-native modern Indian language became part of the curriculum across the country. Currently, India has eighty languages as medium of instruction at different levels of education. TLF has been the official policy on role of languages in education even before its official implementation in 1968. It envisaged the regional language or mother tongue as the first teaching language for the first five years, Hindi in non-Hindi areas and any other Indian language in Hindi areas as the second language for three years (6-8th grade) and finally, English as the third language from the 3rd year onwards.

There are several confusions that spilt out of this formula and some of those are as follows: there was a clear discrepancy in understanding the relationship between the regional language and mother tongue in most regions as this easily led to the imposition of majority languages on marginalised groups, especially tribals. Second, this was applicable only in government sponsored education and the private educational systems could follow any combination that they prefer. This problem is manifold today, with the massive private investment in education and the 'stress on international benchmarking' in the NEP-2020. Even when the TLF was modified in 1964 by the Kothari Commission, these confusions continued but, a provision was added for the transitional multi-lingual education for tribal groups. Eventually, majority language in each region became the first language, English as the most common second language and Hindi or Sanskrit as third language. The National Education Policy of 1986 largely continued the language related provisions given in 1968.

The National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages (NFGTIL) constituted under the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in their Position Paper submitted in 2006 points out that TLF has been 'observed more in the breach than in the observance' meaning, the Hindi-speaking states have largely adopted Sanskrit as the third language, apart from Hindi and English, instead of a southern language whereas the many non-Hindi-speaking states, such as Orissa, Kerala, West Bengal, and Maharashtra among others implemented the formula in letter and spirit. However, Tamil Nadu devised a two-language formula by including only Tamil and English in its curricula, as it argued that the Hindi-speaking states are bypassing the spirit of the formula by using Sanskrit, which can be written in the same script as Hindi and will not be tested for its spoken abilities (NFGTIL 2006).

As mentioned above, the TLF has seen vastly varied interpretations and implementations across India. A minor language shall be taught in the primary

schools where at least 10% population speaks the language and it shall be alongside a dual medium of instruction in the regional language and in the minor one. The governments were supposed to provide special teachers for these languages specially for areas where the speakers are below 10% and there is research that shows the partial or inadequate implementation of this provision. The medium of instruction is unclear in many regions as the institutional systems do not support multilingualism. It promotes casual assimilation and many tribal groups in India, face the eventual loss of mother tongues. Moreover, most children from the marginalised rural backgrounds from the non-Tribal regions, will end up following a four-language formula as their mother tongue, as spoken at home is distinct from their regional language. It has been argued that the TLF has been a failure in addressing major issues in multilingual education because it has been mostly done on political whims, under pressure from popular protests and vote-bank motives, without thorough research and theoretical frameworks even after five decades separating between the initial formula and the current policy.

However, Harold Schiffman presents a different take on the trajectory of TLF. He identifies four unique features of India's linguistic culture namely, antiquity, ubiquity (the pervasiveness of Indian linguistic cultural norms), orality (elaboration of complicated methods of oral transmission of language) and diversity (1996: 170). In such a context, language policies exist in either explicit or implicit domains and the abolition of 'the explicit rules about language, or declaring "standard" languages to be nothing but a "myth" or an ideology does not make the cultural assumptions underlying these concepts automatically disappear' according to Schiffman (1996: 148). He also points toward the attempt in the 1950s to imitate the language policy of the USSR, simply by installing Hindi in the place of Russian. Schiffman argues that the TLF, which replaced this Hindi-centric approach 'recognizes the historical multilingualism, the linguistic diversity, and the reverence for ancient classical languages is more likely to succeed than an imported model of any sort' (1996: 168). According to him, even the failure of the TLF is 'a negotiated outcome, a middle way between unfettered diversity and monolingualism'. Its success lies in its ability to allow different interpretations of the policy, depending on local sentiments and needs and goes on to state that '[I]n fact, if left to their own devices, many Indians will learn more than three languages, and expect the same of their children, and their children's children' (1996: 172).

Regional Political Mobilisations on Language (TLF)

The protests around the linguistic reorganisation of Indian territory goes back to the early 1950s which led to several instances of violence and militant assertion. This eventually led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956 that

recurved the boundaries of the units of Indian polity, namely the states along linguistic lines. Before going into the mobilisations after the TLF, it is imperative to briefly layout the map of such efforts for the formation of the language-states as a precursor to the former. As we know, the partition of India in 1947 unleashed violence of unprecedented proportions in modern Indian history and this in turn caused uncertainty among the political elites and masses alike. The former had to resort to more conservative political strategies in order to avoid any further fissures in the national body and this made them overtly cautious about the claims of language-based units in the post-colonial phase. The first of those protests took place in the Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras State and the State of Andhra was formed three years prior to the Act of 1956. Later, several such assertions took place in various parts, including for the formation of Maharashtra, with Bombay as its capital.

The political assertions against the language policy in education can be understood as the second wave of mobilisation flaming out of linguistic aspirations. As a response to the TLF, the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam*) leader and then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, CN Annadurai provocatively said during the mobilisations of 1967-69 that '[I]f we had to accept the principle of numerical superiority while selecting our national bird, the choice would have fallen not on the peacock but on the common crow. Why should we then claim the tiger as our national animal instead of the rat which is so much more numerous?' He argued that if English is capable of linking the region with the rest of the world, it ought to be sufficient in linking the region with the rest of the country as English is an essential part of education across the land. In a humour so characteristic of his political speeches, he went onto say that '[T]o plead for two link languages is like boring a smaller hole in a wall for the kitten while there is a bigger one for the cat. What suits the cat will suit the kitten as well' (Ramakrishnan, 2019). He was willing to give the formula a chance in his state, only if all other states were following it too. The DMK mobilised people against the formula arguing that any government-sanctioned requirement for higher studies or employment, to study Hindi at school would disadvantage the Tamil-speakers as Tamil and Hindi were completely dissimilar languages in terms of grammar, structure, script and history. It was argued that any compulsion to learn and practise Hindi would give an unfair advantage for Hindi-speakers. These protests around mid-1960s were one of the reasons why the Centre rescinded on its earlier decision to replace English completely with Hindi. The two-language policy of the DMK government in 1968 has been discussed above as an example of how the TLF had been 'honoured more by breach rather than by abidance' (Schiffman, 170).

The recent revival of the TLF under the NEP-2020 stirred some responses from the regional parties, like DMK and their regional rival AIADMK. Edappadi K Palaniswami, who was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at the time of its

introduction, termed it as 'painful and saddening', as he vowed not to implement the new policy in the state. Mr Palaniswami listed the consistent stands on the issue taken by late Chief Ministers Anna Durai, MG Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa against the imposition of Hindi and urged Prime Minister Modi to 'reconsider' the three-language policy (Jesudasan, 2020). It is amply clear that such assertions give rise to negotiable policy dimensions and these dominant language subjects in India have been the beneficiaries of such explicit and implicit negotiations.

The Absent Minors: Political Mobilization and Electoral Bargaining

The Report of the University Education Commission had cautioned the government about the 'pockets of minorities' spread across the nation, who would benefit from a primary education with their mother tongue as the medium of instruction. They could be introduced to the respective dominant regional language 'if the numbers are adequate' at secondary and university levels. The pervasive lack of interest shown by the juggernaut of governance to these 'pockets' from the early decades of the 'nation building' has been studied by various scholars in terms of industrial, infrastructural and development policies cutting across ministries and departments. Still, the fragmented histories of the tribal and other severely marginalised communities are yet to be fully recognised and unearthed by the Indian academia. Here, we will look at their absence from any of the political bargains and decision-making platforms as heated struggles for language took place across the nation.

It can be inferred from the discussion in the chapter that the lack of such organised assertions, of linguistic identity and its political prowess, has led to the marginalisation and invisibilisation of several languages from the rich linguistic map of India. In an interview given by Ajit K Mohanty, an established scholar of the social, educational, and cognitive implications of bilingualism among linguistic minorities, within the context of Indian multilingualism, he points out that there are around 500-600 tribal mother tongues in India out of which only two have been recognised in the Eighth Schedule, namely Bodo and Santhali (both in 2004). Moreover, only 3-4 of these languages are being used as medium of instruction in schools (Pattnaik, 2005). This unpacks the picture of the marginalisation of minor languages in India vis-à-vis the institutions and process of education and development.

Cynthia Groff (2017) argues that the national-level language and language-in-education planning in India, through its insensitive process of recognition, classification and rationalisation, fails to legitimise the majority of the minor languages. She emphasises on the need to 'acknowledge the pluralistic

language practices that defy linguistic categorization' as in the long run any attempts at rigid classification would only help the dominant languages and it will in turn reduce the linguistic varieties and cultural diversities (Groff: 157)

Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005, 2007) in her path-breaking work brings back the question of class into the language classrooms of India and argue that English cannot simply be seen as a colonial tongue, as the proactive engagement of people from various social strata, economic classes and regions in India have resulted in centuries of adaptation and decolonisation of English. It has become 'hybridised, nativized and decolonised in many respects', while continuing to provide access to power and dominance in a deeply divided society like India. Even in the case of the multilingual education provided to minority students, especially tribal children, English still works as the most important resource that could afford the students with socio-economic mobility. Moreover, most efforts of multilingual education programs are still in the nascent stage in India.

In the final section, we will point towards the two languages, Bodo and Santhali with regard to their journey into the Eighth Schedule as examples of a paving a way forward for other minor languages. Before that we will briefly analyse the National Education Policy introduced in 2020, for its interpretation of the TLF, focussing on the content of the policy, as separate from its political ramification spelt out in the earlier section.

NEP-2020: Challenges and Possibilities

We have already seen how the National Policy on Education-1968, and its subsequent iterations in 1986, and 1992 have been more or less similar in their agendas and methods of implementation. NEP 2020 claims to promote multilingualism in India by harnessing the power of language in teaching and learning for individual and collective development. Scholars have argued that this could possibly ensue a 'democratic reform' by openly discussing multilingualism in India for the first time. It is also considered as consistent with mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) models that have gained currency across the world in the recent years.

In brief the provisions in NEP-2020 with regard to the medium of instruction (MoI) are as follows: the MoI is to be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond and thereafter, the home/local language is to be taught as a language wherever possible. A bilingual approach is to be adopted by teachers using 'bilingual teaching-learning materials' especially in cases where a discrepancy exists between the home language of the students and the dominant MoI. It is expected that this will provide 'greater flexibility' to the TLF, and no language will be imposed on any state. As long as at least two of the three languages are native to India, the specific choices can be made by the students in accordance

with the larger choices of the states. An important provision in the NEP-2020 is the prominence given to Sanskrit, which is identified as the repository of something known as 'Sanskrit Knowledge Systems' comprised of ancient knowledge of the sciences, arts, philosophies and spirituality, of multi-religious and secular authors.

Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) points out that the NEP documents lack clarity in terminology like mother tongue, local language and/or home language and certain ambiguities in the policy makes the scholars doubt its potential beyond the rhetoric. They argue that the policy lacks a viable plan thus making the Language, Policy and Planning (LPP), a universal requirement of modern states non-existent in the case of India. According to them, the policy seems to sideline the pertinent questions about the specific methods and timeline for the execution of the policy.

There exists a huge gulf between the state level implementations of language policy and national level policy itself across Indian states and a number of infrastructural and practical problems like the lack of availability of well-trained teachers make it impossible to create any changes in the positive direction despite the policy guidelines. A report published by a fact-finding team of journalists in a number of tribal schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh, conducted in August 2023, three years since the introduction of the NEP-2020 opines that the tribal students experience a 'dissonance' between their lives at home/in community and attending school, which in turn lead to slow learning, class repetition, and eventual dropouts. This perpetuates and intensifies the 'structural invisibility of Adivasi students' and the total destruction of their invaluable knowledge systems. This resonates with the scholarly explorations in the space occupied by tribal students in other parts of India. (Mohanty & Saikia 2004, Groff 2016, Nag 2018)

The study unearths a letter from the Director of Tribal Welfare Department, AP to the office of the AP *Samagra Shiksha* program, dated 7 July 2023, which states that 1454 schools are implementing the MTB-MLE program in seven tribal languages across 11 districts. It can be noted that the Department of Tribal Welfare does not recognise the payments given to the volunteers of the MTB-MLE scheme as salaries in the official documents; instead, they are noted as honorariums, which makes their job insecure without any pension scheme, PF or insurance facilities (Pangi et al. 2023). Most of these volunteers are also drawn from these tribal communities to function as intermediaries between the dominant language and the home language of the students and this exposes the vicious cycle of exploitation and lack of planning in the policy.

Dhir Jhingran, a retired bureaucrat and expert in language policy argues that the formula was 'almost shelved in practice' and the NEP-2020 revives it along with stipulating the introduction of all three languages in the early years and ensuring speaking proficiency and reading ability in all three by grade 3. This

has been pointed out as a distinguishing aspect of the TLF in the NEP-2020. He goes onto argue that the Draft makes no distinction between 'language acquiring skills' and 'language learning skills' of children at an early age. Children living in multilingual socio-cultural contexts observably showcase the former skills, while the latter, which focusses on learning scripts and formal structures of a language, depends on the formal training imparted at school.. This will place 'a very heavy cognitive burden on a young child of five to seven years' according to him and this burden will be experienced disproportionately by children from marginalised sections, with no additional support from their mostly uneducated families (Dasgupta 2019).

Way Forward: Substantive Political Participation from the Margins

Ajit K Mohanty in his seminal work on multilingual education in India argues that through the implementation of the TLF, a hierarchical progression from the mother tongue to regional and then national level languages is accepted as a goal of education. But its practice is enmeshed with the power-structures at different levels as to which language gains prominence at what level and which language is employed for what functions. He elaborated the organic life of a language using an 'ecology metaphor' whereby languages evolve in particular environments and become endangered and even extinct under changes to that environment (2019). The double divide' in the history of language politics in India – between the language of the elites in power and that of the masses on the one hand and the language of the masses and that of the marginalised on the other necessitates multi-pronged approach as opposed to a top to bottom one.

Drawing from their research among the Kond tribal group with the language Kui in Orissa, Mohanty and his fellow researchers have shown that the tribals themselves are aware of the lack of social mobility and resources associated with their linguistic identity and struggle to access the same through public education in Oriya, the dominant state-language. He suggests a few strategies to overcome the tensions, conflicts and uncertainties that underlie the language paradigm in India, primarily drawing from the recent examples of Bodo, the language of the Bodo tribe in Assam and Santhali, the language of the Santhal tribe in West Bengal, both gained constitutional recognition in the Eighth Schedule in 2003. These two tribes and the speakers of Dogri and Maithili (the minority languages in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Bihar, respectively) have a long history of political struggle that led to their recognition. These struggles vary from each other in their modes of assertion and nature of the demands raised vis-à-vis the state and the Centre. Especially

in their study among the Bodo tribe, after the recognition and education made possible in the mother tongue, they have identified various positive benefits among the children, starting from a meaningful identity formation as students and sense of closeness to the curriculum (Mohanty 2006: 271).

An equity-oriented implementation of multilingualism in India necessitates substantive political participation from the grassroots. This will enable us to move away from approaching the language as a problem to a paradigm where language is seen as a resource in India. (Mohanty 165-174). Shivani Nag (2018) has examined the linguistic alienation of those who did not have their mother tongues as medium of instruction and their consequent disempowerment in higher education, based on her research on multilingual education models implemented in Orissa. Tollefson (2008) in his seminal work on language planning in education provides us some pointers to the future of our discourse. The human rights approach to language rights seems insufficient especially in the era of complete commercialisation of education and the role of the language policy as an 'apparatus of governmentality' and its subversive relation to 'social change and critical pedagogy' should be acknowledged by the academicians. This will be possible only by addressing the theoretical questions around power, inequality and ideology embedded in any language policy.

Mahapatra and Anderson focus on the need for the linguistically inclusive 'Languages for Learning' (LFL) framework as an alternative to the MoI framework that they deem as 'outdated and reductive' (2023: 109). Without going into the details of this framework we could summarise that it would be 'structurally flexible, socio-culturally feasible, economically viable and academically relevant' (102). It will focus on equity, inclusivity and cognitive independence along with other focal points. They argue that more fundamental research needs to be done, moving away from the Western models of education reform, fitting for the South Asian experience. This is possible only if the long-term aim is democratisation of education through sensitive use of language rather than the straight jacket approach that might be convenient for governance. They also raise an argument pertinent to our discussion that the relation between research in language and other social sciences like political theory and sociology needs to be strengthened.

Conclusion

The chapter attempted to bring together the questions of language policy, political assertion culminating in community-formation, access to resources and the democratisation of education framed by inclusion and equity in the Indian scenario. It is argued that for such an exploration, it is significant to contextualise the research in language policy and education in the discourses of political theory using the concepts of justice, freedom, and democracy.

On the one hand, the minor language groups have to struggle for the official recognition within the multilingual constitutional framework of India, but on the other, the governmental classifications further minimize their possibility of independent development as a conceptual and communicative resource of the community. Will Kymlicka (2001) argues for a 'politics in vernacular' as the most effective way towards the formation of a 'demos', a political community that can give substance to the slogan of 'unity in diversity' in the multicultural context of India. Hence, the language-politics matrix explored in the chapter points at a complex layer in the discourse on Indian multiculturalism that complicates not only the policy paradigms of language, but also the nature of the conception of the political community that emanates out of identity-assertions in the postcolonial theoretical practices.

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