

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
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ADOPTING A CONSTITUTION FOR A NATION - -
THE LAST DAYS OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF INDIA
AND THE ADOPTION OF LANGUAGE PROVISIONS

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EMOTION CHARGED ATMOSPHERE

We describe below the emotion-charged atmosphere within the Constituent Assembly, when issues relating to language use were raised. But, immediately, let us review the basic facts and the progress of a consensus draft, which outlined the official language of India, and its subsequent unanimous adoption by the Assembly.

As pointed out earlier in our last article, neither the Draft Constitution prepared and circulated by the Constitutional Adviser, Sir B. N. Rau, as a first step toward formulation of the Indian Constitution nor the Draft Constitution settled by the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, after much discussion on various issues by the Constituent Assembly, contained any article or clause on the Official Language of the country.

LANGUAGE PROVISIONS - NO DIRECTIONS FROM THE ASSEMBLY TO THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE

This was but natural because of the cautious attitude toward the issue adopted by the top Congress leadership. It was an unwritten understanding among the Congress leadership that issues that would raise much heat and dust and would generate intense conflict and emotions to the point of dividing the nation be dealt with only at the end of the life of the Constituent Assembly. Thus, in the absence of any direction as regards the official language from the Constituent Assembly, the Drafting Committee headed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar did not include provisions for the official language policy in its draft version.

However, these draft versions contained, as I mentioned earlier, only the provisions regarding the language or languages to be used in the Union Parliament and in the State Legislatures. And yet, of all the issues, it was the language question that was uppermost in the minds of the members of the Assembly, and it was the language use that was more often raised during the consideration of the Draft version submitted by the Drafting Committee.

The opinions expressed were very divergent and were of a conflicting nature.

In view of the emotions displayed and the widening divergence between opposing views, the Indian National Congress took the initiative to consider the issues in discussions outside the Assembly to arrive at a consensus.

THE CONGRESS PARTY MEETING IN AUGUST 1949

The Congress Party in the Constituent Assembly met in August 1949 to iron out the differences between pro-Hindi and anti-Hindi viewpoints. Hindi in Devanagari script was ultimately to be the Official Language, according to the decision.

Since differences of opinion on both sides continued, now mostly with regard to the place of English (Arabic or International) and Devanagari numerals, but also in some measure with regard to the decision “Hindi Only” as the official language, a special Committee was formed, with members of the Drafting Committee as well as Abul Kalam Azad, G. B. Pant, P. D. Tandon, Balakrishna Sharma, Syoma Prasad Mookerjee and K. Santhanam with responsibility to draft an appropriate provision, based on the Congress Party consensus, for the consideration of the Constituent Assembly.

Let us read what Shiva Rao (1968) reports on the matter:

The Committee suggested that English would be the only official language for ten years; thereafter, if both Houses of Parliament decided by a two-third majority of the members present and voting, it could be extended for another five years. The Committee also suggested the adoption of international numerals. These suggestions were not accepted by the Party. The search for general agreement continued and the Drafting Committee made a further attempt to evolve such a formula. The proposals of the committee were again discussed by the Party but no agreement emerged. There was keen controversy on a number of issues, particularly the arrangements for the transition period. The question of numerals also evoked differences.

Towards the end of August 1949, Munshi and Gopaldaswami Ayyangar prepared detailed draft compromise provisions for inclusion in the Draft Constitution. In a letter to Chairman of the Drafting Committee on September 1, 1949, Ravi Shankar Shukla, the Premier of the Central Provinces and Berar, strongly advocated the replacement of English by Hindi as soon as possible.

A DECISION NOT TO DECIDE ON A PARTY BASIS

The Munshi-Ayyangar draft again came up before the Congress Party on September 2. After a heated discussion votes were taken on the issue whether or not the draft should be moved in the Constituent Assembly as an official proposal on behalf of the Drafting Committee. It was finally decided that the question would not be decided on a party basis, that the Munshi-Ayyangar draft would be moved by Ambedkar, Munshi, and Gopaldaswami in their personal capacities; and members would be free to move amendments and vote in the Assembly as they pleased.

MUNSHI – AYYANGAR DRAFT AS REVISED BY THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE

Draft by K. M. Munshi and N. Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar as revised by the Drafting Committee, August 24, 1949 was as follows:

Chapter I – Language of the Union

301 (A) (1) The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script and the form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals.

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in clause (1) of this article, for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union, for which it was being used at such commencement:

Provided that the President may, during the said period, by order authorize for any of the official purposes of the Union the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals in addition to the international form of Indian numerals.

(3) Notwithstanding anything contained in this article the Parliament may by law provide for the use of the English language after the said period of fifteen years for such purposes as may be specified in such law.

301 (B) (1) The President shall, at the expiration of five years from the commencement of this Constitution and thereafter at the expiration of ten years from such commencement, by order constitute a Commission which shall consist of a Chairman and such other members representing the different languages specified in Schedule VII – A as the President may appoint, and the order shall define the procedure to be followed by the Commission.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to –

- (a) the progressive use of the Hindi language for the official purposes of the Union;
- (b) restriction on the use of the English language for all or any of the official purposes of the Union;
- (c) the language to be used for all or any of the purposes mentioned in article 301-E of this Constitution;
- (d) form of numerals to be used for any or more specified purposes of the Union;
- (e) any other matter referred to the Commission by the President as regards the official language of the Union and the language of inter-State Communication and their use.

(3) In making their recommendations under clause (2) of this article, the Commission shall have due regard to the industrial, cultural and scientific advancement of India, and the just claims and the interests of the non-Hindi speaking areas in regard to public services.

(4) There shall be constituted a committee consisting of thirty members of whom twenty shall be members of the House of the People and ten shall be members of the Council of States chosen respectively by the members of the House of the People and the members of the Council of States in accordance with the system of proportional representations by means of the single transferable vote.

(5) It shall be the duty of the Committee to examine the recommendations of the commission constituted under this article and to report to the President their opinion thereon.

(6) Notwithstanding anything contained in article 301A of this Constitution, the President may after consideration of the report referred in clause (5) of this article issue directions in accordance with the whole or any part of the report.

Chapter II – Regional Languages

301-C. Subject to the provisions of article 301-D and 301-E of this Constitution, a State may by law adopt any of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any official purposes of that State.

Provided that until the Legislature of the State otherwise provides by law, the English language shall continue to be used for those official purposes within the State for which it was being used at the commencement of this Constitution.

The language for the time being authorized for use in the Union for official purposes shall be the official language for communication between one State and another State and between a State and the Union:

Provided that if two or more States agree that the Hindi language shall be the official language for communication between such States, that language may be used for such communication.

301-E. Where on a demand being made in that behalf the President is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desires the use of any language spoken by them to be recognized throughout that State or any part thereof for such purposes may specify.

Chapter III – Language of Supreme Court and High Courts, etc.

301-F. Notwithstanding anything contained in the foregoing provisions of this Part, until Parliament by law otherwise provides –

- (a) all proceedings in the Supreme Court and in every High Court,
(b) the authoritative texts -
- (i) of all Bills to be introduced or amendments thereto to be moved in either House of Parliament or in the House or in either House of the Legislature of a State,
 - (ii) of all Acts passed by Parliament or the Legislature of a State and of all Ordinances promulgated by the President or a Governor or a Ruler, as the case may be,
 - (iii) of all orders, rules, regulations and byelaws issued under this Constitution or under any law made by Parliament or the Legislature or a State shall be in the English language.

301-G. During the period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution no Bill or amendment making provision for the language to be used for any of the purposes mentioned in article 301-F of this Constitution shall be introduced or moved in either House of Parliament without the previous sanction of the President, and the President shall not give his sanction to the introduction of any such Bill or the moving of any such amendment except after he has taken into consideration the recommendations of the Commission constituted under article 301-B of this Constitution and the report of the Committee referred to in that article.

Chapter IV – Special Directive

301-H. Every person shall be entitled to submit a representation for the redress of any grievance to any officer or authority of the Union or a State in any of the languages used in the Union or in the States, as the case may be.

301-I. It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi and to develop the language so as to serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without intervening with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India, and drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.

Schedule VII- A

1. Hindi
2. Urdu
3. Punjabi
4. Kashmiri
5. Bengali
6. Assamese
7. Oriya
8. Telugu
9. Tamil

10. Malayalam
11. Canarese
12. Marathi
13. Gujarati
14. English

RAVI SHANKAR SHUKLA'S STATEMENT ON HINDI AND HIS OPPOSITION TO ENGLISH AND THE LISTING OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN THE CONSTITUTION

Ravi Shankar Shukla, Premier of the Central Provinces and Berar, in his letter dated September 1, 1949, wrote to the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, saying that

the use of international form of numerals in addition to but not in substitution of Devanagari form can be tolerated ... The real crux of the language problem is the approach to the question of progressively using Hindi in place of the English language. There are only two ways of approaching this problem. One is to devise ways and means to substitute as early as possible Hindi in place of English. The other is to delay the use of Hindi in place of English as far and as long as possible and to continue the use of English after fifteen years. ... The second is decidedly a wrong approach. If we intend really to substitute Hindi for English, we must take recourse to the first approach. ... If our Southern India friends wish to use the English language for fifteen years, one should have no quarrel with them. But let English not continue to be an imposition on the rest of India. I have a feeling that our Madras friends are playing into the hands of those who do not like Hindi to be the official language of the Union.

R. S. Shukla was also against having a separate schedule listing the languages. He said in his letter,

a schedule of languages in the Constitution is wholly unnecessary in view of the precarious conditions in the country. A Committee consisting of members representing so many languages can never solve the problem before us, it will delay and retard the progress and excuse me when I say that it is a reactionary provision intended to delay the introduction of Hindi as the official language of the Union.

RETENTION OF ENGLISH - A THREAT TO THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

It was easy for the Hindi-speaking Congressmen to play upon the dangers of disintegration lurking in the minds of people, caused by the partition of India, when it came to the recognition and prominent use of non-Hindi languages. Their major plank was to install Hindi in Devanagari script as the national language; they saw in the retention of English in the Union and the prominence given to non-Hindi languages as a threat to the pre-eminent position as *the* national language.

AN INDIVIDUAL RESOLUTION BY GOPALASWAMY AYYANGAR

On September 12, 1949, N. Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar moved a resolution in the Constituent Assembly containing the proposals earlier put before the Congress Party by the Drafting Committee, as an individual resolution.

Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar, while proposing the resolution, said:

... one thing we reached a fairly unanimous conclusion that we should select one of the languages in India as the common language of the whole of India, the language that should be used for the official purposes of the Union. In selecting this language various considerations were taken into account. The final decision as all honourable Members know, on that particular question is that we should adopt Hindi as the language for all official purposes of the Union under the new Constitution. That, of course, is an ultimate objective to be reached. ... That decision to substitute Hindi in the long run for the English language having been taken, we had to take also the subsidiary decisions which were involved in that one decision. Now the subsidiary decisions were that we could not afford to give up the English language at once. We had to keep the English language going for a number of years. Until Hindi could establish for itself a place, not merely because it is an Indian language, but because as a language it would be an efficient instrument for all that we have to say and do in the future and until Hindi established itself in the position in which English stands today for Union purposes. So we took the next decision, namely, that for a period of about fifteen years English should continue to be used for all the purposes for which it is being used today and will be used at the commencement of the Constitution ... Then, Sir, we had to consider the other aspects of the problem. We had to consider, for, instance, the question of the numerals ... Then we have to consider the question of the language of the States and we took a decision that, as far as possible a language spoken in the State should be recognized as the language used for official purposes in that State and that for inter-State communications and for communications between the State and the Centre the English language should continue to be used, provided that where between two States there was an agreement that inter-communication should be in Hindi language, that should be permitted.

We then proceeded to consider the question of the language that should be used in our Legislatures and the highest courts of justice in the land and we came to the conclusion after a great deal of deliberations and discuss that while the language of the Union, Hindi, may be used for debates, for discussions and so forth in the Central Legislature and where while the language of the State could be used for similar purposes in the State Legislature, it was necessary for us, if we are going to perpetuate the

existing satisfactory state of things as regards the text of our land and the interpretation of the text in the courts, that English should be the language in which legislation, whether in the form of Bills and Acts or of rules and orders and the interpretation of that text in the courts, that English should be the language in which legislation, whether in the form of Bills in the form of judgments by judges of the High Court – these should be in English for several years to come ... It is not because we want to keep the English language at all costs for these purposes. It is because the language which we can recognize for Union purposes and the languages which we can recognize for State purposes are not sufficiently developed, are not sufficiently precise for the purposes that I have mentioned, viz., laws and the interpretation of laws by courts of law ... Hindi ... requires a lot of enrichment in several directions, it requires modernization, it requires to be imbued with the capacity to absorb ideas, not merely ideas but styles and expressions and forms of speech from other languages. So we have put into this draft an article which makes it the duty of the State to promote the development of Hindi so that it may achieve all these enrichments and will in due course be sufficiently developed for replacing adequately the English language which we certainly contemplate should fade out of our officially recognized proceedings and activities in the course of time. Those, generally speaking, are the basis of this particular draft which I have moved ... The first that I wish to place before the House is that this draft is the result of a great deal of thought, a great deal - of discussion. It is also what has emerged – a compromise between opinions, which were not easily reconcilable. ... It is a result of a compromise in respect of which great sacrifices of opinion, of very greatly cherished views and interests, have been sacrificed for the purpose of achieving this draft in a form that will be acceptable to the full House ... Our basic policy according to the framers of this draft should be that the common language of India for Union purposes should be the Hindi language and the script should be the Devanagari script. It is also a part of this basic policy that the numerals to be used for all official Union purposes should be what have been described to be the All-India forms of international numerals. The authors of this draft contemplate that these items should be essential parts of the basic policy in this respect for practically all time...

CRUCIAL DATES AND DEBATES ON INDIAN LANGUAGES

The 12th through the 14th of September 1949 were the most crucial days for Indian languages. The Constituent Assembly took up the Draft provisions regarding language prepared by K.M. Munshi and Gopalaswami Ayyangar for discussion. As already pointed out, the draft provisions have been presented before the Constituent Assembly as provisions worked out by the above two eminent scholar0statesmen supported by the other members and Chairmen of the Drafting Committee, and not as proposals either of the Congress Party or of the Drafting Committee. A gentleman's compromise to be

considered with all seriousness and sobriety and to be voted upon by individual members as their own individual perceptions and inclinations led them. None was to be questioned as to his or her loyalty to India based only on the choice he/she made.

CAUTIONARY REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Before Gopaldaswami Ayyangar rose to make his speech presenting the draft provisions, already quoted above, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President, Constituent Assembly cautioned the members:

I know this is a subject which has been agitating the minds of Members for sometime and so I would make an appeal to the speakers who are going to take part in the debate. My appeal is not in favour of any particular proposition, but it is with regard to the nature of speeches, which Members may be making. Let us not forget that whatever decision is taken with regard to the question of language, it will have to be carried out by the country as a whole. There is no other item in the whole Constitution of the country, which will be required to be implemented from day to day, from hour to hour, I might even say from minute to minute in actual practice. Therefore Members will remember that it will not do to carry a point debate in this House the decision of the House should be agreeable to the country as a whole. Even if we succeed in getting a particular proposition passed by majority, if it does not meet with the approval of any considerable section of people in the country—either in the North or in the South, the implementation of the Constitution will become a most difficult problem. Therefore, when any member rises to speak on this language question I would request him most earnestly to remember that he should not let fall a single word or expression, which might hurt or cause offence. Whatever has to be said should be said in moderate language so that it might appeal to reason and there should be no appeal to feelings or passion in a matter like this.

SETH GOVIND DAS ON HIDDEN ATTEMPTS TO RETAIN ENGLISH

Seth Govind Das, among other things, said:

My only submission is that when they were ready to accept Devanagari script in its present form, it is plain that they should accept Nagari [Devanagari] numerals also, for numerals are an integral part of a script and are not something extrinsic to it. When they are in favour of accepting the Devanagari script they should at least permit us without any rancor, bitterness or anger, the right of remaining firm in our original views.

Now I take up the other points. The article moved by Shri Gopaldaswami lays down that Hindi in Devanagari script shall be the official language of India. But if you read the article carefully, you will find there is an attempt to keep the day, when Hindi will take the place of English, as far off as possible. This House seems divided into two groups on this issue. One accepts Hindi in Devanagari script to be the official language of the country but it wants to postpone the replacement of English by Hindi to the remotest possible date. The other group wants Hindi to replace English at the earliest possible moment. I would like to draw the attention of the honourable Members to the resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee—in this respect. The Working Committee wants that every attempt should be made completely to replace English by Hindi within the period of fifteen years so that English may have no place at all here after fifteen years. But Shri Gopaldaswami Aayangar has told us in his speech today that English may have to be retained for long, even after fifteen years. I must tell him that we do not agree to this. Our definite opinion is that if English is at all to go from the country it must go at the earliest possible moment. We are accepting an interim period of fifteen years during which English should be replaced by Hindi. But this does not mean that during this period English cannot at all be replaced by Hindi in any sphere...

Now the main question that concerns us is whether you are going to replace English within fifteen years or you require a still longer time. The Congress Working committee has already given its verdict on this issue...why should the provinces, that have already adopted Hindi and where Hindi is already in use in High Courts, be forced to use English? ... A new change has of late been leveled against the supporters of Hindi. We are accused of holding communal outlook in regard to language question. Even our great leaders have leveled this charge against us... We look at it, from a purely national point of view... To be frank, Sir, the supporters of Hindi have never been communal in outlook but the same cannot be said for the supporters of Urdu. They do have communal outlook. ... It is true, we have accepted our country to be a secular State; but we never thought that acceptance implied the acceptance of the continued existence of heterogeneous cultures. India is an ancient country with an ancient history. For thousands of years one and the same culture has all along been obtaining here. This tradition is still unbroken. It is in order to maintain this tradition that we want one language and one script for the whole country. We do not want it to be said that there are two cultures here.

SETH GOVIND DAS' POSITION ON REGIONAL LANGUAGES VIS-À-VIS HINDI

Seth Govind Das declared,

We have no hostility to any of the regional languages; we are well aware of the fact that the National Language can never flourish unless the regional languages are fully developed and enriched... Every State of the Union must use its own language in its schools and colleges, in its courts and legislatures. It is not my intention in saying so that the languages other than the state language, but spoken by substantial persons of the people of that states should not be given any recognition. But as has been laid down in the resolution of the Congress Working Committee, the language demanded should be recognized only when twenty percent of the people of the State want it to be recognized. But if one or two percent of the population makes a demand for the recognition of a particular language, the State cannot afford to satisfy the remand, for it will retard the development of the State language... We had, the people of India had, visualized a picture of free India and that picture will remain incomplete until the question of national language is resolved.

AN IMPASSIONED PLEA TO RETAIN ENGLISH IN THE INTEREST OF UNITY OF THE COUNTRY

Mr. T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar (Madras: General) said that:

After all where do we stand? We have got languages which are better cultivated and which have greater literature than Hindi in our areas. If we are going to accept Hindi, its not on account of the excellence of the language, it is not on account of its being the richest language, or on account of its being as it has been claimed for Sanskrit, the mother of other languages and things like that. It is not that at all.. It is merely on account of the existence of a larger number of people speaking Hindi, not even a majority of the population of the country, but only among the languages spoken in India Hindi claims probably the largest number of people, It is on that basis that they are claiming that Hindi should be accepted as the official language of the whole country. Well Sir, being practical we also do not claim that our languages which are better cultivated, which have got better literature, which are ancient, which have been there for millenniums, should be adopted...I want the Hindi speaking brethren sitting here to consider whether they are justified in making the claim for everything they want and putting us... coming from the South in the false position which we will occupy if we are going to accept all their claims...Sir, on account of the realities of the situation, as I said, we have accepted Hindi in Nagari script as the official language. I however said that you cannot use the word 'national language' because Hindi is no more national to us than English or any other language. We have got our own languages, which are national languages for which we have got the same love as the Hindi speaking people have got for their language. ...I may say that the South is feeling frustrated. If there is the feeling of having

obtained liberty, freedom and all that, there is very little of it felt in the South...”

ANOTHER NON-HINDI STALWART

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee said,

if it is claimed by anyone that by passing an article in the constitution of India, one language is going to be accepted by all, by a process of coercion, I say, Sir, that that will not be possible to achieve Unity in diversity is India’s key-note and must be achieved by a process of understanding and consent, and for that a proper atmosphere has to be created.”

JAWAHARLAL’S SUPPORT TO THE AMENDMENT PROPOSED BY AYYANGAR

Jawaharlal Nehru rose to support the amendment proposed by Mr. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar. He said, among other things,

Language is a most intimate theory. It is perhaps the most important thing which society has evolved, out of which other things have taken growth. ...It makes us aware of our selves. First, when, language is developed it makes us aware of our neighbour, it makes us aware of our society, it makes us aware of others societies also. It is a unifying factor and it is also a factor promoting disunity. It is an integrating factor and it is a disintegrating factor as between two languages, as between two countries...

GANDHI’S IDEAS ON LANGUAGE, PROPOUNDED BY JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru propounded the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi on language and listed the logic of Gandhi in the following manner:

Mahatma taught us that while English is a great language ... no nation can become great on the basis of a foreign language can never be the language of the people, for you will have two strata or more—those who live in thought and action of a foreign tongue and those who live in another world. So he taught us that we must do our work more and more in our language. ...Secondly, he laid stress on the fact that language should be more or less a language of the people, not a language of learned coterie...the last thing...was...that this language should represent the composite culture of India... I am a small man and it is rather presumptuous of me to say that I agree with him or do not agree with him, but for the last thirty years or so, in my own humble way, I stood by that creed in regard to language and it would be hard for me if this House

asked me to reject that thing by which I have stood nearly all my political life... Now, we stand on the threshold of many things and this resolution itself is the beginning of what might be termed a linguistic revolution in India a very big revolution of far-reaching effects...we took to English obviously because it was the conqueror's language, not so much because it was very important even then—we took it simply because we were dominated by the British here... However good, however important, English may be, we cannot tolerate that there should be an English-knowing elite and a large mass of our people not knowing English. Therefore we must have our own language. But English—whether you call it official or whatever you please, it does not matter whether you mention it in the legislation or not—but English must continue to be a most important language in India which large numbers of people learn and perhaps learn compulsorily... The fact remains that both from the point of view of convenience and from the point of view of utility, English is obviously the most important language for us and many of us know it. It is absurd for us to try to forget what we know or not take advantage of what we have learnt. But it will have to be inevitably a secondary language meant for a relatively restricted number of people...

...Is your approach going to be a democratic approach or what might be termed an authoritarian approach? I venture to put this question to the enthusiasts for Hindi, because in some of the speeches I have listened to here and elsewhere there is very much a tone of authoritarianism, very much a tone of Hindi-Speaking area being the centre of things in India, the centre of gravity, and others being just the fringes of India. (Italics and bold, ours.) That is not only an incorrect approach, but it is a dangerous approach. If you consider the question with wisdom, this approach will do more injury to the development of the Hindi language than the other approach. You just cannot force any language down the people or group who resist that. You cannot do it successfully...

INDIA IS MY NATION, I AM AN INDIAN, BUT MY LANGUAGE IS MARATHI

A beautiful statement was made by Shankarrao Deo from the great state of Maharashtra, who said:

As I have tried to understand Indian culture, Sanskritic, Indian religion and Indian Spiritual traditions, it is not uniformity but unity in diversity. It is vividhata that India stands for. That is our richness, that is the contribution that India can make to the world-culture and world progress. I would like to maintain the variety of cultures, the different languages, each without obstructing, hindering or killing the unity of the country. Therefore when people use the term, “national language,” my heart does not respond to it. I admit India is a nation and I am an Indian, but if you

will ask me, ‘what is your language?’ Sir, you will excuse me if I say, “My language is Marathi.” I am one of those who have been insisting that this language, which will replace English, should not be called the national language. If you mean by national language one language for the whole country, than I am against it. I must make it quite clear. India is a nation and I am an Indian, but my language is Marathi.

IN SUPPORT OF HINDUSTANI, A LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said, among other things,

Today you will decide that the national language of the Indian Union will be ‘Hindi’. You may decide that. There is nothing substantial in the name of ‘Hindi’. The real problem is the question of the characteristic of the language. We wanted to keep it in its real form by calling it ‘Hindustani’. Your majority did not agree to it. But it is still in the hands of our countrymen not to allow the shape of Hindi to be deformed and instead of making it an artificial language let it remain an easy and intelligible medium of instruction. Let us hope that the present atmosphere of narrow-mindedness, which is the residue of the past misfortune, will not last long and very soon such an environment will be created in which people freeing themselves from all sorts of sentiments would see the problem of language in its real and true perspective.

A CROWNING SUCCESS FOR THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Those were only some of the representative speeches made in the Constituent Assembly, (Quoted from *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. IX) when it considered the draft provisions on language, which were prepared and presented as a gentlemen’s consensus. The atmosphere was truly supercharged with emotion and yet, as desired by the Congress leadership, the Assembly adopted the provisions without insisting on division. Ultimately, thus, the evolution of a language policy for India acceptable to all the “warring” groups became yet another crowning success for the Indian National Congress.

ENSURING A PRE-EMINENT PLACE FOR HINDI

The Congress leadership allowed various linguistic groups to express and assert their views on the floor of the Assembly while at the same time it ensured a pre-eminent place for Hindi. In its efforts to ensure a pre-eminent place for Hindi, which was sanctioned by the policy adopted long ago by the Indian National Congress, the President of the Constituent Assembly played a crucial role and was of great help. His bias and preference for the use of Hindi both within the Constituent Assembly and beyond the life of the Constituent Assembly in the Republic of India could be documented easily.

Throughout the proceedings of the Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad expressed his helplessness when it came to the non-use of English by English-knowing members, an act

which was intended generally as an assertion of the preeminent place that should be accorded to Hindi. His attitude of helplessness was overtly related to his desire that all groups be treated on an equal footing (those who were for or against Hindi, those who were for English, and those who were for all Indian languages). But, in reality, it encouraged Hindi speakers to continue to speak in Hindi only. There were some Hindi-speaking members who did not possess an adequate knowledge of English to express themselves in Hindi. But, taking advantage of this, Hindi supporters persisted in speaking only in Hindi. Moreover, the President clearly expressed himself in favor of using an Indian language as the National Language, which was once again an approved policy of the Congress during the freedom struggle. In almost all his speeches, Dr. Rajendra Prasad did not specify any particular language as the National language; but there was no doubt at all about which language he was referring to as the likely choice for according the status of national language.

LOYALTY TO HINDI AS A TOKEN OF PATRIOTISM – CULTURAL IDENTITY VERSUS CONVENIENCE IN COMMUNICATION

Pro-Hindi members of the Assembly again and again resorted to display of language loyalties as a token of assertion of patriotism. Cultural identity (in preference over convenience in communication) was asserted by some Hindi and non-Hindi members, when they insisted upon speaking in their own languages in the Assembly. However, a majority of those who discussed the provisions of the Draft Constitution in the Constituent Assembly chose to adopt a stance in favour of convenience in communication rather than in favor of the assertion of cultural identity.

Practical politicians (and statesmen) such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad made it a point to use Hindi briefly prefacing their speeches. The linguistic complexity of India was brought to everybody's conscious knowledge by the debates in the Constituent Assembly through the speeches in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, etc., and through the responses to such speeches by non-Tamil, non-Kannada and non-Telugu members.

While the linguistic complexity of India was brought to light by such speeches, indulgence in such languages was never taken as a serious handicap, nor was it seen as detrimental to the progress of deliberations in the Constituent Assembly. Such speeches in languages, which were not understood by a majority of the members, were also received in a spirit of accommodation and humour, whereas speeches exclusively in Hindi by Hindi-speaking members were taken as an affront to the others.

There were, perhaps, two reasons for this. Firstly, such speeches in Hindi were more frequent and on substantive issues; secondly, such speeches, according to non-Hindi members, were persistently made to assert the assumed status of Hindi as the official language in India. It might also be noted that several senior leaders from the Hindi region, who had demonstrated their competence in English on many occasions in the past, delivered speeches in Hindi.

EXASPERATION OF NON-HINDI MEMBERS

The non-Hindi members of the Assembly felt that they were often at a loss, were unable to follow the proceedings and to contribute their best to the nation-building process going on in the Constituent Assembly when members from Hindi-speaking provinces and others persisted in using Hindi even when the latter were adept at using English. This had led to frustration and misgivings in non-Hindi members, whose case finally had to be presented heatedly and in a very strong condemnatory language by T. T. Krishnamachari. His forceful handling of the matter was inevitable; Congressmen from the South had faced a fierce anti-Hindi agitation, which threatened to affect the poll prospects of the Congress after independence; their own experience in the Assembly was none to happy.

All the same Congressmen from the South were until then a relatively more disciplined lot and were all along abiding by the decisions of the Congress leadership at the top. A behavior that would bring down the Congress rule in Tamilnadu in 1967, and from which it had not been possible for the Congress Party yet to recover. Even when they found themselves helpless and frustrated, they let their feelings be expressed not in a riotous manner, but in a forceful and disciplined manner through a seasoned Congress leader of some eminence and respect so that their feelings would receive utmost consideration.

THIS IS LANGUAGE IMPERIALISM! DECLARATION BY T.T.K.

All these were of no avail before the aggressive march of the Hindi zealots within the Constituent Assembly, who without any regard for the sentiments of non-Hindi members were bent upon using Hindi only within the Constituent Assembly. This had to be objected to in the strongest terms for the sake of “Southern friends” who could not follow and contribute to the proceedings in the Assembly. Hence, when T.T. Krishnamachari raised several points on the economic provisions in the Draft Constitution, he concluded his speech by giving a stern note of warning on “language imperialism”. He said:

“But, Sir, while I feel that a strong Centre is necessary, because I visualize the most important task before us in the implementing of the economic objectives, I am rather disinclined to pursue that idea to its logical end, because of what happened yesterday here...We found yesterday the display of a certain amount of intolerance of a certain amount of fanaticism, of a certain amount of thoughtlessness on the part of the people whom I always regarded as being highly intellectual, highly developed in the matter of aesthetic sensibilities and civilization. I refer, Sir, to a type of imperialism that seems to threaten us today which perhaps driven to its logical end will bring into being a type of totalitarianism and reaction on the rest of the units of the Union of India to be. Sir, I refer to this question of language imperialism. There are various forms of imperialism and language imperialism is one of the most powerful methods of propagating the imperialistic idea. It is no doubt true that a large portion of this country do speak a particular language. If I were perhaps a Hindi Speaking person, I would certainly visualize the days

when the Hindi-Speaking areas would be a powerful area, well-knit with United Provinces, the northern portion, of C.P., portions of Bihar, Matsya Union, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh, all together reproducing, Sir, the greatness of the Asokan Empire, the Empire of Vikra-maditya and that of Harshavarhana. It is a thing which just tickles your fancy and if you happen to be a native of the area, your imagination more or less takes you to the glories of the past which ones seeks to bring into being. But what about the other areas? What about the level of education that we have now attained in those areas and the ideas of freedom that have grown with it? Believe me, Sir, that the hatred that we in South India had for the English language has now gone. We disliked the English language in the past. I disliked it because I was forced to learn Shakespeare and Milton, for which I had no taste at all, but today it is longer a matter of duress. But if we are going to be compelled to learn Hindi in order to be a member of the Central Assembly in order to speak out the grievances of my people, well, I would perhaps not be able to do it at my age, and perhaps I will not be willing to do it because of the amount of constraint that you put on me. I shall deal with this particular subject later on at the appropriate time but I do feel, Sir, that my honourable friends of the U.P, and C.P. and portions of Bihar will take note of the fact that while they are enthusiastic for their own language, and while they want the English language to be wiped out of this country, they must also recognize that there are a number of people all over India who do not understand the Hindi language. Sir, my honourable friend yesterday resorted to a simile, to strengthen his case. I am accustomed to hear similes. I have a friend who is extraordinarily good in the similes and parables, who is somewhere near here now. But what about the simile used by my friend? My honourable friend said, 'Are there not a number of people who do not understand English, who trust the people who speak the language?' Yes, there are a number of people in this House and elsewhere who do not understand English. It may be my neighbour from Madras does not understand English and he is prepared to trust me, but that does not mean that a person in South India would be content to trust somebody in U. P., however good Pandit Balkrishna Sharma may be and whatever assurance I may carry forth from Delhi to the South. I know he is an ideal legislator, has an aesthetic soul, is a poet and all that sort of thing – it does not mean that merely because in one particular area there are people who cannot understand the language, they should be prepared to trust those people, who understand it and who are a thousand miles away to carry on the administration of this House, who have been merely gaping unintelligently because we could not understand what is being said? It may be, as my honourable friend, Mr. Satyanarayana, who propagates Hindi in South India without effect told me, that there was not much substance in the Hindi speeches that have been made; perhaps it is so, but I would like to know what has been said; I would like to counter the points made. I felt completely helpless in a situation where I am bound to have brought to bear all my faculties to

understand what has been said for the benefit of the future of my country, for the benefit of the future of my people. This kind of intolerance makes us fear that the strong Centre which we need, a strong Centre which is necessary will also mean the enslavement of people who do not speak the language of the legislature, the language of the Centre. I would, Sir, convey a warning on behalf of the people of the South for the reason that there are already elements in South India who want separation and it is up to us to tax the maximum strength we have to keeping those elements down, and my honourable friends in U.P. do not help us in anyway by flogging their idea 'Hindi Imperialism' to the maximum extend possible. Sir, it is up to my friends in U.P to have a whole-India; it is up to them to have a Hindi-India. The choice if theirs and they can incorporate it in this Constitution and if we are left out, well, we will only curse our luck and hope for better times to come." (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol VIII pp 234-).

WHO ARE ALL ANTI-NATIONAL?

Most of the Constituent Assembly members from Hindi-speaking provinces failed to comprehend the opposition to Hindi from members of the Madras Presidency. Since the anti-Hindi agitation in the Southern State was spearheaded by an anti-Congress political organization, namely the Justice Party, the agitation was viewed as being against Congress and hence anti-national. The cultural basis of antagonism towards the Hindi language could not be comprehended by Hindi-speaking members from the provinces where the anti-Urdu and anti-English movements had been patriotic endeavors for more than a hundred years. Any position against the status of Hindi as *the* national language was considered to be anti-national. The leaders, who took a mid-course, compromising stance which emphasized the preeminence of Hindi, were willing to continue the use of English for a stipulated period but viewed the Hindi – non-Hindi controversy only in terms of ensuring evenly spread-out, equal job opportunities for non-Hindi people.

SANSKRIT-BASED VISION OF MUNSHI, AYYAR AND AYYANGAR – IS LANGUAGE PROBLEM ONLY A PROBLEM OF ENSURING JOBS FOR THE NON-HINDI PEOPLE?

Leaders such as K.M. Munshi, Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyar, and Gopalaswamy Ayyangar were men of great erudition and foresight, but they represented a class of people whose vision of India generally flowed from the oneness and supremacy of Sanskrit-based culture; their thinking acknowledged the existence of regional cultures but it would always give precedence to the standardized Sanskrit ethos. With the Sanskrit ethos available for every one who wished to seek it, and being ever considered the most ideal and prestigious, job-seeking communities and their representatives in the Constituent Assembly could view the linguistic problem mostly as an issue of ensuring a fair opportunity for jobs for the non-Hindi peoples of India. That there could be sub-nationalities with linguistic and political aspirations of their own was recognized and

even feared, but the provision for making a single Indian language as the official language was considered by these men of compromise as essential for nation building.

WORKING OUT A COMPROMISE

Also it should be noted that, with passion running high, with the Congress Party committing itself already in favour of Hindustani as the national language of all Free India, with the leadership at the top favourably inclined to implement the earlier Congress resolutions relating to official language, and with the assertive stand of the Hindi-Speaking members, it became impossible to do anything other than working out a compromise which would give preeminence to Hindi while retaining English for a specific period.

The clause-by-clause consideration of the Draft Constitution, taken by the Constituent Assembly on November 15th, 1948, was concluded October 17th, 1949. The Draft Constitution, with the amendments adopted by the Assembly, was then referred again to the Drafting Committee with instructions to carry out such renumbering of the articles, clauses and sub-clauses, revision of punctuation and review and completion of the marginal notes as might be necessary, and to recommend such formal or consequential or necessary amendments to the Constitution as might be required.

The Draft Constitution as revised by the Drafting Committee contained 395 articles and eight schedules and was submitted to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Constituent Assembly of India, on November 3rd, 1949. The Drafting Committee consisted of B.R. Ambedkar (Chairman), N.Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, A. Krishnaswamy Ayyar, K.M. Munshi, Sayid Mohd. Saadulla, and T.T. Krishnamachari. In this Draft, where words were substituted or where new words were inserted, they were italicized, and where words were omitted it was indicated with asterisks. Apart from additions, deletions, and amendments incorporated in the revised Draft, the Drafting Committee gave notice of some further amendments. Other members also gave notice of amendments on November 14th, 15th, and 16th, and these were put to vote on November 16th, 1949.

THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION AS REVISED BY THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE

The Draft constitution as revised by the Drafting Committee and submitted to the President of the Assembly on November 3rd, 1949, deleted the English language from the Schedule of Languages in the previous Draft and inserted in its place Sanskrit. Thus the second reading of the Schedule of Languages was as follows:

Eighth Schedule

(Articles 344 and 351)

Languages

1. Assamese
2. Bengali
3. Gujarati
4. Hindi
5. Kannada
6. Kashmiri
7. Malayalam
8. Marathi
9. Oriya
10. Punjabi
11. Sanskrit
12. Tamil
13. Telugu
14. Urdu

THE FINAL READING AND ADOPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitutional Assembly took up the third reading of the Constitution on November 17th, 1949, on a motion by Dr. Ambedkar “that the Constitution as settled by the Assembly be passed.” The discussion on the motion concluded on November 26th and the motion was put to vote and adopted amidst prolonged cheers.

On that date, and speaking in Hindustani, President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, said,

The method, which the Constituent Assembly adopted in connection with the Constitution was first to lay down its terms of reference and as it ere in the form of an objectives resolution which was moved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in an inspiring speech and which constitutes now the Preamble to our Constitution. It then proceeded to appoint a number of committees to deal with different aspects of the constitutional problems... Several of these had as their Chairman either... Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru or Sardar Patel to whom thus goes the credit for the fundamentals of our Constitution. ... Not only the Members of the Drafting Committee who were giving their close attention to the Constitution, but other Members were vigilant and scrutinizing the Draft in all its details. No wonder, that we had to consider not only each article in the Draft, but practically every sentence and sometimes every word in every article... One of the problems, which the Constituent Assembly took considerable time in solving relates to the language for official purposes of the country. There is a natural desire that we should have our own language, and in spite of the difficulties on account of the multiplicity of languages prevalent in the country, we have been able to adopt Hindi, which is the language that is understood by the largest number of people in the country, as our official language. I look upon this as a decision of very great importance when we consider that in a small country like Switzerland they have no less than three official languages and in South Africa two official languages. It shows a spirit of accommodation and a determination to organize the country as one nation that those whose language is not Hindi have voluntarily accepted it as the official language [Cheers]. There is no question of imposition now. English during the period of British rule and Persian during the period of the Muslim empire were court and official languages. Although people have studied them and have acquired proficiency in them, nobody can claim that they were voluntarily adopted by the people of the country at large. Now for the first time in our history, we have accepted one language which will be the language to be used all over the country for all official purposes, and let me hope that it will develop into a national language in which all will feel equal pride while each area will be not only free, but also encouraged to develop its own peculiar language in which its culture and its traditions are enshrined. The use of English during the period of transition was considered inevitable for

practical reasons and no one need be despondent over this decision. Which has been dictated purely by practical considerations. It is the duty of the country as a whole now and especially of those whose language is Hindi to so shape and develop it as to make it the language in which the composite culture of India can find its expression adequately and nobly. ...There are only two regrets, which I must share with the honourable members. I would have liked to have some qualifications laid down for members of the legislatures. ...The other regret is that we have not been able to draw up our first Constitution of a free Bharat in an Indian language. The difficulties in both the cases were practical and proved insurmountable... After all, a Constitution like a machine is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them. There is a fissiparous tendency arising out of the various elements in our life. We have communal differences, caste differences, language differences, provincial differences and so forth. It requires men of strong character, men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the interests of the country at large for the sake of smaller groups and areas and who will rise over the prejudices which are born of these differences. We can only hope that the country will throw up such men in abundance.

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