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INDIA'S LANGUAGE CRISIS : NAVIGATING MULTI-LINGUALISM IN A MODERN NATION

Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in shaping individual and group identities, it is a fundamental tool for communication. Each nation have their national language but India is a multilingual country therefore it has not any national language. According to 2011 census , India has 22 official languages, and over 19,500 dialects are spoken across the country. While linguistic diversity can be seen as a sign of India's culture richness, it also poses some challenges for the country. Some non-states against Hindi since the pre –independence because they think that their regional language will be lost. In other hand, English language is taught in all states , so Can we not lose regional languages because of English? One of the biggest problem with linguistic diversity in India is the lack of a common language. Hindi is a Official language of the union under Article 343 of constitution, many states have their official languages, which lead communication barriers between people from other states. In this article, discussed the language issue before independence to currently issue. It also discussed about that what is the three language policy? This article highlights the need for effective language policies that promote linguistic diversity, bridge communication gaps, and ensure equal participation in society. And what is the political impact of language issue? India should have a common language for job and easily travelling every part of India.

Keywords- Linguistic diversity, Official Language, eighth schedule, National Education Policy, south states, Three Language Formula.

1.Introduction:- India is one of the world's most linguistically diverse countries and some estimates say thousands of languages are spoken here. The language issue in India has been a diverse and challenging issue. The language issue is a sensitive and complex matter, and the policies and comprise make during that period aimed to strike a balance between promoting linguistic diversity and fostering national unity. Linguistic diversity posed challenges for national consolidation with the debate over the union's official language state's linguistic reorganisation.

2. What are the constitutional provisions of language:- Part XVII of the Indian constitution deals with the official languages in Article 343 to 351. These provisions cover Language of the Union, Regional languages, Languages of judicial and texts of laws, and special directive.

Official language- The Eighth schedule to the constitution consists of the following 22 languages-Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkari, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, of Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili, and Dogri.

It can be noted that there is no fixed criteria for any language to be considered for inclusion in the Eighth schedule. Hindi was adopted as the Official language of Union by the constituent Assembly of India on 14th September 1949 and with the adoption of the Indian constitution on 26 January, 1950, Hindi became the Official language of the Union.

Article 343 ; The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals. This article also states that English will continue to be used as an official language for 15 years from the commencement of constitution. However, the President may authorize the use of Hindi language in addition to the English language for any of the official purposes of the Union.

Article 344; Provides for the constitution of a commission by the President on expiration of five years from the commission of the constitution.

Regional languages-

Article 345; Provides that a state may by adopt any one or more languages in use the state or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that state.

Article 346; It is about the official language for communication between the states and between the states and Union. The article states that the "authorised" language will be used. However, if two or more states agree that their communication shall be in Hindi, then Hindi may be used.

Article 347; President can direct any language that shall also be officially recognized throughout that State or any part of the state.

Language of the Judiciary-

Article 348(1) Until Parliament by law provides English should be used in the following areas all proceeding in the Supreme Court and in every High Court, the authoritative texts of all bills and ordinances shall be in English language.

Article 348(2) provides further that notwithstanding the provisions of Article 348(1a), the Governor of state may, with the previous consent of President, authorise the use of Hindi or any other language used for any official purpose, in proceeding in the High Court.

Special Directives-

Article 350 Language to be used in representations for redress of grievances.

Article 350A facilities for the instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage.

Article 350B provides for the establishment of a special officer for linguistic minorities. The officer shall be appointed by the President and shall investigate all matters relating to the safeguards for linguistic minorities, reporting directing to the President.

Article 351 gives power to the Union government to issue a directive for the development of the Hindi language.

3. Background of language Issues :-

The issue of language in India is not a new one; even before independence, there were protests and debates regarding language issue in country. India is a home to a vast array of languages, with several spoken in different regions, leading to ongoing discussions and protests related to language matters in various states.

Pre-Independence language issue-

During the 1920's Gandhi ji emphasized that English is a language of international commerce, a language of diplomacy, a language of literary treasure, and a language that gives us an introduce to Western and culture.

The other candidate for the status of official or link language, Hindi or Hindustani had already played this role during the natinalist struggle, particularly during the mass mobilization phase. Because Hindi is the most widely spoken and understood language in the country, it was accepted by the leaders from non-Hindi speaking regions. Some of the Hindi's most ardent supporters included Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhi ji, C. Rajagopalachari, Subhash Bose and Sardar Patel.

The Congress had substituted Hindi and the provincial languages for English in its sessions and political work ." The proceedings of the Congress shall be conducted as far as possible in Hindustani," congress amended its constitution in 1925. If the speaker is unable to communicate in Hindustani, English or any other provincial language may be used.

The Nehru report , which reflected a national consensus, stated in 1928 that Hindustani , which could be written in Devanagari or Urdu script ,would be the common language of India, but that English would be used for a while. It's interesting to note that , with the exception of replacing Hindustani with Hindi , the constitutional of free India eventually adopted this position.

After 1942, Gandhi ji emphasized Hindustani, a fusion of Hindi and Urdu, as the unifyin languages. Constitutional Assembly has disagreed on declaring Hindi as the national language. But finally, it was decide that the constitution will speak of 'Official language'.

Anti-Hindi movement of Tamilnadu- In 1937 , newly elected Congress government headed by Rajaji, issued a Government order making Hindi complusory in state government schools. Periyar EV Ramasamy's Self respect Movement and the justice party protested the move , and led agitation against it. Picketing ,processions and fiery speeches marked the protest that spread across the state. More than 1,100 people, including Periyar and Annadurai was arrested. Two of those died due to illness. This inflamed the agitation further. In October 1939, the congress government resigned , protesting India,sinvolvement in the second world war. In February 1940, Governor Erskine issued a oress release withdrawing compulsory Hindi in schools. This three year protest was the first anti-Hindi protest imposition agitation in the state.

Post Independance language issue-

After India's Independence ,the adoption of an official language for the republic was a debated issue during the framing of Indian Constitution. Succeeding an divisive debate , the Constitution adopted the Munshi-Ayyangar formula, making Hindi in Devanagari script the official language with a 15 years transition period. English would continue to be used for all official purposes for the next 15 years , to enable a smooth transition for non Hindi speaking states. As the 15 year period specified in **Article 344** of Indian Costitution came closer , the imposition of Hindi was constested in many non-Hindi states, especially in the Southern state of Tamilnadu. Violent protests broke out in Southern India leading the P.M. Nehru , to introduce the '**Official Language Act,1963**' , which extended the use of the English beyond the transition period along with Hindi as the Official language of the union of India.

Why protest started again in 1965- After the death of Nehru ji in 1964, Tamils were apprehensive that his assurances of continuation of English as an Official language would not be kept. It was further strenghthened when the state government under Congress' M Bhaktavatsalam introduced the Three- language Formula in Madras legislative Assembly. Anti-Hindi imposition protests spread across the state, with college students at the forefront. Chinnasamy of Tiruchi was the first person to immolate himself against imposition of Hindi. This led to spate of

self-immolations against imposition of Hindi. Anna announced that January 26, 1965 will be observed as a day of mourning. Finally, the P.M. Lal Bahadur Shastri backed down and made a radio broadcast on February 11, 1965 promising to Nehru's assurances. The Official Language Act, 1963 was amended in 1967. This act provided a bilingual solution for Official communication between the Centre and states (English-Hindi). It also recognized regional languages in provincial administration and public service examinations, acknowledging the diverse linguistic landscape of India.

4. Why language issue currently arising? :-

The concept of three language formula in National Education Policy, 2020 was first presented in **NEP 1968**. This policy advocated making Hindi a compulsory language throughout the country. Under this Hindi speaking states were required to teach Hindi, English and a modern Indian language (preferably a South Indian language). Non-Hindi speaking states were expected to teach the local regional language, Hindi & English. In context, **NEP 2020** does not technically impose any specific language on any state, providing more flexibility.

- Tamil Nadu Govt. considers the three language formula an attempt to impose Hindi. It argues that in practice the implementation of three language formula will actually promote Hindi because resources for additional language teachers and teaching materials are limited.
- Language dispute started between Karnataka and Maharashtra, when in Belagavi a group of people allegedly intercepted the KSRTC bus and beat up its conductor and driver for not speaking to a passenger in Marathi.
- Kerala has always encouraged a three-language formula, but it is against the imposition of Hindi, state Higher Education Minister said amid a row between the central and Tamil Nadu over the policy.
- In January, 2025 a post saying Bengaluru is closed to people from North India and neighbouring states who don't want to learn Kannada has sparked a heated debate, reigniting the Kannada language controversy on social media.

Recently, another controversy stirred up online after a video from the city gained traction on social media. The clip, shared on 'X' showed a digital board displaying the message "Hindi is the official language." I

5. Language issue in judicial System;-

In January, 2025 the Gujarat High Court has asked a journalist facing contempt of court proceedings to speak only English as that was the language in the higher judiciary.

Reasons for using English-

-Cases from all over the country come the Supreme court., judges and lawyers of the Supreme court also come from the all parts of India.

- Judges can documents hardly be expected to read and hear arguments in languages are not familiar. Without the use of English' it would be impossible to discharge their duty.all judgements of Supreme court are delivered in English.

- Though' in 2019, the Court introduced an initiative to translate its judgements into regional languages, it is rather a tall order given the sheer volumes of judgements which the court delivers.

- The Kerala High Court dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed seeking direction to the respondents to provide nomenclature in the English language for the Acts (The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, BNS,2023, and The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023). The court held that English is a language recognized under the Constitution. Under Article 351 of the Constitution , directives are issued for the development of Hindi language as a medium of expression for all the elements of composite culture of India. " Therefore, nothing prevents Parliament from using Hindi words as the title of an enactment. The mandate under the constitution is to prefer English as the authoritative text to ensure uniformity throughout the country, not to denounce Hindi in any form with reference to the title of an enactment." The title of an enactment cannot be understood as an authoritative text under **Article 348**.

6. Social and Political Impact of language issue in India:-

As we know that the India is a diverse country having many variations in language.Indian societies have many culture and there cultures represented by language and communication so they are trying to prior their language to spread their culture and values.

- In today, context issue of language arised because many states having different regional languages and everyone wants to protect and spread their language and thinks if they will use other language (HINDI) their culture functions will not transfer to next generations and tend to lose their language with culture.
- Pre-Independence period many non-Hindi states leader accept the Hindi Language but they also love your regional language. Gujrat and pujab states have been no major languages disputes and we can see Punjabi and Gujrati language popular in all India.
- Political parties often leverage language to mobilize support among special linguistic groups. TamilNadu has governed by DMK party since 1967. On the recent issue of language, the opposition party leaders said that due to the election in Tamilnadu next year, DMK party trying to attract votes by raising the issue of imposing Hindi language.

7. Conclusion:-

India is a linguistically diverse country, with hundreds of languages spoken across its vast expanse. This diversity has led to both unity and tension, affecting social cohesive and political landscapes. Protest regarding language have been going on in India since pre-independence. With independence came the question of choosing a 'National' language. The idea of making Hindi the national language faced strong opposition from non-Hindi speaking regions. The provisions for language in Indian constitution is given in Article 343 to Article 351.

India's languages reflect its diverse and pluristic society, where different religions, castes and classes coexist and interact. Multilingualism can also improve social and emotional skills, such as empathy, perspective-taking, and intercultural competence. Currently, ongoing language issue is right to the perspective for Tamilnadu's people because they thought that their regional language will become extinct such as Santhali, Maithili etc. on the other hand, If those who speak only regional languages might find it difficult to access national-level opportunities or migrate for employment. Therefore it's right to promote Hindi because it's the most spoken language in India as mentioned in the Constitution. But the controversy against Hindi is ongoing then How can prevent this , What steps should taken by the government? We all know, that no one has benefited from the protests, Central and State govt. should be solving this issue through the discussion.

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