

Hindi imposition and its discontents

November 5, 2022

Manifest Pedagogy:

The reported recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee on Official Language to use Hindi as the medium of instruction in Central institutions of higher education in Hindi-speaking States and regional languages in other States has once again ignited a controversy over an attempt to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking people. Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have voiced their concerns over the recommendation. Language is a very sensitive matter and it must be handled carefully. Focus must be on pro-active adoption of a language rather than forceful imposition.

In News: The 11th volume of the Report of the Official Language Committee headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, which was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu last month, has triggered angry reactions.

Placing it in the Syllabus: Society

Static Dimensions

- Background
- About language panel

Current Dimensions

- Recommendations of the language committee
- Are these recommendations uniform across the country
- Importance of preserving linguistic diversity in India
- Criticism of the proposals

Content

Background

- The origin of the linguistic row goes back to the debate on official languages.
- In the Constituent Assembly, Hindi was voted as the official language by a single vote. However, it added that English would continue to be used as an associate official language for 15 years.
- The Official Languages Act came into effect on the expiry of this **15-year period in 1965**. This was the background in which the anti-Hindi agitation took place.
- However, as early as in 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru had given an assurance in Parliament that English would continue to be in use as long as non-Hindi speaking people wanted it.

About language panel

- The Committee of Parliament on Official Language was set up in 1976 under **Section 4 of The Official Languages Act, 1963**.
- Section 4 of the Act says “there shall be constituted a Committee on Official language, on a resolution to that effect being moved in either House of Parliament with the previous sanction of the President and passed by both Houses”.
- The Committee is chaired by the **Union Home Minister**, and has, in accordance with the provisions of the 1963 Act, **30 members – 20 MPs from Lok Sabha and 10 MPs from Rajya Sabha**. T
- The job of the Committee is to review the progress made in the use of Hindi for official purposes, and to make recommendations to increase the use of Hindi in official communications.
- The Committee of Parliament on Official Language constituted by the Home Ministry submits its report to the President.

Recommendations of the Language committee

- The language used for communication in the administration should be Hindi, and efforts should be made to teach the curriculum in Hindi, but the latter is not mandatory.
- High Courts in other states, where proceedings are recorded in English or a regional language can make available translations in Hindi, because verdicts of High Court of other states are often cited in judgments.
- The panel wants state governments to warn officials that their reluctance to use Hindi would reflect in their Annual Performance Assessment Report (APAR).
- Communication, which includes letters and emails, question papers for recruitment exams, events organised by the government and its departments, will have to be in Hindi.
- There are specific proposals to make the language in official letters and invitations simpler.
- The “crux” of the recommendations is that “there should be a deliberate attempt to reduce the usage of the English language in official communication and to increase the usage of Hindi”.
- Knowledge of Hindi would be compulsory in a number of government jobs.
- English, as a medium of instruction in all technical and non-technical institutions, will be permitted only where it is absolutely essential, as the idea is to replace the language gradually with Hindi in those institutions.
- The removal of English as one of the languages in examinations held for recruitment to the Central services. It has stated that the requisite knowledge of Hindi among candidates should also be ensured.

Are these recommendations uniform across the country

- States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala are exempt as per The Official Languages Act, 1963 and the Rules and

Regulations (of the Act), 1976. The law is implemented only in 'A' category states, in which the official language is Hindi.

- According to the Rules, **region 'A'** includes the states of Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, and the Union Territories of Delhi and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
 - **Region 'B'** includes Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Punjab, and the Union Territories of Chandigarh, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
 - Other states, where the use of Hindi is less than 65 per cent, are listed under **region 'C'**.
- The Committee has suggested that efforts should be made to use Hindi "100 percent" in the 'A' states.
 - The medium of instruction in IITs, central universities, and Kendriya Vidyalayas in the 'A' states should be Hindi, while the regional language should be used in other states, the Committee is learnt to have recommended.
- The use of Hindi in Ministries like Defence and Home are 100 per cent but the Education Ministry has not yet come to that level.
 - The Committee had certain parameters to assess the usage of language and it has found that in many central universities including Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, BHU, and AMU, the usage is just 25-35 per cent when it should have been 100 percent.

Importance of preserving linguistic diversity in India

- **Cultural Identity:** For individuals, language is constitutive of cultural identity. Any destruction to language impacts the identity of individuals leading to identity crisis. This impacts their ability to grow and develop as an individual.

- **Cultural Diversity:** Diversity in languages reflects and enhances cultural diversity. This in turn enriches the world. Unwritten languages rich in oral traditions, stories, songs, poetry, and ritual passed down through the generations constitute cultural diversity of a nation.
- **Human rights:** Since language is central to identity, one's freedom to use one's language is seen as inherent in the dignity of the human person.
- **A glimpse of our past:** Languages provide a glimpse of our history. Once a language is lost it is a loss of history and culture associated with that language.
- **Cognitive abilities:** Research has shown a strong correlation between improved cognitive abilities in children when they are taught in their mother tongue in primary school.

Criticism of the proposals

- Can lead to protests in various parts of the country if the Centre continued to impose Hindi on the state.
- Punishment of reluctance to use Hindi- Serious view of officers and other employees in the central government who do not use Hindi in Hindi-speaking states.
 - Use of Hindi language would affect their Annual Performance Assessment Report (APAR).
- Usage in official communication:
 - Communication, which includes letters and emails, question papers for recruitment exams, events organised by the government and its departments, will have to be in Hindi.
- Implicit Compulsory: Knowledge of Hindi would be compulsory in a number of government jobs.
- **Increasing Regionalism and Parochialism:** The people of different linguistic groups who are concentrated in a state seem to think only in terms of the interests of their own States. This undermines consideration of

national issues and causes parochial feelings.

- **Formation of Regional Political Parties:** Linguism has resulted in regionalism which has ultimately led to the formation of regional political parties in some states.
- **Persecution of the Linguistic Minorities:** The State Reorganisation Commission had provided for safeguard of linguistic minorities in States. But in reality the linguistic minorities have been harassed in different States.
- **Erosion of National Feeling:** The national feeling is eroded due to linguistic and regional loyalties. The erosion of national feeling threatens the sovereignty of the country.

Wayforward

- Equal treatment to all the languages specified under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Question papers for competitive examinations should be prepared in all the languages.
- Keep open the avenues of progress in terms of education and employment equal to speakers of all languages.
- Language is a sensitive matter. There is a need to develop consensus rather than imposition from the top.
- Zonal Councils and Interstate Council can be a great platform to discuss this sensitive issue.
- Government should be sensitive towards the people's aspirations. Any attempt of forceful imposition of any one language on masses should be refrained.
 - Rather efforts should be made to preserve and protect the languages under threat of extinction.
 - For ex: Advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence can be used to translate and digitise ancient regional texts.
- Programmes like 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' are a step in the right direction to promote unity in diversity.
- The three-language formula envisaged by Kothari

Commission should be implemented in such a way that the choice of language(s) must be left with the citizens and not the Government.

Mould your thoughts

Q.Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru gave an assurance that 'English will continue to be one of the official languages as long as the non-Hindi speaking people want. Critically analyse in light of recent recommendations made official language committee for promotion of Hindi language (250 words)

Approach to the answer.

- Introduction about the language issue
- Background
- About official language committee
- Recommendations of the committee
- Issues with the recommendations
- Suggestions
- Wayforward and conclusion