

Hindi to unite India?

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Manifest pedagogy: The issue of National language has many dimensions to it, hence it can be asked in different disciplines namely Indian Society, Post independent India and Indian Polity or even ethics (Constitutional Morality of Federalism and NATIONAL language). Hence the aspirant should prepare all the aspects.

In news: Union Home Minister who is also in charge of the Department of Official Language, asserted that “Hindi could work to unite the country” on the occasion of Hindi Diwas.

Placing it in syllabus: Language issue in India

Static dimensions:

- Debate on official language at the time of independence
- Hindi language movement and countermovement in south
- Provisions of Constitution on languages
- Official Language Act, 1963 and its amendment of 1971

Current dimensions: Consequences of recent language issue if implemented and solutions

Content: Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement that Hindi can unite the country has once again evoked sharp disapproval from political parties, especially in south India.

Debate at the time of independence:

Post independence, the debate over declaring national language started. Hindi speaking states favoured for Hindi to be declared as the national language. Great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar too favoured Hindi.

However non-Hindi speaking states, especially from South

showed a sharp opposition. Another interesting factor that motivated the anti-Hindi argument was the seeming lack of prestige in the Hindi language. Though Hindi literature had grown, it was nowhere as ancient as Kannada, Tamil or Telugu.

In 1948, when the **Linguistic Provinces Commission** presented its report to the constituent assembly, it concluded that “formation of provinces on linguistic considerations” is not in the larger interests of the Indian nation. The need of the hour was to find a way to invest in unity, and to create a framework that would bring together people of all parts of the country together.

After three years of debate, the assembly arrived at a compromise at the end of **1949** by the **Munshi-Ayyangar formula**. This formula **did not provide for a national language**. It proposed that Hindi in Devanagari script would be the “official language of the Union” and that English would continue to be used for all official purposes for fifteen years from the date of the Constitution, which could be extended by Parliament. All the groups accepted the proposal.

The Constitution, did not declare Hindi as the national language and rather accorded Hindi the status of official language along with English (Article 343). Official Languages Act, 1963 was passed and now Hindi is one of the 22 scheduled languages contained in the eighth schedule of the constitution.

Hindi language movement and countermovement in south:

Post independence, the adoption of an official language for the Indian Republic was a highly debated issue during the framing of the Indian Constitution. The new Constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950.

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. Efforts by the Indian Government to make Hindi the sole official language after 1965 were not acceptable to many non-Hindi Indian states, who wanted the continued use of English.

The **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)**, a descendant of Dravidar Kazhagam, led the opposition to Hindi. To allay their fears, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru enacted the **Official Languages Act in 1963** to ensure the continuing use of English beyond 1965.

As the day (26 January 1965) of switching over to Hindi as the sole official language approached, the anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in Madras State with increased support from college students. Riots broke out all over Madras State marked by acts of violence, looting, police firing and lathi charges.

To calm the situation, the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri gave assurances that English would continue to be used as the official language as long as the non-Hindi speaking states wanted. The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as official languages.

Now the **Eighth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution lists **22 languages**, which have been referred to as scheduled languages and given recognition, status and official encouragement.

Provisions of Constitution on languages:

Article 343: The **official language of the Union shall be Hindi** in Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals.

Article 344: The **President** shall, after the expiration of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, by order **constitute a Commission** which shall make recommendations to the President regarding

- the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes of the Union;
- restrictions on the use of the English language for all or any of the official purposes of the Union;
- the language to be used for all or any of the purposes mentioned in article 348;
- the form of numerals to be used for any one or more specified purposes of the Union;

Article 345: Subject to the provisions of articles 346 and 347, the legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the Language or Languages to be used for official purposes of that State.

Article 346: The language authorised 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 should be the official language for communication between such States.

Article 347: On a demand being made, if the President is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the **population of a State desire the use of any language spoken** by them to be recognised by that state, direct that such language shall also be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof.

Article 348: Until Parliament by law otherwise provides, all proceedings in the Supreme Court and in every High Court, the authoritative texts-of all Bills to be introduced and amendments to be moved in either House of Parliament or in the House or either House of the Legislature of a State, shall be in the English language.

The Governor of a State may, with the previous consent of the President, authorise the use of the Hindi language, or any

other language used for any official purposes of the State, in proceedings in the High Court having its principal seat in that State.

Article 350: 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 State.

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

Article 350B: provides for the establishment of a **Special Officer for linguistic minorities.**

Article 351: It shall be the duty of the Union to **promote the spread of the Hindi language**, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment.

Official Language Act, 1963 and it's amendment:

- Notwithstanding the expiration of the period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution, the English language may, continue to be used, in addition to Hindi,—

(a) For all the official purpose of the Union for which it was being used immediately before that day; and

(b) For the transaction of business in Parliament.

- The Act also lays down that both Hindi and English shall compulsorily be used for Resolutions, General Orders, Rules, Notifications, Administrative Reports, Press Communiques etc.
- The form of numerals to be used for official purposes of the Union were supposed to be the international form of Indian numerals.

The 1967 Amendment modified **Section 3 of the 1963 Act** and provides for **continuing the use of English** in official work even after 25 January 1965. Hence it guaranteed the “*virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism*” (English and Hindi) in official transactions.

Consequences of recent language issue if implemented and solutions:

What connects the country is our glorious history and the Constitution. They uphold the **language diversity** principle. Hence the opinion of bringing one particular language of the 22 languages to connect Indians, is **neither historically sensible, nor constitutionally correct.**

‘One nation, one language, one culture’ is a 19th century European idea that **failed to create unity**. Instead, it **caused a lot of bloodshed** in the world. Above all, when a language tries to expand beyond its **semantic-carrying capacity**, it starts **breaking up**. It happened to Latin in the past and to Sanskrit as well.

Any idea of one link language, whether Hindi or English, will be **economically disastrous** for India. It will **slow down migration and reduce the ease of capital flow.**

Though many leaders in the national movement visualised a special role for Hindi, most of them supported Hindustani, a mixed language, not the pure Hindi being pushed today. But all of them were clear that it could not be imposed.

Facts:

- The “**Hindi” dialect** under the scheduled language is **spoken by** about 32 crores i.e around **26% of the Indian population (census 2011)**.
- Close to 40% of the Hindi language speakers speak mother tongues other than Hindi.
- Despite being spoken by a large number of people,

Bhojpuri and Rajasthani are not listed as scheduled languages, while Bodo and Nepali which are spoken by relatively fewer people are in the Eighth Schedule.

- The southern States and northeastern States, apart from Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, have the lowest proportion of the Hindi speaking population.
- The share of Hindi-speaking people in Gujarat is significantly lower than most States, according to the data.

India is united in its diversity. Diversity is a great philosophical idea and should never be seen as a cultural burden. The **three-language policy** was introduced, officially giving regional languages their space, while not compromising on either English or Hindi's positions.

The Hindi speakers should be let alone. The government should not interfere with the linguistic behaviour or choices of people. India is uniquely gifted in that out of the world's 6,000 languages, we have close to 10% of the spoken languages. Our **country is multilingual** in nature and any attempt to make it monolingual would be disastrous. Hence **ensuring diversity will bring about unity in the country.**