



# The Debate on 'One Nation, One Language'

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## **Abstract**

The debate on 'one nation, one language' stems from the idea that India is a nation-state, however, a reality check illustrates the fact that due to the existing political scenario of the world at large, India, although it may be branded as a nation-state as of today, did not start as one, neither during the pre-independence era nor in the post-independence era. The recent issues are cropping in and around the language debate in the country, wherein Hindi is 'being promoted', basically being a euphemistic expression of 'being forced'. Imposition of a particular language on the entire geographical stretch of India would result in a new form of imperialism. Meaning thereby, promoting Hindi in the name of national integration and naming it as an 'official language' is the first step towards declaring it to be the 'national language'. Since India inhabits people of varied linguistic backgrounds having separate dialects and scripts, such action on the part of the government is nothing less than being arbitrary.

## **Keywords**

one nation, one language, imperialism, official language, national language, multilingualism

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## 1. Introduction

M. K. Gandhi, a nationalist and a lawyer who spearheaded the Indian national movement for independence once said that “a nation is dumb without a national language”, and indeed he was referring to India as a nation in this respect. We are well aware of the language debate which has existed in the history of India since time immemorial and which intends to thrust Hindi as the suitable choice for the national language of the country. *When did we learn that India is a nation? Probably during the years of our primary education, but were we not being taught nationalism in a tailored form as nowhere in history, regional nationalism has been given importance?* As has been rightly claimed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of All India Muslim League and the founder of Pakistan: “India is not a nation, nor a country. It is a subcontinent of nationalities” (Abeyagoonasekera, 2018). This is because India has always been a conglomeration of various regional identities and these identities may be in the form of varied culture, language, dialects, literature, religion etc. (Jain, 2003).

The present paper is an attempt to look at the fundamentals of the ‘one nation, one language’ debate from the lens of the Constitution of India, 1950 by way of deliberating on whether India does qualify as a nation-state at all. Also, an attempt has been made to revisit the anti-Hindi agitations which were experienced by India during pre-independence and post-independence era owing to the linguistic differences prevailing throughout the country and how legislative measures cajoled the emotions of the public. Considering the recent resurfacing of the language debate in the country, wherein Hindi is euphemistically claimed as ‘being promoted’ but is actually ‘being forced’, the views of the ruling political party have also been discussed in the present paper. Finally, an attempt has been made to analyse the feasibility of the idea of ‘one nation, one language’ vis-à-vis the diverse social, cultural, linguistic mosaic of India. The major premise that the paper is trying to put forth is that the imposition of a particular language on the entire geographical stretch of India would result in a new form of imperialism. Also, even if one contests that Hindi is being promoted only for making it the ‘official language’, the question is, in practise, how one can draw the line between ‘official language’ and ‘national language’ if the country undertakes all its business in a particular language. Promoting Hindi in the name of national integration and naming it as an ‘official language’ is the first step towards declaring it to be the ‘national language’. India’s population, being multi-cultural and multi-lingual with a rich history of different dialects and scripts, demands for a harmonization of their backgrounds instead of an implementation of arbitrary ideologies.

## 2. The History of the Debate on 'One Nation, One Language' in India

The debate with respect to Hindi being the national language of India has been alive since aeons. M. K. Gandhi wrote in his book titled 'Hind Swaraj' or the 'Indian Home Rule' that Hindi should be the *lingua franca* and the national language of India with the option of writing it in Persian and Nagari scripts (Gandhi, 1909). While delivering a speech to the students of the Hindi Prachar Mandal, Gandhi said that the language spoken by 200 million people in India should be learnt by the rest of the 11 million people and that this language is necessarily Hindi (Tendulkar, 2016). With respect to English proposed to be the national language of India, Gandhi expressed his discomfort by stating that few characteristics must be present for a language to be eligible to be the national language of India which are: (i) should be easy to learn for the general population and the government officials; (ii) should be the language of the majority of the people of the country; (iii) should be equipped to accommodate religious, political and economic issues of India; and (iv) should not be chosen based on some temporary or immediate interest (Gandhi, 2017). However, this view was heavily criticised and opposed by various sections of the society.

In 1937, the Congress party led by C. Rajagopalachari planned on making Hindi a compulsory subject in schools in Tamil Nadu, which led to wide-scale anti-Hindi protests/ demonstrations by student bodies with the fear that North Indian States were trying to infiltrate the Dravidian culture, adversely affecting education as well as opportunities in government jobs. Similar protests/ disagreements were demonstrated by Tamil Saivite scholars, women, certain sections of the Brahmin population, Tamil speaking Muslims etc. (Venkatachalapathy, 1995; Ramaswamy, 1997; Geetha & Rajadurai, 1998).

Much rancour on the language debate was witnessed by the Constituent Assembly with the immediate issue of arriving at a national language for drafting the Constitution of India, 1950 and conducting the proceedings of the assembly. On one hand, the supporters of Hindi including members from Bihar, Maharashtra, Berar etc. proposed Hindi to be declared as the national language (few supported Hindi per se and others supported Hindustani, which was a mixture of Hindi and Urdu). On the other hand, there were members, majorly from South India, who proposed the retention of English as the official language. Finally, on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1949, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Munshi Ayyangar formula (Constituent Assembly debates, 1949) which suggested negating the idea of a 'national language' and limiting the Indian Constitution to the proclamation of only the 'official language', and it declared that although Hindi in Devnagari script shall be the official language – at least for 15 years from the date of adoption of the Indian Constitution – English shall also be an official language. The idea was that India needs to be prepared for the functional development of Hindi in order for it to become the official language, developed in the sense of quality as well as in the sense

of usage by maximum number of people of the nation. Most importantly, the Constituent Assembly, in order to facilitate the transition from English to Hindi in a smooth manner, provided for the constitution of two commissions and also the Committee of Parliament on official language (Constitution of India, 1950, art. 344).

Following this, in June 1956 the Kher Commission was constituted under the chairmanship of Shri Bal Gangadhar Kher and thereafter in September 1957, the Parliamentary Committee on Official Language, chaired by Shri Govind Vallabh Pant, was constituted for making recommendations on the complete transition from English to Hindi. Both of them were of the view that English should be allowed to be continued as a co-official language. However, a majority of the non-Hindi speaking population of the country were distraught as, although the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, had declared that no steps would be taken to impose Hindi in non-Hindi speaking States, the non-Hindi population feared the opposite. After elaborate discussions in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha it was declared by the then Prime Minister that English shall be continued as an additional language even after January 26, 1965 till the time it is completely replaced by Hindi and that the non-Hindi states shall stop using English eventually. However, no time limit was prescribed. Following the above, the President's Order, 1960 was passed on April 27, 1960 for substituting Hindi for the official work of the Central Government. Thereafter, the Official Languages Act, 1963 was passed in exercise of the powers conferred on the Parliament under article 343(3) of the Constitution of India, 1950.

However, the nearer January 26, 1965 was, the graver anti-Hindi agitations became, especially in Madras, which were conducted by a large number of students declaring January 26, 1965 as a day of mourning and also a number of protestors self-immolated themselves. As a result, on February 11, 1965 the then Prime Minister made a speech assuring the people that English shall be continued to be used for communication among the States, between various States and the Centre and also for the All-India Civil Services Examinations. Apprehensions arose with respect to the usage of the term 'may' in Section 3 of the Official Languages Act, 1963 as the non-Hindi speaking community feared as to how the continued usage of English at the Centre would be ensured. Resultantly, the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967 was passed, which specifically mandated the continued use of English. This usage should continue till the time a resolution for its discontinuance would be passed by the legislature of each State, and a further resolution would be passed by both the houses of the Parliament.

In 1986 similar anti-Hindi agitations resurfaced, which were a result of the introduction of the National Education Policy (National Policy on Education, 1986, India) by Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, proposing a three-language formula wherein Hindi is also determined to be taught in schools. It also provided for the establishment of Navodaya schools, where Hindi could be taught. Further, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a resolution for non-imposition of Hindi and usage of English only as the official language of the Union (Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Third Session, 1986).

After a series of protests, self-immolations and arrests, it was finally declared that Hindi shall not be imposed, and no Navodaya schools shall be established in Tamil Nadu.

### 3. Legislative Provisions as They Stand Today

The provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India, 1950 in relation to the language problem prevalent in the country is somewhere between the views of the Hindi supporters and opposers. The provisions basically revolve around few general premises, which are as follows:

1. For 15 years from the date of adoption of the Constitution of India, English shall be continued to be used as the official language;
2. thereafter a transition will be done from English to Hindi;
3. explicit steps shall be taken for the promotion of Hindi by the Central and State governments; and
4. a particular State may adopt its regional language as its official language.

Article 343(1) enshrines that Hindi in Devnagari script was accepted as the 'official language' of India, however, in accordance with article 343(2) the usage of English should be continued for a period of 15 years and from January 26, 1965 it should be replaced by Hindi. In order to provide some flexibility to the abovementioned transition from English to Hindi, article 343(3) provides that the Parliament may by law allow the continued usage of English even after the said period. In the case of *Union of India v. Mursoli Maran* (AIR 1977 SC 225), the Supreme Court of India held that article 343(3) is an enabling provision for the transition of English to Hindi as the official language and does not in any way impair the status of Hindi as the 'official language' of India. Article 343(2) empowers the President to by order allow the usage of Hindi in Devnagari script and Hindi numerals in addition to English for any of the official purposes of the Union of India. It can be understood that the idea was that in the initial period of 15 years Hindi would be used in addition to English and thereafter the position would reverse and English would be used in addition to Hindi for official purposes and correspondence of the Union of India.

In order to ensure the smooth transition from English to Hindi and the usage of Hindi in addition to English during the period of 15 years, article 344(1) provides for the establishment of an Official Language Commission within 5 years and thereafter at the expiry of 10 years of the commencement of the Constitution of India to make recommendations for the progressive use of Hindi, restricting the usage of English, language of the court proceedings, numerals to be adopted etc. Also, article 351 of the Constitution

was formulated, which enshrines that the Central Government should take steps to promote and develop the Hindi language; for that purpose, the vocabulary of various regional languages and Sanskrit could also be resorted to. Surprisingly, the framers of the Constitution failed to acknowledge the fact that in the name of assimilation and development, Hindi would have changed so much that it would not have remained in its original form at all.

One of the major concerns faced by the constituent assembly was the protection of the regional languages and their development and promotion. In the year 1956, by way of the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, article 350 A and 350 B were inserted for the protection of the linguistic minorities. Further, Schedule VIII of the Constitution recognizes 22 regional languages with the intention that these languages should be represented by the Official Language Commission as well as resorted to (e.g., to their vocabulary) for the holistic development of Hindi.

With respect to the languages being used in court, proceedings article 348(1) enshrines that the proceedings in the High Courts and the Supreme Court shall be conducted in English unless the Parliament authorises otherwise. Also, all legislation and the authoritative texts of bills introduced in the Parliament shall be in English, but a State legislature may authorize the introduction of bills in the respective State legislature in a language other than English, provided a translation in English is available.

Also, article 120 provides that the language to be used in the Parliament shall be Hindi or English but any member may speak in his/her mother tongue with the permission of the Chairman or President of the concerned House. It also envisages a complete replacement of English by Hindi 15 years after the commencement of the Constitution.

Although the Constitution among other provisions does contain the abovementioned provisions with respect to the official language(s) of India, the language issue could not be solved even 10 years after the commencement of the Constitution and the transition from English to Hindi seemed to be impossible. As a result, the Official Languages Act, 1963 was passed, providing the continued usage of English even after January 25, 1965.

The Official languages Act, 1963 was a result of the recommendations of the Commission, which was further revisited by the Parliamentary Committee, which under Section 3 enshrines that even 15 years after the date of commencement of the Constitution of India, 1950, English shall be continued to be used as the official language of the Union of India in addition to Hindi for official purposes and for the business of the Parliament.

The point to be noted here is that after the passing of this Act the perspectives on 'official language' changed as earlier it was enshrined by the Constitution that Hindi shall be used in addition to English; however, by way of this Act it has been provided that English may be used in addition to Hindi. The Act among other things provides for the language to be used for the official communication between the Centre and States and between States and amongst various offices and departments of the governments.

## 4. Language Politics in India

It was with the advent of the idea of 'modern State' that the politics of language and language movements emerged (Arel, 2002). Prior to the emergence of these movements and nationalism, it was for the ruler to decide the official language, which did not require the involvement of public. Although the use of a particular language for administrative and other purposes is not essential, most of the modern States find it convenient to use a particular language for governmental purposes. Such choice of considering certain language(s) as official language(s) has an effect of empowering a certain category of people within the nation and disempowering the others (Hobsbawm, 1990).

*Understanding the intent behind 'language' as an ethnic marker:* The process of building a nation in any multicultural society begins with the identification of an ethnic marker such as religion, language, culture, color etc. (Brass, 1974). The ethnic marker that comes into play largely depends upon what the State intends to recognize, and other markers take a back seat for time being. For example, in pre-independence India, the British identified religious segments, such as Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, to provide with political opportunities and therefore the discourse around language took a back seat and was not much politicized as compared to the politicization of religious identity. However, in post-independence India, with the formation of a secular State and resultant restrictions on political demands on the basis of religion, the language movements became central to Indian politics and to some extent displaced religion as an ethnic marker of nation building (Brass, 2003).

In the initial stages, language movements, generally, are movements lead by elites in pursuance of social status, economic development and political power. The elites, depending upon the situation they are placed in, may choose strategies based on their political and economic goals and accordingly they may strategize to associate or dissociate with a particular group (Annamalai, 1989). Furthermore, 'bilingualism' or 'multilingualism' always does arise amongst those who hold an elite position in the society. In the Indian context, a classic example can be that in the pre-colonial India, during Mughal rule, the elites maintained and further enhanced their political and societal status through acquiring and learning Persian and they continued to maintain and enhance their status by acquiring English in the colonial era. In addition to acquiring the English language, the elites modernized and standardized their own mother tongues in order to generate literature in these languages and to create a speech community (Chatterjee, 1993). In multilingual cultures, the elitist language movement leads to a movement of dual nature. On one hand, there is a movement involving elites pushing for a particular language or dialect with an intent to create a new speech community recognizing that language or dialect as regional or even national language. The language or dialect so promoted may displace or encompass certain other languages or dialects. On the other

hand, there develops a movement which creates barriers between two or more communities speaking similar languages. This has, in literature, been referred to as the processes of 'standardization and purification' (Annamalai, 1989; Brass, 1974). The Hindi-Urdu dispute in northern India serves as a good example of co-existence of both these movements and prevalence of 'standardization and purification' at the instance of elites. The process of the promotion of Hindi by the elites leads to standardization of the language which encompasses several dialects prevalent in the Northern and Western part of India. This process was further supported by the idea of purification through Sankritization. Further, the insistence of Devnagari script developed barriers between Urdu (in Arabic script) and Hindi (in Devnagari script) speaking communities in Northern India (Farouqui, 1995; Latifi, 1999; Pant, 2002; Brass, 2003).

If, as explained above, certain people may choose to detach from their language in pursuit of economic, political and social goals and in the process adopt another language suitable for achieving the above stated goals, then what describes the attachment that one may feel towards his/her/their language or why would someone choose to die while defending his/her/their language in the language movement? Such commitments, passions and attachments develop under specific circumstances and actually conceal other hidden interests. This passionate attachment is not towards the language, but it is directed towards one's self and related interests. It is the sense of self, self-respect and loss of centrality in the world that lies at stake in such cases (Brass, 2003). Metaphorical references to mother's milk, mother's language etc. are invoked when one cannot speak the language promoted by the elites and the majority and resultantly the possibility of improving life chances for the person are decreasing (Crystal, 2000). According to Brass, there are only two logical responses to this situation: (i) learn to speak the language of majority; or (ii) initiate or join a movement to protect one's mother tongue to protect social, political and economic interests of the person (Brass, 2003). The adoption of Hindi in Northern and Western India and resultant encompassing of various distinct dialects is an example of the former; and the protest against standardization of Hindi in Tamil Nadu may serve as an example of the latter alternative (Ramaswamy, 1997). It is therefore not the attachment to the language itself that plays a role in the language movements, rather self-interests of the participants, associated with the language that plays a role in deciding on one of the choices mentioned in the previous paragraph, and thereby directing the movement towards achieving the desired goal.

*Language politics in the name of 'integration'*: The language movements, against imposition of other language, therefore, may range, in its mildest form, from steps taken towards purification, involving removal of alien words (*example, Anglicized Hindi words such as 'bungalow' which comes from the Hindi word 'bangla'; 'karma' which comes from the Hindi word 'karm' etc.*) and disallowing further borrowings from other languages (*example, the term 'alpha' borrowed from ancient Greek*) (Annamalai, 1979) to an extremist stance of violence, including self-sacrifice, justified as retaliation to the imposition by the others. In all the



cases of language movements, whether in its mild form or extreme stance, underlies a search for dignity of one-self and one's community (Brass, 2003).

India is considered to be a success story in light of national integration. It has aimed at resolving the language issues in several respects for reasons owing to the federal structure and each State struggles to have its own 'official language' concerning the education and governmental works. Also, viable compromises are voted for between supporters and opposers of Hindi language through retention of English as official language along with Hindi. But, in light of the recent propaganda, by the government in center with respect to the claim of '*one nation, one language*', it is apprehended that the Indian success story may soon be running in a reverse gear.

The language debate in India, i.e. the debate on '*one nation, one language*', has been in existence since the colonial times and is thrusted by the apprehension of threat to linguistic diversity of India. The intelligentsia have often attempted to understand the debate by juxtaposing the concepts of 'nation' and 'civilization/ empire' and looking at India from the lens of these concepts.

The term 'nation' in general parlance is associated with ethnic communities having a common culture, common history and a common territory. Also 'nations' are further categorized as 'nations in being' and 'nations in the state of becoming'. Considering the fact that we are taught to associate India with the term 'nation', we can focus on the phrase 'nation in being' which is considered to be a political community and is located in a distinctly demarcated locality or region (Kumar, 2002). It is further characterised by possessing a succinct vision and having a shared language, ethnicity, culture. A 'nation' can be defined as an *imagined community* which is political in nature and imagined as both limited and sovereign in nature (Anderson, 1983). It is 'imagined' as there is no promising nexus and proximity between the fellow members as they might not even meet or hear each other but still there is an illusion or image of a communion which exists in the minds of each member. The idea of a 'nation-state' is basically to give birth to an institutional structure which aims at making the political boundaries and the cultural boundaries of the State match. Hence, it incorporates people who share a common culture and ethnicity (Kazancigil & Dogan, 1986). The political agenda of such entities generally aim at creating a common cultural identity amongst the members, encouragement of voluntary assimilation of personal identities with the nation-State's identity, usage of social pressure and coercion to prevent the birth of alternative cultural identities (Stepan et al., 2010).

On the other hand, a 'state-nation' has multi-cultural identities at its base and respects and promotes them. In other words, it recognizes the multifariousness of various socio-cultural identities and provides a mechanism to accommodate competing and conflicting claims without resulting into discriminatory outcomes (Dahl, 1986). In case of a democratic society the policies built from a 'state-nation' perspective take the form of federalism and more often the form of asymmetric federalism.

The question which needs to be asked in case of India is that although since the beginning of primary education, every child in India is taught that India is a 'nation-state', is it actually the case? As British colonial administrator John Strachey once proclaimed: "first and the most essential thing to learn about India", he advised his colonial masters, is that "there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.... That men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North Western Provinces, and Madras, should ever feel they belong to one great nation is impossible" (Yadav, 2013). The formation of a nation always has a pre-history behind it which has a multiplicity of events and cultures which do not necessarily drive towards the idea of nationhood (Balibar & Wallerstein, 2011).

The idea of '*one nation, one language*' might be extremely workable for a State which is homogeneous in nature in terms of caste, culture, language but a State like India cannot survive it, considering the fact that massive diversity amongst the people in terms of language, caste, culture is the very essence of India. India since its genesis was intended to flag the idea of 'unity in diversity' and hence branding it as a 'nation-state' is not pragmatic. In order to substantiate the abovementioned argument, we can refer to the speech of B.R. Ambedkar when he said:

"I am of opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the world, the better for us." (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949, Vol. XI)

This reinforces the fact that the people of India, especially the ruling parties, from time to time need to realise that we need to internalize the fact that merely declaring an entity as a 'nation-state' does not make it one. The sooner we acknowledge the existing diversity in India and the need for protecting it, the easier it would be to see India from the lens of a 'state-nation' and a space will be developed for policy changes having respect for such diversity at its base.

## 5. The Current Scenario and the Associated Difficulties

*"Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do Pradhan aur Do Nishan nahi challenge"* – These were the words of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who was the founder of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, the party which preceded the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the latter being the ruling party in India. This statement basically translates into: 'one country cannot have two constitutions, two prime ministers and two national emblems' (Rohmetra, 2013). BJP's party politics is centred around the abovementioned premise, which makes us question its credibility while applying it to aspects which cannot be looked through one lens; such as religion, culture and/or language. Since the subject matter of this paper is the 'language debate' we will

restrict our discussions to present conflicts on the language debate in India, which although seemed dormant in the past few years but has revived with full vigour after the year 2014 (Anonymous, 2014). This is because in 2014 the government employees were ordered by the Home Ministry to use English or Hindi, but preferably Hindi in their social networking platforms, which was heavily criticized by the South Indian States (Kalra & Asokan, 2014).

The language debate, which was first time officially recorded by way of the National Education Policy, 1968, re-emerged in 2019 when the BJP government put forth the 2019 Draft Education Policy (Draft National Policy on Education, India, 2019). The 2019 policy refers to English as the language of the colonists and the economic elite and proposes a three-language formula wherein Hindi should be taught in the non-Hindi speaking States as well. It states that in Hindi-speaking States the study should include Hindi, English and a modern Indian language and in case of non-Hindi speaking States it should include Hindi, English and the regional language. The explanation provided by the ruling party is national integration and coherence in education, & economic development of the nation. The 2019 draft policy faced wide-scale opposition especially from South Indian States considering the fact that the so-called flexibility, which the government is claiming to have provided in the draft policy, is only after grade VI, provided students show proficiency in three languages in the board examinations (Vater & Sen, 2019). However, the draft policy was later adopted as National Education Policy, 2020 with certain amendments. The 2020 policy states that although the three-language formula shall continue, greater flexibility will be provided in choosing these languages and no language shall be imposed by the State and the primary education shall be conducted in the mother tongue of the region (National Education Policy, India, 2020). The step seems to be welcome initially but considering the power politics in India, it is pragmatically inconceivable to imagine that Hindi shall not be imposed, especially considering the views of the ruling party. Also, in all practicality considering that every State in India has different languages spoken within it and as mentioned, many of them are even not recognized in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India, 1950; the determination of 'mother tongue' in a particular State will itself become a political choice.

Further, although the BJP election manifesto 2019 explicitly provides for "conserving *Bhartiya* linguistic culture" as one of its objectives, the actions of the party seem to be opposite to such an objective (BJP Sankalp Patra, Lok Sabha, 2019). The manifesto mentions that a National Task Force will be constituted to analyse the status of various dialects in the country and that mechanisms for revival and promotion of vulnerable and extinct dialects shall be developed. However, the views of the party as being reported in various news channels and other media sources seem to be quite contrary. Recently, the Home Minister gave a speech saying that there is a dire need for a common language for the country to bring in national integration and that every child in the North-East shall be taught Hindi mandatorily (Anonymous, 2019b). He also urged the people to fight for

the idea of 'one nation, one language'. On September 13, 2019 the Home Minister celebrating 'Hindi Diwas' tweeted that although India is a dwelling for various languages there is a need to integrate the nation on the basis of one particular language and Hindi is the only available choice that India can afford to have (Tirumurthy, 2019).

The ruling party is backing its claims by referring to various articles of the Constitution of India and the Official Languages Act, 1963 but it fails to understand that there is a major difference between the ideas of 'official language' and 'national language' (Gupta, 1970). The intention of the Constitution makers was never to provide Hindi the status of 'national language' but only to use it as an 'official language' for easing trade and other forms of communication between the centre and the States and amongst various States.

In order to appreciate the abovementioned statement, one needs to understand the difference between the two terms. 'National language' is the language which is used throughout the political, social and cultural landscape of the nation and most importantly, it serves as one of the national symbols of a particular nation (Baldrige, 2002). On the other hand, an 'official language' has a particular purpose behind its usage and is commonly used for smooth functioning of governmental and administrative functions as they in all cases require active communication between various governmental bodies. To put it simply, 'national language' is symbolic in nature whereas an 'official language' has a practical vision behind its declaration. There is a possibility that they both may be the same in some nations but it is not always the case and India's language politics revolves around this pertinent issue of the need for having an 'official' and a 'national' language for the nation.

India is struggling with this debate because of the lack of clarity in the demands of the political parties/ speakers and more specifically because of the complexity of multilingualism which is quintessential to the identity of India being diverse. It is often argued by scholars/ political parties and even public at large that although Hindi is not recognized as the 'national language' under the Constitution of India, it still is the most widely spoken language across the country. Such statements are an antithesis to the idea of recognizing and respecting diversity as most regions in India have almost no knowledge of Hindi and even if they do have some knowledge of Hindi, it is the result of promotion of Hindi since the time of independence and its subtle imposition. As has been rightly pointed out by Florian Coulmas,

"if language can be employed as a symbol of national unity by a dominant group, dominated groups may, of course, exert the same logic and make political claims based on their linguistic identity. Thus, while the idea of a national language-ideology and its political enforcement may be said to function as a cohesive force, the reverse is also true." (Coulmas, 1988)

India since inception has been multicultural, multiracial and multilingual in nature and has always boasted the diversity it carries within itself (Chaudhary, 2009). As a result, people from different regions come in contact and communicate with each other making multilingualism a constant reality because time and again new languages emerge

due to such contact between various linguistic communities. In order to address the issues arising out of this existing multilingualism in India, one of the methods promoted in India is the three-language formula. This formula, while promoting English and one regional language, does make Hindi a mandatory language for the purposes of primary education. However, such a formula is extremely insensitive and inconsiderate to all those nationalist aspirations, which various linguistic communities have, as language in itself is considered to be a mark of identity and self-respect (Pattnayak, 1984). Surprisingly, the existence of different languages is often used as a positive factor when the political parties intend to boast about the rich multi-cultural and multi-lingual ethos of India but is often considered to be a hindrance when it comes to the economic growth of the nation. It is often argued by politicians that regional languages prove to be a hindrance in the communication between people from different regions, which has deteriorating effect on the employment opportunities, trade and collective development of the people of the country.

## 6. Conclusion

If India is to be termed as a 'nation', then it has to be the 'nation' of each and every citizen and not just a 'nation' of the majority population. Language is not just a culture, it is an identity which defines a particular individual, clan or community. If a foreign language is imposed on an individual, it is nothing less than another form of imperialism. We need to realize that India is diverse in various aspects, language being one of them, and instead of imposing the language of the majority, we need to celebrate the idea of 'unity in diversity', which has been the mantra of India for so many years and which is gradually getting lost. When a child is not taught in his/ her mother tongue, then in the initial years of schooling the child may show poor results owing to the child struggling between various languages. This is because an individual structures and communicates his/ her/ their thoughts in the mother tongue in the most effective fashion (Rao, 2008).

The need of the moment is not to delve into the quest of 'national language', but rather 'official language'. Instead of imposing Hindi in direct and indirect ways, efforts need to be made to recognize and give official status to various regional languages. As a matter of fact, as per the last reported census of India, i.e., the 2011 Census, on the basis of rational grouping based on linguistic information there are a total of 121 languages in India. Out of this only 22 languages form a part of the Eight Schedule to the Constitution of India, 1950, which provides for scheduled languages. It further reports that a total of 96.71% of the Indian population has one of the scheduled languages as its mother tongue and the rest (3.29 %) has other languages as its mother tongue. The immediate step which needs to be taken in this regard is to amend the Eighth schedule of the Constitution of India, 1950 because clearly the schedule is not all encompassing as it does not

even recognize various other languages although the intent of the schedule is to list the official languages of India (Anonymous, 2019a). When we talk about national integration, it can never be explained by giving weightage to one particular language only because it is the one which is spoken by the majority of the population. More critically, every language being one of the regional languages itself, shows a clear bias and arbitrariness in its imposition as no rational explanation can be provided on choosing Hindi over other regional languages.

Instead of promoting Hindi as the national language and proposing a three-language policy, a thought can also be given to recognize various regional languages as official languages. The result would be that for the matters inside a State the concerned regional language can be used and for matters concerning various States or the Centre an additional language can be used. That additional language can be made a part of the curriculum as an additional language although the medium of instruction in schools should be the regional language of the concerned State. It is also clear that it is very difficult to remove the usage of English altogether hence instead of promoting Hindi, a thought needs to be given to a two-language policy where the regional language can be the medium of education in various States and English can be learnt as an additional language, which in turn can also suffice the language constraints while undergoing international dialogues. The greatest evil to India considering its diversity would be choosing one regional language over various others and imposing it on the minority population because it would shatter the very spirit of the idea of India (Anonymous, 2019c; The Telegraph Editorial Board, 2019).

Reliance can also be placed to parallel experiences in other jurisdictions which are similarly multi-lingual and multi-cultural as India is. In the European Union for example, a total of 24 official languages are recognized as certain languages are shared by few member countries. An official language is chosen by each country while becoming a part of the European Union. Although the arrangement seems fair, multilingualism does lead to practical difficulties. Having said that, choosing one 'national language' or a *lingua franca* from the entire European unions has not been considered a viable option because even if certain languages would be dominantly spoken, choosing one common language will definitely lead to undermining the political and social status of the native speakers. There has been a clear commitment to show solidarity to the diversity which is existing in such jurisdictions, because after all it is a question about 'identity' and 'expression'.

In case of India, if the National Education Policy, 2020 is applied in its spirit while also being attentive of the political pressures of the ruling party, which may come in various ways, the underlying theme of the policy does justice. However, this normative application of the policy seems to be a distant reality considering the political and social matrix of the country.

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