

THE TOWER OF BABBLE: MOTHER TONGUE AND MULTILINGUALISM IN INDIA*

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Received May 27, 2017; Revised June 22, 2017; Accepted June 25, 2017

Abstract. Since ancient times India has been a multilingual society and languages in India have thrived though at times many races and religions came into conflict. The states in modern India were reorganised on linguistic basis in 1956 yet in contrast to the European notion of one language one nation, majority of the states have more than one official language. The Linguistic Survey of India (LSI) conducted by Grierson between 1866 and 1927 identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. The first post-independence Indian census after (1951) listed 845 languages including dialects. The 1991 Census identified 216 mother tongues were identified while in 2001 their number was 234. The three-language formula devised to maintain the multilingual character of the nation and paying due attention to the importance of mother tongue is widely accepted in the country in imparting the education at primary and secondary levels. However, higher education system in India impedes multilingualism. According the Constitution it is imperative on 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 ... by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.” However, the books translated into Hindi mainly from English have found favour with neither the students nor the teachers. On the other hand, the predominance of English in various competitive examinations has caused social discontent leading to mass protests and cases have been filed in the High Courts and the Supreme Court against linguistic imperialism of English and Hindi. The governments may channelize the languages but in a democratic set up it is ultimately the will of the people that prevails. Some languages are bound to suffer a heavy casualty both in the short and long runs in the process.

Keywords: *language, bilingualism, multi-lingualism, mother tongue, linguistic imperialism, the Constitution, schedule.*

Шарма Сушил Кумар. Балакунська вежа: рідна мова та багатомовність в Індії.

Анотація. Із давніх часів Індія була багатомовним суспільством, і мови в Індії процвітали, хоча й виникали конфлікти серед багатьох рас і релігій. Штати сучасної Індії були реорганізовані на лінгвістичній основі в 1956 році, але на відміну від європейського поняття однієї мови для однієї нації, більшість індійських штатів мають кілька офіційних мов. Лінгвістичне опитування Індії, проведене Грісоном в 1866–1927 рр., дало змогу виокремити 179 мов та 544 діалектів. Перший індійський перепис після здобуття Індією незалежності (1951 р.) визначив 845 мов, включаючи також діалекти. Переписом 1991 року було визначено 216 рідних мов, тоді як в 2001 році їх кількість становила 234. Тримовна формула, що спрямована на збереження багатомовності нації та приділення належної уваги важливості рідної мови, широко прийнята в країні на рівні надання початкової та середньої освіти. Однак система вищої освіти в Індії перешкоджає багатомовності. Відповідно до Конституції: “Держава має сприяти розповсюдженню мови гінді, розвивати її так, щоб вона

*Plenary Lecture in the III International Conference on “Challenges of Psycholinguistics and Psychology of Language and Speech” – COPAPOLS 2017, Lutsk and Svityaz, Ukraine, 29–31May, 2017

могла слугувати засобом вираження для всіх елементів складної культури Індії ..., шляхом залучення, де це необхідно або бажано, її словника, головним чином на санскриті, а далі вже на інших мовах". Проте книги, перекладені на гінді переважно з англійської, не користуються популярністю ні серед студентів, ні серед вчителів. З іншого боку, переважання англійської мови в різних конкурсних іспитах спричинило соціальне невдоволення, яке призвело до масових акцій протесту, а також подання нових справ на розгляд до Вищого та Верховного судів проти мовного імперіалізму англійської та гінді. Влада може визначати мови, проте в умовах демократії переважає думка народу. Незважаючи на це, автор зазначає, що деякі мови приречені зазнати важкої втрати як у короткостроковій, так і в довгостроковій перспективі.

Ключові слова: мова, двомовність, багатомовність, рідна мова, мовний імперіалізм, конституція, графік.

1. Introduction

About six thousand languages are being used currently in more than two hundred countries of the world. The questions like: "What/Who made so many languages?" and "Why different languages are used by different social groups all over the world?" have no definite answers. According to the Greeks diversity in speech was brought by the god Hermes and along with it separation and discord ensued; the *Bible* narrates the story of the "Tower of Babel" (Genesis 11:1–9) to explain the phenomenon of multi-lingualism that led to "disharmony". On the other hand people of some ethnicities like those in North America believe in a Great Deluge that separated people and their speech while those in Africa believe in great famine as the cause of different languages. These discourses/explanations underline the politics of dominance and the natural/geographical intervention as the probable reasons for so much diversity in languages.

"What comes first: language or thought?" is a riddle that remains unsolved like the riddle as to what came first – a hen or an egg. However, there is no disagreement on the fact that language is a wonderful creation the use of which grants one the status of being human and distinguishes one from vegetative state. All languages are capable enough of meeting the requirements of a social group where they have originated though they also become the instruments of oppression/expression in the hands of institutions wielding/professing educational, economic, political and religious power. Each social group/institution keeps on updating its language by way of adding/disusing vocabulary items and modifying syntactical structures to meet its current requirements which lead to modernization of a language. If a group and its language fail to meet the current challenges both of them either lose their significance or get wiped out. The disciplines of Anthropology and Historical Linguistics are full of examples to prove the veracity of the above statements.

Language is an important tool not only for the purpose of communication among the members of a gregarious group but also to form bonds among the members of a family and a society. It is also a vital tool to understand the world around us and for forging and maintaining friendly, cultural and economic tie-ups. John Stuart Mill says, "Language is the light of the mind." (Dictionary, 1997:128) The linguist Edward Sapir maintains that language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a community but it

also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. Sapir says, "... the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language" (Qtd by Farinde, 2007:157). Benjamin Whorf has noted that language shapes one's thoughts and emotions besides determining one's perception of reality. He writes: "We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community



The poster reads: "Why is English preeminent in UPSC?"

The headline in the front page of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy's periodical *Kudiyarasu* (3 September 1939) reads "Veezhga Indhi" (Down with Hindi)

and is codified in the patterns of our language." (Whorf, 1940:229–31, 247–8.) One's mother tongue is an essential component in shaping and giving a person one's identity; it is not only a social need but also a psychological need. If one is not able to use it for a long time one becomes emotionally dry; it may turn one into a psycho or may lead one to madness. Therefore, one craves to use one's mother tongue when one goes to an alien land where one's language is not used and insists on preserving it. One's language is the most important part of one's being though it is equally important to learn other languages besides one's own if one wishes to expand one's mental and other horizons and wishes to learn about other people, their

problems and perspectives and cultures and explore the world for economic, educational, political and religious purposes. Every normal child knows his/her mother tongues well (listening and speaking skills) when s/he is sent to a school at the age of three or four for becoming literate (reading and writing skills), learning some skill and becoming proficient in some subject in order to render his/her services to his/her family, society, country and humanity at large. These objectives are achievable both by formal and informal education. The higher goal of liberating oneself (*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*¹) is not an achievable objective in the present system of education being practised at the behest of the different governments all over the world. Still all governments have to impart education and language planning is one of the key issues in the field. In Indian context "Language" is both could be a means of communication (of knowledge in a particular discipline) and a subject matter (in

itself). Since most of the Indian leaders, who participated in the freedom struggle during late 19th and early 20th century had been trained in Europe/USA the Indian state was shaped on European models by them. Solutions to many Indian problematic social issues cropping up owing to a curious history and its colonial interpretation in many areas were derived out of the existing European models. Issues like education and languages had been independent of the political/government interference before the arrival of the European colonisers in India but the situation had changed by the time they left. The British left a strong burden of educational system/institutions imparting education in English which were patronised by the Government both directly (in terms of grants) and indirectly (in terms of recognition). The system could not be overthrown overnight though the



nationalist fervour and a clamour to develop Indian identity after independence necessitated having fresh look at the related issue of education and language. With the emergence of new disciplines of Sociology of Languages (Basil, 1971, Fishman, 1972, Giglioli, 1972, Peñalosa, 1981), Sociolinguistics (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, Hymes, 1974, Trudgil, 2000, Chambers, 2009) and Language Planning (Haugen,

1966, Lewis, 1972, Jernudd, 1982, Mansor, 2005) and the emphasis of the United Nations since 1950's on imparting education in mother tongue further livened up the debates regarding the issues of Mother Tongue and Multilingualism in India as several new dimensions were added to them at the International level. The area is quite fascinating for further researches in psycho-linguistics and cognitive sciences as traditionally almost every Indian is a multi-lingual. Because different areas of brain are used in using different languages an Indian's reactions and perspectives on social and political issues are largely different.

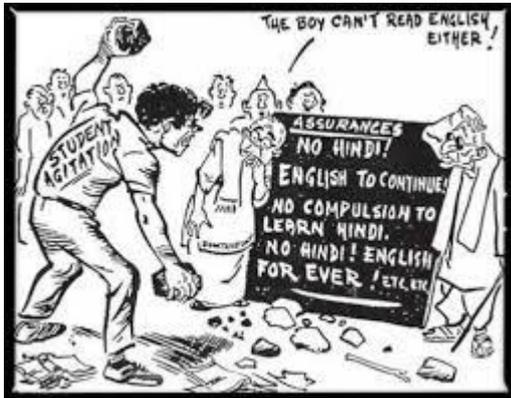
2. Methods

In order to understand the matrix of Mother Tongue and Multilingualism in India a theoretical study of the language planning policies and practices with reference to Mother Tongues and Multi-lingualism has been undertaken. The data available at different sources in public domain has been used to corroborate the study. A comparative approach has been followed to analyse the actual practice of the multi-lingualism and use of mother tongue in the education system. The observations on the data of actual practice have been compared and contrasted with a view to see its import on the larger goal of the development of a civilization. The limitation of the study is the data drawn from secondary sources (mainly from the agencies involved in the process) as it is not possible for an individual to collect the data because of the enormous size of the country which is almost of the size of Europe, and a huge population of 382 persons per sq km (totalling to 17.86 % of the

total world population) yet the findings are not likely to change with the corrections in the data at micro-level.

3. The Study

It is in the modern formal system that the first conflict regarding languages starts – if education should be imparted in one's mother tongue or in an alien language. All over the world, except in developing countries (=backward in the development of science and technology and imparting modern education i.e. education developed in the West/colonisers), all education from primary language to higher education is provided in their national language which is also mother tongue in most of the cases. In British and American schools/universities it is English, in France French, in Germany German, in Japan Japanese and the like. Even the (former) communist countries like China, Russia (former USSR), Poland, Ukraine, Czech and Slovak Republics (former Czechoslovakia), Vietnam and the like promote the use of one language to promote nationhood, equality and comradeship. This historical reality

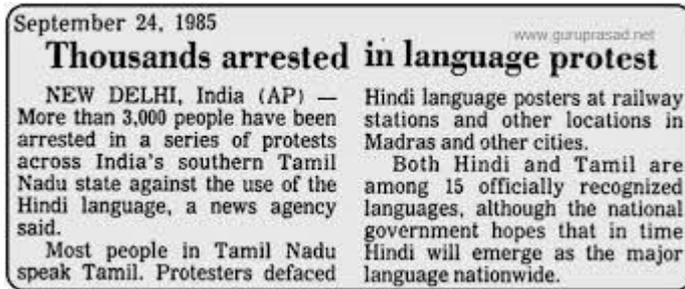


leads to a logical derivation that the knowledge of modern science can be acquired in any language because it is a methodology and not parroting a subject/knowledge. If one acquires scientific temperament one can make scientific advancements independently as has been done in Germany, Russia, Japan and China. A person thinks in one's mother tongue and can come up with innovative ideas to solve the problems around one. Developing countries will always

remain in the third world group unless they make discoveries and inventions to make a leap into the scientifically/technologically developed economic world. Researches in science/technology are always a matter of time unlike the literary works which are unique products of a combination of their times and artists; scientific innovations take place in some places earlier than at some others but philosophical/literary productions remain unique. This timing is of utmost value as the early invention in the field of science and technology gives one an edge over others and it makes all the difference. Language of one's thought is very vital for an innovation for one thinks best in one's mother tongue. Developing countries are likely to be in the same situation if the medium of instruction is not changed at their higher education institutions.

It is a well known fact that the modern education system in India is the brainchild the British. They created municipality schools for the commoners (mostly located in impecunious and scruffy localities) and elite institutions (like Rajkumar Colleges) which were located in posh and elite areas for the education of sons and relatives of the Feudatory class, who donated funds. A parallel education system in the form of Mission Schools/ Colleges was started by the churches as a missionary activity with a dual purpose in mind: mainly to convert the heathens into believers and secondly to cater to needs of the children of British and Anglo-Indian officials

serving in India. All these formal activities largely took place in English and it gave birth to a new “class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” (Macaulay, 1835) This class of persons were to be the agents of change (not the innovators themselves) in the country: “To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to



render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.” (Macaulay, 1835) Even in the post-independence era the pattern of education has virtually remained the same and a derivative of the Western Epistemology as is evident

from the lists of prescribed reading and recommended books in various courses. Since these books are in English, learning English becomes obligatory for a University degree which in turn is imperative for a government job. English, therefore, continues to be at the helm of affairs and enjoys the status of the language of the social elites; the process starts a chain reaction to promote the need of the English language. This is a situation not only in India but in almost all the countries that have a colonial past. Because of this situation there has been a debate whether education should be provided in mother tongue (MT) or in an alien language. Also the large gap between the achievements of MT schools and English medium schools in terms of proficiency in English has led to the democratic demand of “uniform education”. The related corollary is if the innovations and the discoveries that the civilization is proud of will ever be made by a person who does not work in his/her mother tongue and who works with a second language. If one tries to verify Macaulay’s tall claims of developing “intellect” through English (the second language) by way of the contribution of the products of even the best Public Schools (like Doon School, Dehradun, Mayo College, Ajmer, Woodstock School, Mussoorie and Scindia School, Gwalior and the like) and the Rajkumar Colleges) one realises that it is almost insignificant to mention. They just appear on the scene when one tries to locate the most expensive schools in India as their graduates do not have any discovery, innovation, patent or path breaking research to their credit in the fields of science, technology and medicine or the related areas. Nor do they seem to be contributing significantly in the fields of Humanities, Social Sciences and Commerce. We of course value Gandhi and Nehru for their intellectual contribution and building of the nation but for both of them English was the second language. However, Gandhi, the imitator of the British/ English, is neither valued nor revered. Gandhi could become the leader of the masses and was able to connect with them and their culture because of his solid foundations in his mother tongue. On the other hand it is also true that Gandhi would not been Gandhi without his English education. Gandhi’s greatness is an example of the greatness generated out of the hybridity in English was grafted to his MT Gujarati.

Language learning is a simple process as well as a complex one. It is so simple a process that every child with ordinary/normal abilities is able to learn the language being used around one. But it turns out to be a complex one if an alien language is to be learnt in unrealistic situations by a young one or when an adult wants to learn a new language. Therefore, the teaching materials, methods and strategies of L1 and L2 users are different. Even different evaluation parameters, strategies and methods are required to judge one's performance in these languages. UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953) and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: children are



more likely to enrol and succeed in school and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: children are more likely to enrol and succeed in school. (Kosonen, 2005) Oliver Stegen, a German linguist also holds the same view though with certain reservations: "Every child should receive basic education in the language which s/he is most familiar with. ... Once a solid foundation is laid in the child's first language, the child can expand her experience and learn more even through other languages spoken in her wider environment. Mother tongue education is not the answer to everything. Teaching methods and students' environments have to be taken into account also. ... In the same way that biodiversity is important for the balance of life on our planet, language diversity is important for the balance of cultures." (Stegen) Gandhi also believed that one may find succour only in one's mother tongue. He was of the opinion that not only primary but also higher and technical education should be provided in one's MT. (Gandhi) It has been observed that the students in "total immersion" system become dull and that they just to cram up the material without involving any creative skills as compared to the ones in L1 or bilingual schools. (author's personal experience); it has also been reported that the children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers. (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000; King & Mackey, 2007) The Indian education system is truly multilingual in its character and it does not ignore the importance of mother tongue in teaching and learning at the primary and secondary level. The three-language formula² widely accepted in the country aims at developing and strengthening the multilingual character of the nation; in some cases (linguistically minority groups) this formula becomes a four-language formula as they have to learn their mother tongue, the dominant regional language, English and Hindi. Various public agencies run schools in bi-lingual and multilingual schools to cater to the needs of various linguistic communities. However, higher education system in India impedes multilingualism. Though most of the Indian universities have both English and local languages as media of instruction yet the quality of graduates opting for an Indian

language as the medium of instruction has always been a matter of concern as there has been a dearth of sufficient number of high quality text-books and reference materials keeping pace with times in the Indian languages. The following data regarding academic/research journals culled from the official website of University Grants Commission³ clearly indicates that most of the academicians do not take their mother tongues seriously at higher education level:

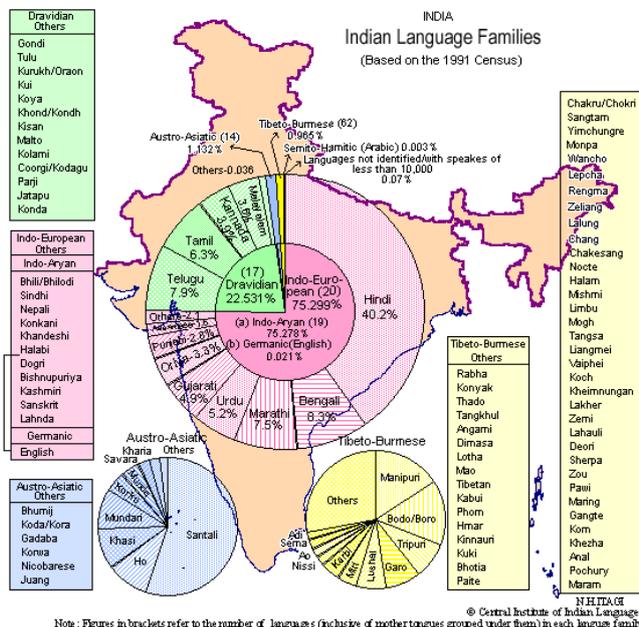
Sl.	Language in VIII schedule	No. of Journals	Sl.	Language in VIII schedule	No. of Journals
1.	Assamese	0	12.	Manipuri	0
2.	Bengali	38	13.	Marathi	11
3.	Bodo	0	14.	Nepali	3
4.	Dogri	0	15.	Odia	4
5.	Gujarati	5	16.	Punjabi	14
6.	Hindi	210	17.	Sanskrit	64
7.	Kannada	1	18.	Santhali	1
8.	Kashmiri	0	19.	Sindhi	Not mentioned
9.	Konkani	0	20.	Tamil	10
10.	Maithili	0	21.	Telugu	2
11.	Malayalam	0	22.	Urdu	67

In professional courses like medical and engineering English as the medium of instruction has been enjoying a predominant position because of our colonial past and non-availability of not only the teaching/research materials but also the experts/teachers ready to deliver in Indian languages. Therefore, a large amount of exchequer goes into importing books in higher education from the English speaking world.

Mapping the Linguistic Plurality in India :

India has always harboured a notion of multi-lingual society as is evident from the following verse of the *Atharva Veda*: “*janam vibranti bahudha vivacasam nana dharmanam prithivi yathaukasam/ sahasra dhara dravitasya ye duham dhruvena dhamurenk pasphuranti* (*Atharva Veda, Prithvi Sukta XII-1-45*, The earth that holds people of manifold varied speech, of different customs, according to their habitations, as a reliable milch-cow that does not kick, shall she milk for me a thousand streams of wealth!) Ashoka’s edicts have been found in languages like Pali, Prākṛit, Magadhi, Aramaic and Greek and in scripts like Brahmi, Kharoshthi and Greek. Because of constant touch between Indian and Chinese scholars over the matter a *Sanskrit Chinese Dictionary* was prepared. During Mogul rule in the medieval period several persons of the royal court like Dara Shikoh translated texts and Akbar used to entertain scholars of many languages. Tulsidas, the saint poet composed his verses in Sanskrit, Avadhi and Brij Bhasha while and Vidyapati in Sanskrit and Maithili. Likewise the Azhwars and Nayanmars in the Southern part composed their literature in a language spoken by the ordinary people and Sanskrit.

Indian classical drama uses both dialects and ‘standard’ languages. Writers used Magadhi, Shaurseni, Prakrit, and Apabhramsa, even as they excelled in the use of Sanskrit.



However, the first effort to document this plurality is seen in the form of the first official language survey popularly known the Linguistic Survey of India, conducted between 1894 and 1928, under the direction of George A. Grierson (dsal.uchicago.edu) The survey was incomplete even in the then British India as it did not take into consideration the former provinces of Burma and Madras to a large extent and the then princely States of Hyderabad and Mysore perhaps owing to non-availability of data. Still, it

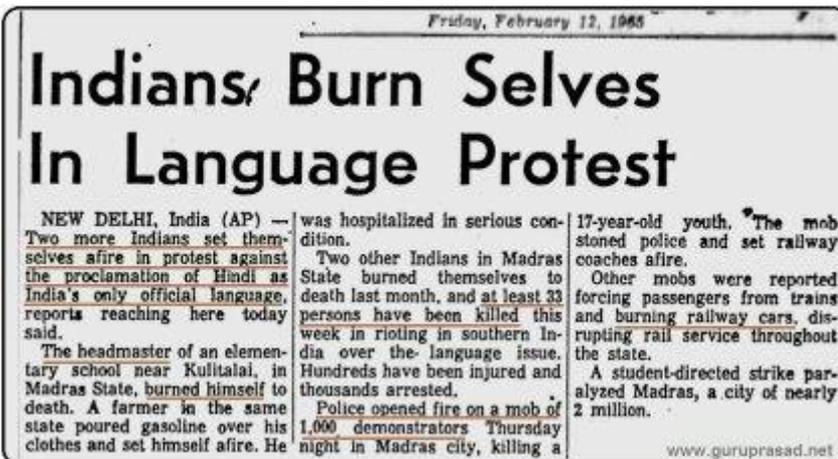
identified 364 languages and dialects. The survey is incomplete for the present day needs of India as well because Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh included in the survey are no more parts of the present day independent India and complete data about south Indian languages is not there in it. Nor does this survey reflect the present day geographical reality as between 1894 and 2014 so many pidgins, creoles and dialects might have come into existence as a result of bi-lingualism and tri-lingualism and also that many of the languages must have shrunk in their areas or might have disappeared. Even if the data-collections tools, efficiency of surveyors and methodology of Grierson are ignored so many new ideas about language, culture and their preservation have come into existence which make a new survey a necessity.

But for a proposal made by the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore (under Ministry of Human Resource Development, India) to the Central Govt to undertake such a survey in the nineties no substantial effort has been made to document the linguistic plurality in the country by more than 250 odd universities in India where language departments function and at least a dozen Universities and Institutes exclusively meant for languages. It is all the more deploring because every University has an area of jurisdiction/operation and the work could have been carried out very easily had there been any planning, concern, co-ordination and will for doing it. Being aware of this lacuna the Government of India launched an ambitious project to expand and revise the linguistic survey of India under VI – Five Year plan. The task was assigned to the Language Division of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India (under the Ministry of Home Affairs) and the work on this project has been going on it since 1984. The work gained momentum around 2000. So far it has published five reports: two on Sikkim (2009) and one

each on Odisha (2002), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (2003) and Rajsthan (2011). (censusindia.gov.in/) The Registrar General is perhaps not the proper authority to conduct a special and technical linguistic study of a language as is also evident from their lean output up to the early 2000 AD. Since 2012, the two organisations viz. Registrar General and CIIL have been working in collaboration with each other on the LSI. However, the result of their collaboration is yet to be seen in the form of some publication.

Some individuals have also devoted themselves to documenting languages and by roping in some others. For example, Ganesh N Devy, a Sahitya Akademi winner for *After Amnesia* (1993), a Padama Shri awardee (2014) and an activist for Tribal rights started documenting oral languages under the banner of Bhasha Research and Publication Centre at his Tribal Academy located at Tejgadh near Vadodara (Gujarat). He calls his project Peoples' Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI). Jamsetji Tata Trust, Mumbai partially funds PLSI programme which plans to bring out at least 50 volumes on people's languages. So far thirty volumes on various Indian languages have been prepared by authentic users/scholars of the languages. "The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) envisions the creation of a Linguistic Survey rooted in people's perception of language. PLSI as a nation-wide survey is being carried out by members of respective communities, writers, cultural activists,

scholars of intangible heritage, practitioners of oral arts and traditions, responsible citizens interested in working out alternate ways of development and scholars who believe in maintaining organic links between scholarship and the social context." (peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/)



[rg/](http://peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/))

4. Results and Discussion

It is clear that even after sixty six years of independence Grierson's survey remains to be the only official and (in) complete survey in the hands of the Government of India. Therefore, a policy regarding Language Planning and related issues in independent India can very safely be attributed to the whims of some powerful individuals/ social groups/ officials/ elites. For example, Sindhi, Kashmiri and Dogri are not the official languages in any Indian state but they find a place in the VIII schedule. On 18th February, 2014 the union Government admitted in the Parliament that there was no approved criterion for inclusion of a language in the VIII schedule⁴, one of the issues in Language planning. However, it will be a misconstruction of facts to believe that in absence of a complete survey of languages there is no official record of the languages being used and the number of users of a

particular language in this highly populated and vast country. The Govt collects some data through Census Commission regarding the languages in use in the form of mother tongue on the basis of which it frames its policies. The following table⁵ will give a rough idea about the changing profile of the number of languages in India and their users:

Table 1

The changing profile of the number of languages in India and their users

Sl. No	Year of National Census	Total No. of Mother Tongues identified	No. of persons claiming English as their Mother Tongue	Total No. of Scheduled		Total No. of Unscheduled	
				Languages	Speakers	Languages	Speakers
1	1951	845	171742	15	323972607	830	32906787
2	1961	1652	223781	14	382333847	179	56900924
3	1971	132	191595	15	522759625	90	25400027
4	1981	221	202440	15	587035664	93	29844108
5	1991	216	178598	18	807441612	96	31142376
6	2001	234	226449	22	993245089	100	35365239
7	2011	Data not yet released		Data not yet released		Data not yet released	

Note:

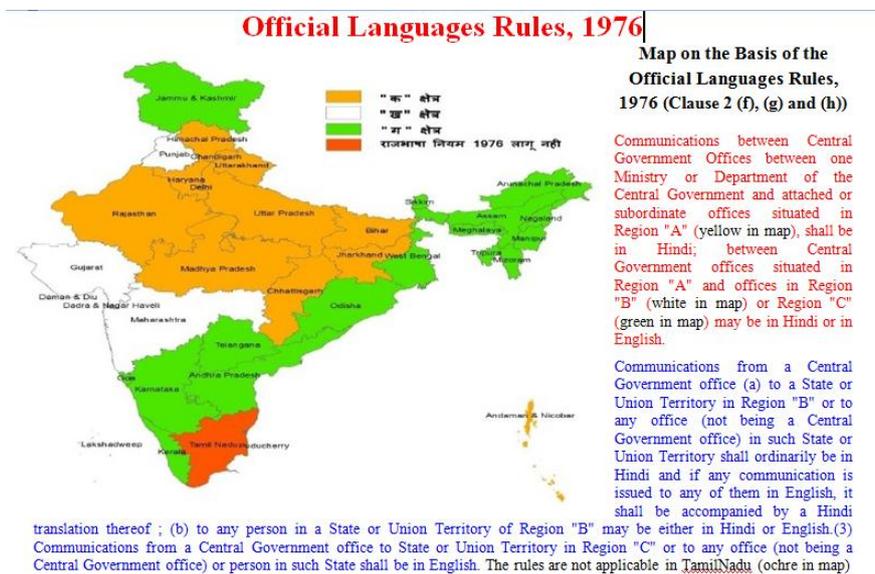
1. The statistics of 1961 is not comparable to post – Censuses since from 1971 Census onwards only the languages / mother tongues returned by 10000 or more speakers at all India level are published for public domain by the decision of Government of India.
2. The pre – Census result of 1961 (i.e. 1951) also is not comparable due to non – systematisation of language Census statistics in Independence India.
3. The language Census result from 1891–1931 is not readily available and the presentation has been avoided since the statistics is not comparable on the ground of geo- political boundary of pre – Independence India.

It can be noticed that the number of mother tongues (MT) is gradually declining. This can be attributed to 1) changing definition of MT in every census 2) people are not aware of their MT 3) people name the majority language as their MT to take political/social advantage of their geographical location 4) people are not proud of their MT rather they feel awkward in associating themselves with it and 5) people have actually lost touch with their MT and have adopted/adapted an associate – related language and in the process the MT has vanished from their memory or is no more on their priority list. Whatever be the reason, the movement appears to be from a multi-lingual situation to a mono-lingual situation. However, there is no agreement on the above figures. There are some like Gary F Simons and others for whom the “number of individual languages listed for India is 462. Of these 448 are living and 14 are extinct. Of the living languages, 64 are institutional, 126 are developing, 190 are vigorous, 55 are in trouble, and 13 are dying.” (ethnologue.com). Vikas Kamat writes, “Depending on whom you ask, the number of languages in India vary from fifteen to two thousand. In other words, there is no definitive count of the languages in practice.

The problem of counting and classifying the languages is compounded by the myriad of dialects, and mixed languages.” (kamat.com/indica/)

Constitutional Provisions and Their Fallout

The Constitution of India in its Preamble provides for social, economic and political justice; liberty of thought, expression, ... worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among the people fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. Language is an important tool to achieve these objectives. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment has been granted as a Fundamental right to Indian citizens (Article 16). Under the fundamental right to freedom, freedom of speech has been protected and all citizens have been granted the right to freedom of speech and expression and to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business (Article 19(2) a, f). Besides, the *Constitution* also protects cultural and educational rights as fundamental rights of even the minorities in the country: “Any section of the citizens residing in the territory



of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.” (Article 29(1)) “All minorities, whether based on religion or language”, have been granted the right “to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.” (Article 30(1))

Discrimination by way denial to admission has been checked: “No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.” (Article 29(1)).

The state has not taken upon itself the duty to protect and preserve any particular language but it is the Fundamental duty of every citizens of India “to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities;” (Part IV A(e)) and “to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.” (Part IV A(h)) However, under Article 351 the Union has been directed to develop and spread develop Hindi language “so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.” Hindi has to enrich itself “by assimilating ... the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages” (Article 351). Thus the purpose of the founding fathers appears to develop a common

language for the nation by providing Hindi a major role and the other Indian languages in the VIII schedule a subordinate role. Hindi in the process has to undergo several changes but other languages may stay in their linguistically pure form. Hindi in Devanagari script has been accepted as official language of the Union but the international form of Indian numerals are to be used for the official purposes of the Union (Article 343 (1)). Hindi was to perform the role of an assistant to English up to 26 January 1965 (Article 343 (2)) but English would become its assistant “from the appointed day” (Official Languages Act, 1963, Clause 3.1). A lease life of fifteen years with effect from 26 January 1950 was provided to English after which it was to be fully replaced by Hindi. Unfortunately, “the appointed day” has not yet been decided.

Article 347 makes special provisions relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a State; the wishes of “a substantial proportion of population” have to be honoured by officially recognising their language. Some state governments have not fulfilled people’s aspiration which has led to agitations. On the contrary when some other states have tried to give these rights to a language group people of different language community take it as an action against their interests. Though Article 345 clearly provides that “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 all or any of the official purposes of that State” yet some enthusiast have filed petitions against the decisions of the State legislatures with respect to recognition of some languages. For example, U P Hindi Sahitya Sammelan filed a petition against the State of UP and others in the Supreme Court of India (2014STPL(web)569SC) challenging the validity of declaring Urdu as the second official language in UP. Such petitions have rightfully been dismissed but their intentions have not been dismissed and Hindi is charged with having imperial designs. Whether primary education should be given in one’s mother tongue only has also been a subject matter of litigation. For example, Associated Management of (Government Recognised – Unaided – English Medium) Primary and Secondary Schools and others sought legal intervention against an order (dated 22 June 1989) of the Karnataka Government which said that “from 1st standard to 4th standard, ... it is expected that normally mother tongue will be the medium of instruction that Kannada.” The matter was referred to Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court on 05.07.2013 by an ordinary Bench of the same Court. Ultimately the Supreme Court struck down the decision of the Karnataka Government with the following observations:

“We are of the considered opinion that though the experts may be uniform in their opinion that children studying in classes I to IV in the primary school can learn better if they are taught in their mother tongue, the State cannot stipulate as a condition for recognition that the medium of instruction for children studying in classes I to IV in minority schools protected under Articles 29(1) and 30(1) of the Constitution and in private unaided schools enjoying the right to carry on any occupation under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution would be the mother tongue of the children as such stipulation. We accordingly answer question No.(iii) referred to us and hold that the imposition of mother tongue affects the fundamental rights under Articles 19, 29 and 30 of the Constitution.

“Article 350A therefore cannot be interpreted to empower the State to compel a linguistic minority to choose its mother tongue only as a medium of instruction in a primary school established by it in violation of this fundamental right under Article

AGITATED
Fretful annoyed
nervous **scared** worried
DISTRESSED FRUSTRATED discouraged
irritated

30(1). We accordingly hold that State has no power under Article 350A of the Constitution to compel the linguistic minorities to choose their mother tongue only as a medium of instruction in primary schools”

There are also examples where state governments have tried to curtail their rights

of some language communities. For example, in Bihar teaching of Maithili subject was discontinued from the schools and consequently recruitment of Maithili teachers was stopped. Maithili was also removed from the Bihar Public Service Examination. Petitions have been filed against such autocratic decisions of the governments (J K Mishra: 1998). Again such steps of the govt are viewed by some as imbued with imperialistic designs. It may be argued that a legal mechanism for corrective measure has been provided for in the Constitution and one is free to take recourse to legal action if one feels otherwise. It is true that legal actions have been taken and aberrations have been set right but the scars that have been left behind in the process of the creation of acerbity is no less disparaging. Similarly, Article 350 entitles every person “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, as the case may be.” When due to the prevalent apathy of the bureaucratic set up no satisfactory action is taken on the representation written even in a major language of the state there should be no wonder at the apathy shown to one submitted in the minor language. The anger of the petitioner in such a case is easily shifted on to the language and the culprit officer goes scot-free.⁶ According the Constitution (Article 351 see supra) it is imperative on the “Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, ... by drawing ... its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.” But the government can only act as facilitator the actual research/work in/ for their languages has to be carried out by the people/ users of a language. However, the books translated into Hindi mainly from English have not found favour with the students and teachers. The absence of authentic academic/research journals in languages in the Indian languages proves that these languages have so far not become the language of people’s thought. On the other hand the predominance of English in various competitive examinations has caused social discontent leading to mass protests and cases have been filed in the High Courts and the Supreme Court against linguistic imperialism of English and Hindi.

5. Conclusions

The above discussion leads us to conclude that 1) The language planning in India leaves a large number of people distressed, worried and agitated; a large number of people are anxious, annoyed, irritated and distressed with it. 2) Gandhi’s opinion “... English can never and ought not to become the national language of India” is still

relevant in Indian case as English is considered to be a symbol of slavery by a large number of people though it is the language of opportunities and intellectual make up for yet another large group 3) Choosing one language to project national identity in terms of the western notion of a Nation-State may is not the best option in Indian context 4) Hindi is being projected as an alternative to English; it is a natural corollary that Hindi imperialism is presented as an alternative to English imperialism; in a democratic set up neither kind of imperialism will be sustainable 5) Mono-lingualism is being preferred over muti-lingualism in contradiction to the national – cultural ethos of respecting plurality as demonstrated above and 6) the language is being used by those in power as a tool of oppression.

In drawing a model from euro-centric notion of state some basic facts are being forgotten. In Europe countries are geographically smaller compared to the size of this nation; the entire size of Europe is almost that of India; here some states are larger than many of the European countries. The population of entire Europe is almost the population of one state here. The ethnic variety in this country is unique and is not found in any of the European nations. Naturally, European models are unfit for fulfilling the aspirations of the people.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to the Language Division, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner India, Kolakata for providing required statistics along with notes in the table at my request dated July1, 2014.

Notes

1. *sa vidya ya vimuktaye*: tr. “knowledge is one that liberates”; the full verse is: tatkarma yan na bandhāya sā vidyā yā vimuktaye | āyāsāyāparaṃ karma vidyānyā śilpanaipuṇam || *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1,19.41 ||
2. In1952, Muthaliyar Commission recommended Three Language Formula which stated that mother tongue should be taught at primary stage but English and Hindi should be introduced later. In 1966, Kothari modified Three Language Formula and recommended that along with Mother tongue English and Hindi should be taught in non-Hindi states while instead of Hindi, any other modern South Indian language should be taught in Hindi speaking states. The National Policy on Education (NPE) – 1986 reiterated the need for the implementation of the three language formula in its true spirit. The National Curriculum Framework – 2005 developed after a nation-wide debate and discussion and approved by Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) endorsed the formula so that the children receive multilingual education from the outset and develop multilingual communicative abilities in a multilingual country. Most of the Hindi Speaking states now follow “Hindi, English and Sanskrit formula” while two non-Hindi speaking states viz. Tamil Nadu and Tripura and one Union Territory, Pudicherry, follow a two language formula i.e. Mother tongue and English and the states like Odisha, West Bengal and Maharashtra follows the three language formula i.e. Hindi + English+ a modern south Indian language. Some boards/institutions permit even European/ foreign languages like Spanish, French and German in place of Hindi or Sanskrit. (Retrieved from <http://mha1.nic.in/par2013/par2014-pdfs/ls-050814/LS%203790.pdf>)
3. University Grants Commission (a national grant-giving agency responsible for “coordination, determination and maintenance of standards in institutions of higher education”) has displayed the list of academic/research journals in various subjects/disciplines. Here only the relevant statistics from the discipline of Arts & Humanities in which 3584 journals are recorded by the UGC is being discussed.
4. In 1950 when India became a sovereign democratic republic the following fourteen languages were recognized in the Eighth Schedule of *The Constitution of India* (Article 344 (1) and 351): Assamese,

Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Later, the following eight more languages were added taking the toll to 22 languages: Sindhi (21st Amendment Act, 1967), Konkani, Nepali and Manipuri (71st Amendment Act, 1992) and Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali (92nd Amendment Act, 2004). The following thirty eight languages are also making their claim for inclusion into the list: Angika, Banjara, Bazika, Bhojpuri, Bhoti, Bhotia, Budelkhandi, Chattisgarhi, Dhatki, English, Garhwali (Pahari), Gondi, Gujjar/Gujjari, Ho, Kachachhi, Kamtapuri, Karbi, Khasi, Kodava (Coorg), Kok Barak, Kumaoni (Pahari), Kurak, Kurmali, Lepcha, Limbu, Mizo (Lushai), Magahi, Mundari, Nagpuri, Nicobarese, Pahari (Himachali), Pali, Rajasthani, Samabalpuri/ Kosali, Shaurseni (Prakrit), Siraiki, Tenyidi and Tulu. A decision on the report submitted by a committee constituted under the chairmanship of Mr Sitakant Mahapatra in 2003 for the purpose is pending with the government. (Retrieved from <http://mha1.nic.in/par2013/par2014-pdfs/ls-180214/356.pdf>)

5. A Bench of Justices **Madan B Lokur** and **Deepak Gupta** has set aside a judgment of the Himachal Pradesh High Court because of the convoluted English used in the judgment, Retrieved from <https://barandbench.com/convoluted-english-forces-supreme-court-set-aside-himachal-pradesh-high-court-judgment/>

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