



One Nation One Language

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This article is based on **“Can Hindi unite India?”** which appeared in The Hindu on 20/09/2019. It analyses the promotion of Hindi language as a factor of unification of India.

Recently, on the occasion of **Hindi Divas**, the Union Minister of Home Affairs held that if one language can do the work of uniting the country, then it is the most spoken language, Hindi. The remark was made in the context of **preserving India's ancient culture and English being an imposed colonial legacy**.

This has revived the **debate of imposition of Hindi** under the name of **One nation One language**.

Background

- The Constituent Assembly of India adopted **Hindi written in Devnagari Script** along with **English as the official language of the country** on **September 14, 1949**, under **Article 343(1)**.
- **Article 351** gives power to the Union Government to issue a directive for the development of the Hindi language.
- The Hindi language is one of the 22 languages of the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India**.
- The imposition of Hindi was contested in many non-Hindi states, especially in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Violent protests broke out in southern India leading the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to introduce the **‘Official Languages Act’ in 1963**, which assured the **continuation of English along with Hindi as the official language** of the Union of India.
- Anti-Hindi protests of 1965 marked an important turn in India’s official language policy. The **‘Official Languages Act’** was amended in 1967 guaranteeing the **"virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism"** for all official purposes of the Union.
- Given the linguistic diversity of India, **there is no national language** as all the states are free to decide their own official languages.

Should Hindi Become Lingua Franca for India?

- The 2011 Census listed 1,369 'mother tongues' in the country. Hindi is only one among them.
- Hindi has largely been **influenced** by Persian — and then English, among other languages.
 - Also, when the languages were enumerated, **Hindi subsumed Bhojpuri**, which is spoken by a little over five crore people. **The Census has put Bhojpuri as a subset of Hindi.**
 - So, it may be true that Hindi is spoken by a large number of people in India, but it is equally true that it is not spoken by a majority of Indians.
 - The fact that Constitution, which has made space for 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule, upholds the language diversity principle.
- It is ironic that our animosity towards English makes us blind to the fact that the **idea of a singular nation: One nation, One language, is itself a European Idea**, whereas India always believed in **Unity in diversity**.

This idea is not in tune with our history, culture and civilisation as India is a **multilingual society**.
- Many leaders in the national movement visualized a special role for Hindi. Most of them supported **Hindusthani, a mixed language**, not the pure Hindi being pushed today. But all of them were clear that it **could not be imposed**.
- Today nearly **35% of people are migrating** daily for work. Therefore, clubbing together multilingual spaces with monolingual habitats is **not fair to the large cities today**.
- 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.
- If there is a mechanical and monolithic idea of unity followed by any entity, such an entity generally generates great **hostility beyond its immediate borders**. This may affect the relationship with India's neighbouring countries.
- In neighbouring Bangladesh – then East Pakistan – the language movement against the **imposition of Urdu on Bengali** speakers was a key driver of Pakistan **splitting into two nations**.
- English is the language that can be linked to India's successes in modern sectors such as IT.

Way Forward

- **Rethink the three-language policy**, which exists just on paper now.
 - Three-language formula envisaged by **Kothari Commission** sought that, Hindi should be introduced in non-Hindi-speaking States from an early stage and the Hindi-speaking States should introduce a non-Hindi Indian language.
 - However, most non-Hindi speaking States did introduce Hindi, unfortunately, the Hindi-speaking States **bypassed** the requirement to teach a non-Hindi language (preferably a South Indian language) **through Sanskrit**.
 - The three-language formula is a sound formula, but the choice of language (s) must be left with the citizens and not the Government.
- Moreover, there are better ways to foster national unity than imposing a language.
 - Creating a **common market** for the country, through a single, simplified tax structure.
 - Fostering a **single labour market**.
- A united nation has to have space for diversity. India is united in its diversity. Diversity is a great philosophical idea and should never be seen as a cultural burden.

Drishti Mains Question

Should Hindi be Lingua franca for India? Comment.