

An Analysis of Language Policies in India: Post-Independence Era to NEP 2020

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Abstract

This research paper analyses language policies introduced by Indian government ranging from the post -independence era to the latest policy document i.e., NEP 2020 with special reference to mode of instruction in education. The paper opens the discussion with constitutional provisions for languages followed by University Education commission 1952, Kothari Commission 1966, NPE 1986, National Knowledge Commission 2009 and closes the discussion with NEP 2020. A large number of mother tongues with additional language English always keeps the policy makers in conflicts for which language to be medium of instruction in schools.

Keywords: *Language Policy, NEP 2020, Mother Tongue, Official Language, Regional Language, Three Language Formula, Education Commission, English Medium of Education, Mode of Instruction.*

Introduction

A nation is identified through its diversified culture and its people practising those cultures in the form of language, rituals, arts, literature etc. In India, its language, culture and values inherent in diversified Indian cultures make the country *Incredible India!* Language is defined as “a system of communication used by people living in a particular country” (Cambridge dictionary). With 1652 mother tongues (GOI, 2001) India exhibits a rich history of languages. Here, Sanskrit is considered as ‘*Dev Language*’. Hindi- the mother tongue along with official language. English is a foreign language but of utmost

importance; for most of the citizens with different languages like Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi, Marathi, etc., it acts as a link language. This affluent linguistic heritage of India necessitated the utmost and cautious planning of language policy after independence.

Language Policies in India

The constituent assembly conceded a lot of time discussing the ‘would be national language’ for the country but due to the affluent linguistic heritage of ours, the assembly failed to finalize a single language as a national language. Article 343(1) of the Indian Constitution recognizes Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, since it

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is spoken by most of the citizens. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020, p. 145). And English was recommended to be continued as an official language with certain conditions. As per Article 343 (2) of the constitution, ...for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement: Provided that the President may, during the said period, by order 5 authorise the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals in addition to the international form of Indian numerals for any of the official purposes of the Union (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020, p. 145). Article 348 states that the Supreme Court and the High Courts shall use the English language in their proceedings, and the authoritative texts of Acts, Bills, etc. of the legislatures shall also be in the English language (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020, p.147). By the statement, it was again ensured that even in independent India English will remain at its significant position. However, it was not a piece of cake to replace English by an Indian language for multiple purposes at that time, but the constitution was determined

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to afford the owing respect to Hindi language. As per Article 351, the Union government is responsible for promoting the use of Hindi, developing it so that it can be used to express all aspects of India's composite culture, and enriching it by adopting, without compromising its essence, the forms, styles, and expressions used in Hindustani and other languages of India listed in the Eighth Schedule. It should also draw primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages for its vocabulary, as needed or desired. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020, p. 148). At one hand constitutional provisions prepared the ground for making laws and at another hand educational commissions were also formed by the first independent Indian government to regulate the state's education system. The first important commission, post-independence, was 'University Education commission, 1948'. It was appointed by the government of India in 1948 under the chairmanship of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The commission was single minded to proffer the due glory to Indian languages without overlooking the practical issues of using a language, so it was recommended that the mode of instruction for higher education should be replaced by an Indian language as soon as possible, but not Sanskrit. This is because Sanskrit is a very complex

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language that is difficult to learn. It is also not widely spoken in India, so it would not be practical to use it as the medium of instruction for higher education. (Ministry of Education, 1963, p. 284). The commission decided not to abolish English from the curriculum because it is a rich language with a vast literature, both humanistic and technical. They argued that it would be unwise to give up English on emotional grounds, as this would cut us off from the ever-growing pool of knowledge and ideas that is available in English. (Ministry of Education, 1963, p. 283). The choice of a language for instruction was a difficult one, as there were strong arguments for both Indian languages and English. English was seen as a connecting language for different states, but Indian languages were seen as being more relevant to the students' culture and heritage. The report stated that no other problem had caused more controversy among educationists, and that the issue was so emotional that it was difficult to discuss objectively. ((Ministry of Education, 1963, p. 266). The Commission acknowledged three key languages: the regional language, the federal language, and English. It made several recommendations for the development of a language policy for the nation, particularly for higher education.

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In 1952, the Government of India established the Secondary Education Commission to restructure the secondary education system in the country. The commission acknowledged that one learns better in one's own language and for this advancement of students, it recommended, Mother-tongue or the regional language should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the Secondary school stage, subject to the provision that for linguistic minorities special facilities should be made available on the lines suggested by the Central Advisory Board of Education (Ministry of Education, 1962, p. 59). Referring to the Middle school stage students, the commission recommended them to study two languages without setting up the study of official language as a burden. "Every child should be taught at least two languages, and English and Hindi should be introduced at the end of the junior basic stage. However, no two languages should be introduced in the same year." (Ministry of Education, 1963, p. 59).

At the high and higher secondary level, the commission recommended that students in high school and higher secondary school should study two languages. The first language should be the student's mother tongue or a regional language. The second language could be Hindi, English, a

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modern Indian language other than Hindi, a modern foreign language other than English, or a classical language.

So, the major focus remained on the study of the mother tongue and not on a language which is considered an alien's language for the students. Whether it is a matter of learning a subject in a particular language or learning the language itself, the commission was never obligatory in its recommendations, exclusively in the context of Hindi or English.

In 1964, the Kothari Commission recommended to the state governments to adopt, and strongly implement the Three Language Formula:

- Language 1: The student's mother tongue or a regional language.
- Language 2: Hindi, the official language of the union or English, the associate official language.
- Language 3: A modern Indian or foreign language, other than the student's mother tongue or regional language, and other than the medium of instruction (GOI, 1966).

The commission's modified three language formula takes into account the importance of mother tongue and regional languages in India. It also emphasizes the need to continue studying English as a foreign language. Since English is a foreign language for both Hindi and non-Hindi

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speakers in India, studying it as a second language in both regions can help to ensure equal opportunities for everyone.

As earlier, due to the recommendations of the Secondary education commission, regional language was already adopted as a mode of learning at school level, now the Kothari commission appreciated it and further recommended to adopt regional languages increasingly at higher level of education too. The commission was committed to developing regional languages, believing that it was an essential step towards improving the quality of education. (GOI, 1966). The commission's concern for the regional language is quite clear in the following **Statement**

Energetic action is needed to produce books and literature, particularly scientific and technical, in the regional languages. This should be regarded as a specific and imperative responsibility of the universities; and the UGC should provide general guidance and allot adequate funds for the programme (GOI, 1966, p. 34).

The recommendations to develop Indian languages turned into a policy document in the form of NPE 1968 which readdressed the necessity by calling it an essential condition for educational and cultural development (Ministry of Education, 1968, p. 39). It was further argued that

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without language education, the creative energies of the people would not be released, the standards of education would not improve, knowledge would not reach the people, and the gap between the intelligentsia and the masses would persist. (Ministry of Education, 1968). The three-language formula persisted in the epicentre of the document. This persistence to develop regional language and to implement three-language formula got more intensified with the next policy on education by Indian government i.e., NPE 1986, by identifying the challenges: There are a number of challenges that are likely to be faced when implementing a language education policy that includes a variety of mother tongues. These challenges include the administrative and financial feasibility of providing instructional facilities for all of these languages, as well as the difficulty of using some tribal languages as media of education. (Ministry of Education, 1986, p. 149). Mother tongue mode of instruction at higher level of education was one of the key concerns in this policy. However, it was already implemented at the University stage but was not applauded as described in the document, 7000 university level textbooks have been produced by the State agencies and some universities with the assistance of the Government of India. The off-take of these books is not satisfactory.

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Consequently, large unsold stocks of books have accumulated' in the States, the main reasons being (a) preparation and production of these books has not synchronised with the universities' decision to switch over to modern Indian languages; (b) university teachers having received education through English find it difficult to teach through the Indian languages; (c) unlike the school stage, control over prescription of textbooks is not tight, with the result that, for various reasons, book produced by private publishers get generally recommended; and (d) Indian language-medium courses are generally not popular with students because of the lack of professional comparability and poor employment potential" (Ministry of Education, 1986, p. 150). The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 identified a number of challenges to language education in India and outlined some specific actions that could be taken to address these challenges. These actions included:

1. *Preparing and producing reference books in modern Indian languages on a larger scale:* This would help to make reference materials available in a wider range of languages, making it easier for students and researchers to access information.

2. *Orientation of university teachers:* This would help to ensure that university teachers are familiar with the challenges of teaching in a multilingual context and have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so effectively.

3. *Translation of textbooks, reference books from English into Indian languages:* This would make educational materials more accessible to students who do not speak English as their first language.

4. *Regular review and monitoring of the effort:* This would help to ensure that the implementation of these actions is effective and that any challenges that arise are addressed promptly. (Ministry of Education, 1986). It also didn't find the implementation of three-language formula satisfactory; consequently, identified the major deficiencies and planned for specific actions:

(i) The Central Government should continue to assist the non-Hindi speaking States for the appointment of Hindi teachers. (ii) The pattern of Government of India's assistance should be restored to 100 per cent of the approved expenditure on the appointment of Hindi teachers as was available till 1978-79. (iii) On the pattern of the scheme for appointment of Hindi teachers in non-Hindi speaking States cent

per cent assistance should be given to Hindi speaking States for the appointment of modern Indian language teachers, preferably teachers of South Indian languages, as the three-language formula suggests. (iv). Apart from establishing teacher training institutions for training of Hindi and modern Indian language teachers in States, facilities for training of language teachers need to be augmented and improved in existing teacher training colleges. (v). The Ministry's language institutions should be strengthened to undertake programmes facilitating teaching of languages, particularly research in methodology of teaching languages and experimentation in the use of computers and new communication technologies (Ministry of Education, 1986, p. 152). Translation of books and preparing bilingual dictionaries were some other important concerns of the document. Agencies like National Book Trust and Sahitya Academy were assigned with the work. Later, National Knowledge Commission 2009 laid more emphasis on translation playing an important function in making obtainable knowledge to varied linguistic groups (EPSI, 2009). Here, by translation, the commission didn't mean only translating literary works but text from different areas. As it says,

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These would include translation of pedagogic materials at all levels, especially in the sciences and social sciences, translation of content- as e-governance applications become increasingly localised and ubiquitous, and also different types of translation both human and machine aided (EPSI, 2009, p. 18). Set up of the National Translation Mission was the brain-child of the very commission.

National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is the latest policy on education which persisted in the previous language policy of three language formula. For medium of instruction, the policy again sustained the preference of regional language medium of instruction to English medium education, exclusively for lower classes of schooling. The use of the child's home language or mother tongue as the medium of instruction is strongly encouraged until at least grade 5, and preferably until grade 8 or beyond. (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 13). Along with mother tongue, the policy favours the promotion of Sanskrit. Publishing in these languages may enrich resources. Printed materials like books, journals and magazine helps expanding and continuing the old Indian tradition and culture. Appointing efficient language

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teachers is another agenda of NEP. NEP promises to create high quality programmes and degrees in Translation, Artefact Conservation, Art, Archaeology, Web Design, and Graphic Design within the higher education system (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 54).

Conclusion

After going through the recommendations of various education policies, we may conclude that our educationists, linguists and policy makers have continuously promoted Indian languages through their policies. The three-language formula advocates for the use of three languages in education: the mother tongue, English, and another Indian language. The policy was first proposed in the 1960s and has been implemented in varying degrees since then. It has been praised for its potential to promote linguistic diversity, cultural understanding, and national integration. Mother tongue medium of education has always been chosen over the English medium of education. Yet the challenges while implementing the recommendations remain the same over years. The nation is struggling almost with the same language issues like lack of qualified teachers as well as lack of standardized curricula. Implementing mother tongue-based education can also be costly, as it requires the development of new textbooks, teacher

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training, and other resources. There are also socio-political factors that can hinder the implementation of mother tongue-based education. For example, in some regions, there may be a history of conflict between different language groups. This can make it difficult to agree on a single language to be used as the medium of instruction. In case of English medium of Education when children start school, they are already proficient in their native language. They have a vocabulary for everyday objects and activities. At school, they are introduced to a new language for abstract concepts and ideas. This can create a separation in their minds, with one compartment for everyday language and another for academic language. Despite continuous emphasis on promoting Indian languages India has lost over 220 languages in the last 50 years alone, (Ministry of Education, 2020) which shows why our language policies need some reconsideration.

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