CHAPTER 8

THE DILEMMA OF THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM

Rajaji has been accused of changing his policy regarding the 'official' and 'national' language problem on the ground that he showed a clear cut difference between the position he held during the Pre-Independence period and what he supported after Independence regarding the compulsory introduction of Hindi in India as the 'official' language. His earlier position, in support of introducing Hindi in schools, agitated the anti-Hindi group in the South and his later opposition to the introduction of Hindi as the 'official' language irritated the pro-Hindi group. A little analysis of his ideas will reveal that the supposed contradiction in his stand emanates from a wrong understanding of what he stood for.

8.1 Arguments for Hindi:

A brief account of the Hindi-English struggle in India in its early period will give us an idea as to what extent Rajaji was right or wrong in his apparently changing policy. The elements of the alleged controversy are present in the very introduction of Hindi into the scene, which, Rajaji, in his later years felt it necessary to expose in order to throw more light on the problem
and educate the politicians belonging to the opposing camps.

Hindi in the pattern of its origin as a language, as such a hybrid as English, is evolved for the convenience of people, drawing some of the useful elements from Persian and Sanskrit. Its present name was given to it by people who were not very much committed to the Indian culture.

The word 'Hindi' was for the first time used by Khushroo for the language. And a galaxy of Muslim writers after Khushroo have used this word not only for the indigenous form of the language but for the Persianized form of it. Nasir Agha of Khurasan who was born in 1177 Hijri, gave the same 'Divan-i-Hindi' to the collection of poems written in a language which would generally be called Urdu today. The well known poet Mir of Delhi used the expression 'Hindi' for the language which he employed for his poems. Hindi, like Hind, derived from 'Hind' does not belong to any community or religion. 1

At the insistence of Gandhiji and also in line with the Nehru-Report-constitution which adopted Hindi as the State language and by acceptance of a majority of the rank and file of the Congress Party, Hindi was accepted as the national language before Independence, without giving much thought to the consequences of such a policy.

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A search for national and cultural identity, which was very much required then, and a growing hatred towards the designing and scheming Britishers, led the national leaders to accept Hindi which showed the prospect of becoming a larger vehicle for communicating to the masses of India. This sentiment was expressed by Gandhiji as can be seen from the following passage:

In my opinion, the existing system of education is defective, apart from its association with an utterly unjust government, in three most important matters:

1. It is based upon foreign culture to the almost entire exclusion of indigenous culture.

2. It ignores the culture of the heart and the hand and confines itself simply to the head.

3. Real education is impossible through a foreign medium.

Regarding the script and also the freedom of choice we have the following view voiced by Gandhiji in 1937:

Roman script cannot and should not be the common script of India. The rivalry can only be between Persian and Devanagari. Apart from its intrinsic merit the latter should be the common script for all India because most of the provincial scripts have their origin in Devanagari and it is far more by far the easiest to learn. At the same time no attempt whatsoever should be made to foist it upon Mussalmans.

and for that matter on those others who do not know it."

Rajaji, who was the 'Conscience-keeper' of Gandhiji took up the line of argument suggested by Gandhiji in all minuteness. In the introduction written by Rajaji to the first edition of Hindi-English Self Instructor (Madras: Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, February, 1928), he outlined his reasons for accepting Hindi as the language of India.

At the outset, the argument based on population was given. The population in India then was thirty crores. Nearly fourteen crores were speaking Hindi or dialects resembling Hindi in some form or other. The Bengali, Assamese and Oriya as a group were six crores. Marathi and Gujarathi were spoken by three crores of people. The Dravidian group consisting of Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu were spoken by three crores of people. Raising his argument upon statistical evidence of his time, Rajaji said that Hindi should be accepted as the language of the people.

The common elements existing between the Northern and Central India are such that, accepting Hindi would not

bring in any conscious change in the local languages. It is possible to have an intelligible communication between the Central and Northern parts of India and Hindi claims to be the best candidate to be the lingua franca to be accepted over a large part of India.

In the case of Bengali and the Western groups, though their languages are different, it is possible to accept that they can gain a working knowledge of Hindi.

Rajaji was not blind to the problem of the difficulty of the South Indians in learning Hindi. But if the country were to operate under a common goal, the Southerners would be bound to accept and learn Hindi at least in the interests of their own future.

A common language is a must for a country, whether it is English or Hindi. The deliberations of the Central Assembly and the transactions of the high officers and others exercising authority cannot be in an alien language. High office and authority cannot be in the sole possession of the educated minority leaving the masses behind. As a friend of the poor, he argued that the people should have access to the transactions of the government and should be given a fair chance to participate in political affairs so that popular government becomes more efficient and meaningful bringing into effect the ideal of Democracy. Applying these principles, English cannot be the common medium. It
should be noted that at that time English was not spoken by so many as most of them were illiterates. So Rajaji felt Hindi was bound to be the language of the Central Government and the Legislative and also of the Provincial Governments in their dealings with each other and with the Government of India at the centre.

From the political point of view he took up the case of the South Indians and argued that, the Southerners should learn Hindi in order to avoid the disability of practically becoming disfranchised. He also indicated that after independence the educated men of the South would face political segregation if they continued to live without learning Hindi. He even went to the extent of saying that imposing English, for the sake of a minority, would weaken people's control over the government.

Culturally the South would be left as a dead branch, owing to lack of living contact through a common spoken language with the other people of India. More dependence upon English medium by the South Indians would be disadvantageous, for English should be seeping into the international sphere, as India progresses under its own programme for development.

A knowledge of Hindi, sufficient at least to speak, read and write would be advantageous in other fields as well. The increasing population with its added pressure for jobs
creates much stagnation among the educated people if they cannot move out to other places seeking business contacts and job opportunities.

Rajaji also added that his support was not at the cost of the regional languages or English. The status of English as an international medium of commercial and political ties was not left aside by Rajaji even then.

8.2 Method to be adopted to implement Hindi

The best way to introduce a language would be, according to Rajaji, in to allow the new language to grow naturally and to make it official. This view, backed by a sense of moderation, was mistaken by the pre-Hindi group at a later stage and the anti-Hindi section in the early period of the introduction of Hindi in schools. He believed in a slow and steady pace of change which would not leave much cultural lag among some of the sections. In 1965 Rajaji advised the Centre to be ready to wait for another fifteen years for the peaceful grafting of Hindi in the South on an official footing if only such a delay could maintain the harmony of our country.⁴ Hindi, he said, should be allowed to spread by its own weight through commerce and cultural contact. The technique of teaching Hindi

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should be such that the student should not feel the strain of learning a new language with all its numerous details of grammar or a strange vocabulary. He suggested that we should introduce interesting subjects of an absorbing nature, by learning which the students will unconsciously learn the principles of usage and grammar effortlessly. Before becoming an official language, Hindi should be allowed to develop from the school level so that the individual does not experience any difficulty in using Hindi.

True to his firm conviction regarding the introduction of Hindi, Rajaji, during his first tenure as the Premier of the Presidency of Madras (1937-39), introduced Hindi at the school level. He released his programme in the budget session for 1938-39, asking provision for the teaching of Hindi in 125 schools in the Presidency. It was only at the collegiate Union meeting of the Annakrishna Home that Rajaji declared his intention of making the study of Hindi compulsory, which drew bitter opposition and criticism from many. His compulsory approach to the teaching of Hindi in the first, second and third forms triggered a militant anti-Hindi Campaign and gradually took a menacing turn of charging Rajaji as one who was promoting anthesis. On the other hand his own colleagues like P.T. Krishnaswami dissuaded him and the English Government was not coming
forward openly to defend him. Much to the chagrin of people like At. Kom.V.S. Srinivasa Sastri he applied the C.L. Amendment Act on June 4, 1938. Even Dr. Subbaroyan, the Minister for Education, reacted by declaring the plan as impractical on grounds of its inevitable unpopularity at the public level. Unable to stand the onslaught of the situation a Government Communication was issued on June 9, 1938 (already much water has flown under the bridge), informing the people that the study and proficiency in Hindi as a subject would not interfere with the passing of examinations and the development of regional languages.  

We do not see any contradiction or deviation from the stand taken by Anaji. He believed in teaching Hindi prior to that of introducing Hindi as the 'official' language.

3.3 Practical advantages of learning Hindi:

Anaji referred to the benefits of learning Hindi in his introduction to the Hindi Self-Instructor. Even during the later years when he was protesting against the imposition of Hindi as the 'official' language, he did not belittle the value of studying Hindi by the Southerners.

He suggested that the study of Hindi by the Southerners would be considered 'vain' and 'just' if only they tried to understand what he actually meant by that.

The study of Hindi would be considered 'vise' for the following reasons: Learning the language of a neighbour is a sign of good-will and Hindi being the language of a number of our neighbours the South Indians should try to learn it. In trade and commerce, learning Hindi affords a practical advantage to people from the South. He referred to an example of a trader from the South trying to sell his goods in the North, who would find it very difficult to do business for the simple reason he does not know Hindi. Another practical problem facing the man who does not know Hindi is that he cannot go to North and offer his services in any office. With the increasing pressure of population in the South, large groups of people are moving to different parts of the country in search of jobs. Such a situation definitely calls for a working knowledge of Hindi, at least to the extent of communicating some of the simpler ideas required for our day-to-day existence. The critic may point out that a thinker like him should not indulge in such material arguments as the one given above. But we have to understand that Rajaji only wanted people to progress through an integral approach.

Rajaji considers it 'just' to learn Hindi as it brings unity among different types of people, for they gain a common identity through a common medium used by a majority
of the people. Being the language of a sizeable majority, Hindi occupies an honorific place in the shaping of our culture. Being the 'National Language', the South Indians should learn to honour it in order to gain cultural identity and be 'just' citizens. Their sense of justice can come to the surface by this sort of respect shown to the 'National Language'.

The two concepts of wisdom and justice introduced into the language problem show the double-sided solution offered by Rajaji in enthusing people to the study of Hindi at two levels, namely that of a lower pragmatic level and a higher ethical and legal level.

8.4 'National' and 'Official' Language

During the period between 12.9.1949 and 14.9.1949 (both days inclusive) the Hindi-English question was a major issue of the Constituent Assembly debates. Sri Gopalaswami Iyengar moved a resolution which aimed at giving more time for the introduction of Hindi and the continued use of English at the official level for some more time unless otherwise authorized by the President of India.

The Secondary Education Commission (1952) headed by Dr. A.L. Mudaliar advocated the continuance of English on the strength of its importance at higher levels of learning and technology. The Commission collected data

from other countries like France, Japan, Federal Republic of Germany, Egypt and U.S.S.R. It was found that English was taught in these countries as a compulsory foreign language from school level. They found that English occupied a place of honour in Japan.

In the meanwhile the Akhil Bharatiya Anand Talao Jeemonian passed resolutions boycotting the English language and segregating people speaking or supporting English both in business as well as political affairs.7

Act 351 of the Indian Constitution mentioned that a central language would replace English for all practical purposes from the 26th January 1965, which strengthened and hastened the introduction of Hindi at the official level with all sentiment. This triggered much wreckage in the form of language riots in many districts of the South.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66), of which Dr. Kothari was the Chairman, stressed the importance of English in the field of higher education and its place in building international contacts.

The Congress Working Committee came out with the 'Three Language Formula' on 3,6,1965 as a face-saving device to satisfy the sentiments of the different peoples.

Following the 1967 elections Bihar drifted on its own and the Governor of Bihar issued a notification giving concessions to the students that failure in English would not affect their success in passing the examinations.  

The hatred for English grew so much that even in the use of international numerals people lost sight of truth. Bitter passions were exhibited in the House for the international numerals. Maulana Asad quenched the fire by informing the House that these numerals are India's own, as they were taken to Arabia from India in the 8th Century A.D. in the reign of Al Mansur, from where it moved to Europe. Latin too had no numerals of their own.  

In short, the Indian sub-continent was plagued by arguments and counter arguments advanced by the intelligentsia trying to maintain the status of English on one hand and the politicians trying to survive by investing upon the mass sentiment on the other hand. Allegories like 'one language, one nation', blinded people to such an extent that animosity developed between the opposite camps.  

The second phase of Bajaji's reaction to the introduction of Hindi in the country started with the background mentioned. As a lover of peace he wanted to clarify matters.


with his subtle logic, which is not as easily perceived at a first glance. Just as the Southerners were advised to learn Hindi to be 'wise' and 'just' citizens, Bajaji advised the pro-Hindi group to understand the meaning of two important concepts namely, 'national' and 'official', in order to bring a sense of moderation among the pro-Hindi groups.

Hindi, he said, possessed the claim to be the 'national' language of India as Hinduism is the 'national' religion of India. Just as people belonging to different faiths in India ought to understand Hinduism and learn to respect it, the people speaking various tongues ought to understand and respect Hindi. This does not mean that Hindi should be considered as a fit candidate for becoming the 'official' language of India.

'National' goes with factual majority but 'official' in true democracy as distinguished from totalitarianism should not go with numerical majorities but with even-handed justice to all, to the smaller as well as to the bigger States and communities. What is 'national' need not always be 'Official'. Deepavali, is a 'national' festival, but it is not an 'official' festival, although we may grant a number of holidays to suit all sections. 10

While Bajaji strongly protested against making Hindi the 'official' language of India, he equally recommended the inclusion of Hindi in school curriculum.

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Just as English is compulsory in the European countries because of its importance, Hindi also gains a similar status in all parts of India. If this point is understood, the injustice of imposing Hindi as the 'official' administrative language should not be perpetrated by the pre-Hindi groups.

He pleaded for the necessary amendment to be made in the Constitution to maintain English as the official link between the states and the centre to avoid much waste. He referred to the approach made by the Government as illogical for the following reason:

If for any political or party reasons or reasons of fact, in view of local political conditions or even all-India policy, the Government does not impose the study of Hindi in schools, how the same Government indulges in the idea of imposing Hindi as the official language for the inter-state or Central purposes?!!

The distinction between 'official' and 'national' was made by Bajaj, only to show how the authorities erred in taking hasty moves without following a systematic approach. There is no controversy among politicians to call Hindi as the 'national' language, but to call it an 'official' language there is such protest. This is illogical on the part of the politicians. Hindi can be a 'national' language without being an official language. That is national can't be an imposition but anything 'official' is an imposition based on the argument

of the majority in democracy. He suggested that much of
the confusion could be solved by allowing English to stay
as an associate medium by saying, 'English and/or Hindi',
meaning both or either, shall be the inter-State and
Central official languages.

The question of 'official' language, according to
Rajaji, consists of two parts. The first part deals with
the 'official' language within the states and the second
one deals with inter-State language and that of the
link between the States and the Centre.

As for the official language within the states
the principle of using the language of the common man is
applied and naturally the choice falls on the regional
media. To serve as a link between different states
Rajaji feels that English is by far the best and utilitarian.
The whole problem arises when it comes to the question of
communicating between the Centre and the states.

Without any prejudice or disadvantage to any of
the states, Rajaji suggested the use of English as the
'official' language of the Union.

It may be argued that the people speaking Hindi
form two-fifths of the population of the country and that
Hindi should be the official language on grounds of use
by the majority. This argument is untenable for three-fifths
of the population is divided among the non-Hindi speaking people, which is definitely more in number than the two-fifths of the population speaking Hindi.

Rajaji advances another argument for the rejection of Hindi to serve as the Union official language. The Hindi speaking people are not spread all over India, but are a compact mass occupying the U.P. and the Central region of India. Accepting Hindi as the official language would affect the interests of the non-Hindi speaking people who are scattered over a wider area than the Hindi speaking people.

As Hindi does not fulfill all the requirements for becoming the official language of the Union, the best alternative is English. In the case of English it has been with us for the past two hundred years and has already been well-established through history and cultural contacts, and on top of all we can use our freedom only by making appeals and protests through the English language.

Why should we throw away what we have? Do we not have English and hold it in free-held possession? Do we pay any tithe or tax on it to any foreigners? Is it not a valuable asset? Has it not a high, a very high foreign exchange value? Surely English is much more valuable than the articles we seek to make and export to countries for earning foreign exchange. 12

Some of the pro-Hindi groups considered it patriotic to reject an alien language, which Gandhiji also voiced to a certain extent (refer to an earlier citation), for which, Anaji simply retorted by saying that, following such a logic would mean giving up the whole administrative system given to us by the English including innovations like the railways, the telegraph and so on. A recent author strengthened Anaji's views by saying:

The slogan 'one nation, one language', is pretty universal in resurgent countries. But India has a composite culture, its genius branching off in many directions; English is historically attached to India and has created impact on her culture. More than that she has borne her culture outside her frontiers. It would be cheating India's destiny if English were denied its place.

The pro-Hindi group has another argument in favour of Hindi to the exclusion of English. Their contention is that if English could be learned, why not the Southerners learn Hindi also. Anaji answered that it is uprooting a fully grown tree to provide for a small sapling. He gives a psychological approach by asking the Northern groups to learn and master Tamil in a time limit of a little more than fifty years. Learning a language, he considers, is a psychological process requiring training from childhood.

English has been in the curriculum and each generation added to the background of the child in learning the same by regular use—the example of children voluntarily using English out of interest in Cricket by imitating the language of the commentators.

In addition to the arguments given so far Rajaji refers to 'Commonsense' and the 'law of nature' in deciding the most suitable language for official use. He referred to some of the successful journals and magazines printed in the English language and challenged if the editors could publish them in Hindi without running the risk of losing circulation. By a law of nature, English, he said, has a greater survival value in trade and commerce by being the voluntary choice of the people.

5.5 The Injustice to the

The compulsory introduction of Hindi as the official language will render the non-Hindi speaking people second class citizens in transacting official proceedings at the political level. Just as the people not knowing English suffered in the hands of the English during the pro-Independence days, the non-Hindi people have to lose their individuality in the post-Independence India if Hindi becomes the compulsory official language. The Hindi speaking people would be

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looked upon as a superior sort of people playing a dominant role in the governance of India. To be ruled by a people speaking different language is identical, psychologically, with race domination.

That the official language should be the language spoken by the people is agreeable on principle. But in the application of this principle we forget the fact that compulsory imposition is unjust in a free country committed to democratic rule.

Majority rule is democracy only when majorities and minorities are evenly mixed up. But an isolated majority cannot claim the right of tyranny over a quite distinct block that lives far apart and is yet an integral part of the whole. 15

We can take the example from other countries where this principle is applied. By article 127 of the South African Constitution, English and Afrikaners were accepted by the Union. In Finland Swedish is only a minority but both are accepted as the official languages. In Canada English and French are given an equal status. In Belgium Flemish and French are accepted for all official purposes.

6.6 Inconsistencies and reasons

There is a general charge that Kajaji was not consistent in his language policy. It is said that he was responsible for the compulsory introduction of Hindi

during his first term of office as the Prime Minister of Madras and that he himself protested against the introduction of Hindi at a later stage disturbing the hornet's nest.

It is to be noted that Rajaji was not against the learning of Hindi. A subtle distinction between learning Hindi and using it for official purposes should be made to clarify matters. As for learning Hindi as the national language or as a language for transacting business with our neighbours, Rajaji repeatedly advised the Southerners to learn Hindi, even in the midst of the strong protests he launched against the introduction of Hindi as the official language. "Let me make it clear that even now I am, as before I was, for Hindi being made an important part of the students' curriculum all over India."16 The difference is only the methodology in implementation and the status given to Hindi by the authorities. Prime Minister Nehru assured the non-Hindi speaking people that Hindi would not be imposed till such time it is accepted by the non-Hindi people. The inconsistency lies not with Rajaji but with the pre-Hindi groups.

Even taking that we ignore the difference between the concepts 'official' and 'national' and charge Rajaji

with inconsistency we have the following reply from him:

At the time—that was 40 years ago...I had recommended strongly the study of Hindi. It was not a question then of official language, it was only a question of study. Is it my fault, is it wrong on my part, that 40 years ago I saw what was to come? ...If people had taken my advice then, they would be able now to meet the situation. I advised them to take to a study of Hindi. But what happened? They would not learn it. They refused to learn it. They were emotional. 17 People could not understand the advice given by him when he wanted them to learn Hindi.

He claims his right for protest from another front as follows:

An arrangement about the official language which would have been tolerable in one kind of government would be insufferable in another scheme of government such as now prevails. Central Government in these days could have been conducted in Greek or Latin or Sanskrit without much inconvenience. 18

It may be said that his association with the British administration created a mild bias in favour of English, which he expressed by his support for the retention of English. He only declared that he was not a fanatic of English language which can be understood from the following statement:

The English language sits on our thoughts, even as this academic robe sits upon me. This robe may be beautiful and it may sometimes serve to protect you against the weather, but it is on the

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18. Preface, My Inconsistencies, p. 3.
whole an inconvenience; in the same way, the English language may be beautiful, but it sits heavily on our thoughts and does not let them grow, or move about freely. 19

In **My Inconsistency**, he explained that he was consistent throughout and even in case it were to be misconstrued for inconsistency, he defended his right to be inconsistent for the benefit of the people and for the cause of justice.

I claim that my present views are right and if my previous views were different they should be rejected. Did not the Congress Party leaders solemnly frame the fundamental rights in 1950 and in the course of only thirteen years have they not made drastic changes, the climax of which will be the 17th amendment now in Parliament? If the Congress Party leaders have the right to change so fundamentally, may I too not claim the same kind of liberty without trying to prove my consistency? 20

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