3.1 Introduction

In trying to define and categorize linguistic conflicts, the first aspect that strikes us is that no two instances of language based conflict can be equated. Their natures are different as are the inherent causes. As has been pointed out in the first chapter that though language along with race, religion, history etc. form the primordial collectivities, the factors that give rise to a conflict situation could be quite different. They could have their base in religion, geographical contiguity or otherwise, socio-economic reasons, migrations past and recent which may acquire nativist overtones, etc: another factor which need not necessarily be a cause but is nevertheless extremely important, is an enlightened and politically oriented leadership with superior strategic and organizational capacity. They can infuse is the disoriented masses, a sense of relative deprivation or superiority along with motivation to agitate for their rights.

In this chapter an insight is attempted into language conflicts in India, with the help of three separate case
studies, which would help in explaining the diverse nature and motivation behind language conflicts in the country. These case studies are preceded by an account of historical factors which led to state formation in India on a linguistic basis and thus laid open the ground for linguistic regionalism and consequent conflicts.

3.2 The Historical Background

Post-independence India has experienced various types of conflict, ethnic, religious, linguistic etc. A majority of the language tensions leading to conflict situations have had their roots in the past, in situations not always linguistically oriented. During the colonial period, when administrative convenience and strategic considerations had topmost priority\(^1\), the colonial masters tailored language policies to their own convenieuce while paying lip-service to the welfare of their subjects. Though eminent Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy had championed the cause of English education in India, when 'Macaulay's Minutes'\(^2\) was passed in 1835, its main aim was the creation of a section of lower

\(^1\) Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1918, para 39.
level officials who would be instrumental in bridging the gaps in communication between the British officials and their Indian subjects.

The first mention of the linguistic principle by the British came in 1903 in a letter from Sir Herbert Risley, Home Secretary, Government of India to the Government of Bengal. In the decision to partition Bengal in 1905 as also during its annulment in 1911, the question of language figured prominently. However, it is common knowledge that the decision to partition Bengal was chiefly in pursuance of the British policy of 'divide and rule' which was applied to the politically conscious province of Bengal. In the garb of administrative convenience, the religious principle was applied. It may be noted that in Lord Curzon's Resolution of July 19, 1905 which provided for the territorial readjustments after the partition, three principles were applied. "Commercial considerations" was the guiding factor in the retention of Chhotanagpur under the Bengal Government; the 'linguistic principle' was mentioned in the transfer of certain Oriya speaking areas from the Central Provinces to Bengal; the principle of 'close contact' between the governor and governed was put forward to justify the

concentration of the typical Muhammadan population of Bengal in a separate province of East Bengal and Assam. 4

However, when the annulment came in 1911, the territorial readjustment was different. In 1912 Assam became a Chief Commissioner's Province, the eastern and western parts of Bengal was constituted into one whole, while Bihar, Orissa and the Chhotangpur region was constituted into a separate province. What is noteworthy in this territorial readjustment, was the altered demographic configuration of the Province of Bengal. 5 With Assam, Bihar and Orissa (all the three regions combined had a sizeable Bengali-Hindu population) separated from the newly constituted Province of Bengal, the Muslims acquired "a position of approximate numerical equality with or possibly a small superiority over the Hindus. 6 Thus the partition of Bengal and its subsequent annulment bring out clearly the interplay of religious and linguistic factors manifesting themselves in territorial reshuffling even way back in the early twentieth century (1905, 1912). The widespread and violent protests against the partition in Bengal may be cited as the first instance

4. Ibid., para 22.
5. Ibid., para 23.
of a linguistic agitation. Moreover the decision to partition Bengal clearly shows how language was made a hand-maid of administrative convenience and is an example of one of the various strategies employed for the perpetuation of British rule in India.

It was later, around 1918\textsuperscript{7} and again around 1930\textsuperscript{8}, that some British statesmen themselves perceived that the existing province-territorial set up was somewhat haphazard and required some sort of territorial readjustments based on more rational principles to make them more homogeneous and compact. The Indian Statutory Commission in its Report recommended the setting up of a Boundary Commission under a neutral chairman to look into this matter.\textsuperscript{9} This Commission also made certain recommendations.

Though the British policies and administrative strategies were to a large extent responsible for the shaping of the linguistic map of India, impetus also came from within the native population. This was later instrumental in bringing about the linguistic reorganization

\textsuperscript{7} Report of Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1918, para 246.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., para 38.
of states. The development of the regional languages or vernaculars had been a continuing process since the medieval period, but they had never been used as instruments of mass-mobilization till the late nineteenth century. With the coming of the British, Persian, the language of administration of the medieval courts had fallen into disuse and no common link-language for the whole country had yet emerged. English was till then understood only by a minuscule minority of the native population, namely the educated elite. However, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was one of escalating political consciousness. The Indian National Congress which was founded in 1885 launched a massive programme of mass-mobilization. Some of the educated young men started vernacular language newspapers most of which aimed at educating the masses on social and political issues. Many politically and socially conscious writers produced a substantial body of literature in the vernacular languages. On the other hand, leaders like Balgangadhar Tilak tried to educate and mobilize the masses about their past heritage and glory by reviving traditional festivals such as the Ganpati and Shivaji Festivals which made extensive use of the Marathi language. Some of the social reformers of the period also used the vernacular in

10. in the last decade of the nineteenth century.
reaching out to the masses. The groundwork was thus made for the eventual take off of, the vernacular/regional languages in the first half of the next century.

During these fledgling days of Indians nationalism, language was not used as an end in itself but as the means to an end. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the consciousness about language and identity crystallized and often became the central issue. The partition of Bengal partly bears out this point. The Indian National Congress while supporting the linguistic principle set up linguistic provinces for its own organisational purposes. Thus the Congress provinces of Bihar, Sindh and Andhra were constituted.11 Despite opposition from Dr. Annie Besant in 1917, the official Congress declaration to champion the cause of linguistic provinces came in 1920 at the Nagpur session.12 The Right to self-determination was later expressed by the Congress. Between the years 1928-1947 the Congress stand on this subject remained unchanged.

In the post-independence period, following partition, serious doubts crept in and the leaders were forced to

12. Ibid.
review their stand on the subject. On the recommendation of
the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, a
Linguistic Provinces Commission, otherwise known as the Dar
Commission was appointed\textsuperscript{13} to look into the feasibility of
creating the desired provinces of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala
etc. and fixing their boundaries. The Commission was also
required to go into the financial, administrative and other
consequences of this proposed exercise.

The Linguistic Provinces Commission was set up in June
1948 with S.K. Dar as the Chairman. In its report the
Commission, while making a strong case and in principle
supporting the idea of linguistic states, concluded that a
state of national emergency existed and other problems
required more immediate attention. The Report stated :
"Everything which helps the growth of nationalism has to go
forward and everything which throws obstacles in its way has
to be rejected... we have applied this test to the principle
of linguistic provinces also and judged by this list, in our
opinion, they fail and cannot be supported."\textsuperscript{14} Another
pertinent observation of the Commission was, "the formation

\textsuperscript{13} cited in India States Reorganization Report, para 58.

\textsuperscript{14} Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission, para 147.
of provinces on exclusively or even mainly on linguistic considerations is not in the larger interest of the Indian national and should not be taken in hand.\(^{15}\) The Dar Commission was chiefly concerned with the specific cases of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra.

The Dar Commission held that the formation of provinces, exclusively or even mainly on linguistic considerations would be inadvisable and in the formation of provinces topmost priority should be given to administrative convenience. "The homogenity of language should enter into consideration only as a matter of administrative convenience."\(^{16}\) The Dar Commission also listed certain criteria to be satisfied before a province could be formed. The pertinent ones were:

1. Geographical contiguity and absence of pockets and corridors.
2. Administrative convenience.
5. A large measure of agreement within its border among people speaking the same languages in regard to its

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., para 131.
formation, care being taken that the new province should not be forced by a majority on a substantial minority of people speaking the same language."17

The Report of the Dar Commission was the first warning bell sounded against the principle of linguistic reorganization of provinces. The leaders of the Congress Party which was then in power were in a quandary. On the one hand, they remained committed to their promises of linguistic provinces, a cause they had championed for almost three decades, on the other was the findings of the Dar Commission, diametrically opposite to their stand.

However, a country more or less ready for a linguistic redistribution exhibited widespread opposition to the Report and the Congress was forced to appoint its own committee in December 1948 to look into the matter. This Linguistic Provinces Committee otherwise known as the JVP Committee consisted of Jawaharal Nehru, Vallabh Bhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya. The Committee was to study the problem taking into account two important aspects. These were, (1) in the light of the Dar Commission Report and (2) the new situation prevalent after the attainment of independence. It

17. Ibid., para 10.
should be remembered that since the initial enthusiasm championing the cause of linguistic provinces, achievement of independence had also seen the partitioning of the country along religious lines.

The Report of the JVP Committee submitted in 1949, endorsed the recommendations of the Dar Commission. They felt that "the old Congress policy of having linguistic provinces can only be applied after careful thought being given to each separate case without creating serious administrative dislocation or mutual conflicts which would jeopardize the political and economic stability of the country."¹⁸

The JVP Committee was candid to acknowledge that "when the Congress had given its seal of approval to the general principle of linguistic provinces, it was not faced with the practical applications... had not considered all the implications."¹⁹ "Primary considerations must be security, unity and economic prosperity of India and every separatist and disruptive tendency should be vigoursly discouraged. It also accepted that "language was not only a binding force

¹⁹. Ibid., p.2.
but also a separating one."\(^{20}\)

The JVP Committee Report went on to add that "no question of rectification of boundaries in provinces of north India should be raised at the present moment whatever the merits of such a proposal might be." The Committee without naming language as the cause for disruption felt that 'forces of disruption and disintegration might be let loose which could seriously interfere with the progressive solution of economic and political difficulties.'\(^{21}\)

The JVP Committee Report was the second warning against the case for linguistic states and the first from within the Congress which had always supported the cause. Composite states were proposed as an alternative and this was supported by such eminent men as S.K. Patil, U.U. Giri, K.M. Munshi and others.

The Dar Commission Report was chiefly concerned with the southern states and Maharashtra, whereas the JVP committee made more specific analysis of the situation prevailing in the states of northern India.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.9.
However, despite these warnings sounded by high level expert committees, linguistic reorganization was carried out under the pressure of overwhelming public opinion and a forestal lobby for linguistic provinces. It may be noted that mass opinion was not in favour of linguistic provinces.

Thus it may be concluded that despite repeated warnings, the work of linguistic reorganization was undertaken. The feasibility of such an operation has been a matter of debate over the decades and continues to figure prominently, especially as regards questions and discussions pertaining to national integration and the composite culture of the country.

The pluralistic solutions which were hallmarks of the Nehruvian era were to a large extent responsible in seeing through the whole exercise. Pressure tactics were no doubt brought into play as was seen in the case of Potti Sitaramalu who undertook a fast unto death to see through the formation of the Andhra state. Such tactics to which the government usually succumbed, no doubt accelerated the pace of state and region formation on the basis of languages.
3.3 Case Studies

3.3.1 Tamil Nadu

The case of Tamil Nadu is perhaps the only one of its kind where a language agitation acquired secessionist overtones. The language agitations or more precisely the anti-Hindi agitations that rocked the state/region in the 1930s and 1960s were the more violent manifestations of a social movement that had been taking shape ever since the early decades of the present century. The protest was basically against the Brahmin/Aryan/North Indian domination of the non-Brahmin/Dravidian/South Indian identity. In the context of the language agitations, the imposition of the Sanskritized version of Hindi as the sole official language on the south was seen as a symbol of perpetuation of this dominance.

The Background

The period of Brahminization of the south took place in the early and medieval periods of Indian history, when some of the kings of South India invited Aryan-Brahmins from the north to settle in this region and help in the performance of religious rites. The Brahmins established their ritual leadership and popularised Brahmanical Hinduism, and
introduced religious, cultural and social institutions and the heirarchical caste system. A period of Sanskritization of the Dravidian languages followed and the society was divided along caste lines. In the initial stages, the new changes were probably embraced with alacrity. In the process of spread of religion, many Tamil deities were brought into the Hindu pantheon. Muruga became Subramaniam, son of Shiva. The were also marriages between Tamil and Aryan deities. The Brahmin ethic was accepted by the Tamilians and there was a consequent popularization of Brahmin rituals and ceremonials. The language of the devotional songs, chantings etc., was generally Sanskrit. Thus the effect was two fold. There was the popularization of the gods and the popularization of language. Ritual hegemony was practiced and priesthood was snatched from the Tamilians. Moreover shastric and Sanskritic knowledge was not imparted to the Tamilians for fear of loss of position.

A revolt began against this system. Their rose among the non-Brahmains, mystics who simplified the religious

23. B.N. Nair, The Dynamic Brahmin, Bombay, p.72
rites and translated Sanskrit poetry into the vernaculars. The Bhakti saints taught salvation though Bhakti or devotion, the Vaishnavites, Shaivites, Saiva Siddhantists all opposed Brahmanical supremacy.\(^{25}\) If a non-Brahmin reached great heights in scholarship or poetry he was most often given a fictitious Brahmin parenthood.

To retain their hereditary superior social position, the Brahmins attempted to divide the Tamil society along caste lines was class and land based prior to the coming of the Brahmins.\(^{26}\) In this, they were not very successful as some of the more powerful groups retained their positions despite Brahmin domination. Moreover, the type of caste hierarchy encountered here was different from that of north India. Kshatriyahood was not conferred on the Tamilians for fear of challenge to their social positions, instead all the Tamilians were taken in as Shudras and Untouchables.

On the economic front also, the Brahmins had become powerful. The kings gave gifts in the form of land grants called `Brahmadeya'. In course of time, these Brahmins became the landowners and challenged the traditional land-


\(^{26}\) B.N. Nair, op. cit. p.47.
owing group the Vellalas. Thus there developed mutual jealousy between these groups. The Brahmins also monopolized institutional learning as only they could read the Vedas and Upanishads.27

The British Period

It was in the early years of the twentieth century that the Brahmin non-Brahmin equation in South India underwent a change. Initially, it was the Brahmins who could reap the maximum benefits from the new opportunities opened up during the British period. As the Brahmins were already into the traditional formal learning, it was easier for them to enter the civil Services, legal professions, politics and academics.

The Brahmins also played a dominant role in Madras politics. It was only after the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1908-9, when the non-Brahmins could not participate in representative government as they failed to meet the property qualifications and could only be inadequately represented both in Provincial and Central Governments that they became aware of their handicapped political position.

It was this awareness of social and political domination that laid the foundation of the Dravidian movement. The awareness of a separate identity also came from outside in the shape of observations made by some European scholars. In fact it was the Europeans who coined the term 'Dravidianess'. Robert Caldwell in his work tried to portray the linguistic affinities of the Dravidian languages. He also came up with theories regarding the origin and nature of Tamil, and Dravidian culture. 28 The themes provided ammunition during the Dravidian movement. A logical extension of this theory was that Tamil culture had a separate existence prior to the coming of the Brahmins from North India. Thus the superior Brahmin position in South India was questioned, which was seen as inimical to Dravidian interest, especially that of the educated non-Brahmins.

The socio-political conditions of South India in the early twentieth century was conducive to the emergence of the non-Brahmin, Dravidian identity. The Brahmins had been the first to respond to Western education, and had reaped

its attendant benefits. As a result of this, their had been a further enhancement of their status. The non-Brahmin landowning classes in the rural areas were dissatisfied as they failed to gain a foothold in the urban professions and politics. This caused hatred and jealousy. The wealthy educated non-Brahmin, on moving to the urban areas faced a threat to their identity and rank which was dependent on rural-localized transactions. Even the upper strata amongst them were treated as Shudras. For this loss of status, they held the Brahmins responsible.

The conflict that ensured was styled as one between forward Brahmins and backward non-Brahmins. In actuality, it was one between elite-forward Brahmins and elite, forward non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmin, Dravidian identity was institutionalized with the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation which became the Justice Party in 1917.

The period between 1908-1915 was one of political ferment. The non-Brahmin candidate, T.M.Nair was defeated by the Brahmin candidate Srinivasa Sastry as member to the Imperial Legislative Council. This was attributed to the Brahmin dominance in the Madras Legislative Council. The

29. R. Mohanty, op. cit., p. 36. also see Urmila Phadnis - Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia, 1989, pp.135-137.
pro-non-Brahmin magazine, "The West Coast Spectator" came out with an article which read, "Home Rule will degenerate into Brahmin Rule,... the non-Brahmins though not inferior to the Triplacans Clique or the Mylapore cabal were not given opportunities to hold ranks in the Congress." 30

The consciousness of deprived non-Brahmins deprived Dravidian, united the non-Brahmins to fight for their rights under the banner of The South India Liberal Federation. The two non-Brahmin leaders, T.M. Nair and Tyagaraja Chetti were united and in 1916 The South India Peoples Association was formed. It published Tamil, Telegu and English newspapers. On December 20, 1916. The "Non-Brahmin Manifesto was released by the Association. It categorically emphasized the predominance of Brahmins in social, economic and educational spheres.

The South India Liberal Federation proclaimed that they were against the Brahmins who were in the Congress and Home Rule Movement and fighting the British. The South India Liberal Federation consequently allied itself to the British. 31 They envisaged self-government with British help

30. Cited in S. Saraswathi, Minorities in Madras State, Delhi, 1974, p. 65.
as otherwise their Shudra Status would remain. The Justice Party then sought separate electorates for non-Brahmin entry into politics and a memorandum to this effect was sent to the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London in 1919.\textsuperscript{32}

By the Government of India Act 1919, there was reservation for non-Brahmins in the Madras Legislative Council. By the John Meston Award, 28 of the total 98 seats were reserved of them. They also sought reservation in government services as also in engineering, forestry and teaching colleges and relaxation of examination qualifications.

To remove Brahminical superiority in social life a movement was launched to reject Aryanism, and ritual leadership. The founding of the Self Respect Movement in 1925 accelerated the process. It stood for liberation from cultural enslavement. It was more an expression of the poor and backward non-Brahmins as opposed to the rich landowning leadership of the Justice Party. The Self Respect League and the Justice Party came together in 1944 to form the Dravida Kazhgam. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker was responsible for the

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
The Self Respect League in 1925 started two magazines to put forth their viewpoint. They were 'Kudi Arasu' in Tamil and 'Revolt' in English. The Self Respect League rejected the Varnashrama Dharma and caste system, the Manusmriti and questioned the efficacy of the Ramayana. They also instituted the 'Self Respect Marriage' in which Brahmin priests did not preside.

The Dravidian identity was manifested not only in the rejection of Aryan religion but also in the rejection of the Aryan languages, chiefly Sanskrit and Hindi. Though Tamil had borrowed a large number of Sanskrit words it still retained its original identity. An attempt was made to purify the Tamil Language from within. Even names were translated from Sanskrit to pure Tamil.

**The Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937**

The antagonism against the Aryan language was expressed through the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937. When the popular governments came to power after 1935, the Congress Government in Madras led by C. Rajgopalachari proposed to introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in High School

33. Ibid.
education in 1937. The Congress programmes were in pursuance of Gandhiji's concept of Swadeshi, which emphasized the replacement of English by a native Indian language, namely Hindi. In this context, Sanskrit as the language of India's cultural past was emphasized. This incensed the Dravidians.

There was popular criticism against this. The Justice Party and the Self Respects opposed the status of Hindi as a common language. According to them Hindi was as much a regional language as any other Dravidian language. The Tamil scholars opposed the measure for two reasons. The first was that, the introduction of Hindi would indirectly mean the revival of Sanskrit, a language to which they were traditionally opposed. The second criticism was that the mother tongue was not compulsory in school education, thus many passed out of schools without any knowledge of their Dravidian language. Therefore, the introduction of an Aryan language without making the mother tongue compulsory would relegate the Dravidian languages to the background.34

A society was established for the protection of the Tamil language. It organized public meetings and published pamphlets. Letters were sent to Rajagopalachari and the

34. E. Sa visswanathan, op. cit., p. 221.
government of Madras. The society united the Tamilians for a common cause. It later merged with the Tamilian Association.

The Madras Government however went ahead with its proposed programme and passed an order introducing Hindi in Secondary schools as a compulsory subject. The opposition intensified and several anti-Hindi conferences were held. Parents were requested not to send their wards to schools and picketing started before Premier's house.

The Anti-Hindi League and the Compulsory Hindi Boycott Committee were formed. On June 1, 1938 volunteers went in processions shouting slogans of, 'down with Compulsory Hindi' and demanded the withdrawal of the order. On June 3, many leaders were arrested, but picketing continued till June 11, when the Boycott Committee's headquarters were raided. Yet the agitators tried to continue the process.

The Chief Minister, C. Rajagopalachari was unwilling to budge from his stand and viewed it as a law and order problem. This resulted in more aggressiveness on the part of the agitators and they continued their picketing and slogan-shouting. Rajagopalachari was portrayed as a Brahmin arbitrator trying to impose the language. The situation again provided the Dravidian leaders to link race, caste and language symbolically.
The students started boycotting Hindi classes and on August 1, 1938 the Tamil Brigade was formed of a hundred volunteers who marched from Trichinopory to Madras to consolidate public opinion. They also held many public meetings. Similar brigades were formed in other districts also. All sections of non-Brahmins who opposed the Congress welcomed these brigades.

Within the Congress, some members of the Madras Legislative Assembly who did not like the high handed attitudes of Rajaji appealed to Gandhiji but no help was forthcoming from that quarter. This attitude shocked many, and some members from within the party started supporting the anti-Hindi agitation. Many Congressmen resigned. Even non-Brahmin ladies openly protested against this imposition.

In the meanwhile, raids were conducted and Naicker was arrested and sentenced to vigorous punishment for one year and fine of Rs. 1000 for each offence. This was criticized by all sections. Even the pro-Congress press criticized this. Naicker however came to be seen as the saviour of Tamil culture. Despite governmental interference this movement continued till 1940 under Naicher, after which it was withdrawn.
It was at this juncture that the movement against North Indian hegemony took a separatist turn and the concept of a separate Dravidnad cause into existence. Dravidnad would consist of the four Dravidian language speaking areas. The sovereign and independent Dravidian state would have a federal structure, and the four units would correspond to the four language speaking areas, each having residuary powers and autonomy over internal administration.  

As has been stated earlier, the Dravida Kazhagam was formed in 1944 with the uniting of the Self Respect League and the Justice Party. It took as its symbol, the black flag with a red circle at its centre. The black symbolized mourning for the subjected Dravidian people, while the red depicted hope for Dravidsthan.

On the political front, Naicker supported the Muslim League for a separate state and in return sought their help in his mission. He perceived that the Aryans of North

36. Ibid.
37. E. Sa Visswanathan, op. cit., p. 312, Phadnis, op. cit., p.140.
India with their religious ideas and linguistic chauvinism were the common enemy of both Muslims and Dravidians.

Thus, the three-nation theory was formulated. Naicker had even approached Sir Stafford Cripps with this theory, but was not ultimately successful. 38

**The Emergence of a Single Identity**

The next phase in the social history of the region, saw a shift in emphasis from the non-Brahmin Dravidian identity to a single Dravidian identity, in the 1950s. The non-Brahmins from the wealthier classes many of whom had received Western education had established themselves. Thus the target changed from non-Brahmins to elite Brahmins. There was further change in attitude when after 1949, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, (DMK), a breakaway group of the DK decided to contest elections.

The DMK popularized the Dravidian identity, but in their concept of Dravidian, they included the Brahmins also. For them, the Brahmins of South India were as much Dravidians as the non-Brahmins of north India was Aryans. Thus at this juncture the Dravidian movement became more

38. Ibid.
broad-based and inclusive. The targets of attack for the DMK were the Congress Governments and the Marwari businessmen who were seen as North Indian exploiters.\textsuperscript{39} The importance given to the North Indian language, Hindi was disliked and its recognition as sole official language was seen as an imposition. Even the concept of Dravidnad changed from one exclusively for non-Brahmins to that for all Dravidians. Films also played an important role in the this process of emergence of the Dravidian identity. Initially the themes were anti-Brahmin, anti-religion, anti-Aryan and anti-Sanskrit. With the coming of the DMK they omitted the first two categories and became pro-Dravidian. The superiority of the Dravidian culture and language and genuineness of demand for a separate sovereign state was emphasized. The social and economic inferiority despite the cultural superiority of the people of South India was depicted in these films. The Congress Government with its corrupt practices was held responsible for the plight of the Tamilians. It is thus not surprising that many of those associated with films like Annadurai, Karunanidhi and M.\textsuperscript{\textregistered} Ramachandran later became successful political leaders.

\textsuperscript{39} R. Mohanty, op. cit., p. 78.
A Shift in Focus

Though the Tamilians had always been in the forefront of the struggle against north India, Aryan supremacy, yet their concept of Dravidian encompassed all the people whose mother tongues were either Tamil, Telegu, Kannada or Malayalam. After the reorganization of states on linguistic lines in 1956, the DMK perceived a change in the attitudes of the other South Indian states to one of indifference. Thus there was a shift in focus from Dravidnadu to Tamil Nadu.

The Anti-Hindi Agitations (1957-1965)

In comparison with the anti-Hindi agitation of the 1930s this agitation was prolonged and more violent. It also had greater mass support. The other South-Indian states participated though not to the same degree. The secessionist attitude was however not evidenced during the course of this agitation.

By the Constitutional provisions regarding language, English would be the official language of Union and that of interstate communication along with Hindi. This arrangement

40. Prefer to the Appendix and Chapter 5.
would continue for 15 years after which Hindi would become the sole official language. An Official Language Commission would also be appointed to look into the status of the official language and suggest measures for its promotion. A Joint Parliamentary Committee would ratify these suggestions.

The first Official Language Commission under the chairmanship of B.G. Kher submitted its report in 1956. The Commission viewed language as, 'important only at the level of instrumentality' and hence of 'no intrinsic consequence'. The Commission thus suggested that the government should play an active role in implementing the complete policy for the introduction of Hindi.

The Committee suggested the teaching of Hindi as compulsory subject at certain stages in schools and colleges. The Joint Parliamentary Committee after examining the Report recommended the continuance of English as principal official language and Hindi as subsidiary language till 1965 after which roles would be reversed.

There was a strong reaction to this recommendation in the South. October 13, 1957 was observed as a protest day against the imposition of Hindi. On that day 678 public meetings were organized in the state and many resolutions were passed. The attempt to force Hindi on the Dravidian people was seen as a deliberate plan to subordinate the South to North Indian imperialism. They requested the government to employ regional languages for state administration and continue English for inter-state communication as also with the centre and the world. A demand for Constitutional amendment was also made.

Many prominent leaders, including Rajagopalachari gave a memorandum to Nehru to reconsider the issue of Hindi as official language. A black flag demonstration was organized on the occasion of the Prime Minister's visit. This was however suppressed by the Congress government of the state. On December 2, 1958, in the Union Language Convention of South India, resolutions urging the Government to continue English as the official language and amend The Constitution to that effect were passed. Many important personalities

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
such as Mirza Ismail, the former Dewan of Mysore and Rajagopalachari expressed their views on this occasion.

The Madras Government also came up with a memorandum on the Report of the Official Language Commission. This was approved by the State Assembly. It called for the use of English alongside Hindi as Union Official Language even after 1965. It also opposed the Official Language Commission's recommendation that Hindi be made the medium of instruction in Universities and its use in the State High Courts and State Statute Book. In all these three fields, the use of the regional language was suggested.\textsuperscript{47}

It was soon clear from these agitations that Hindi could not replace English within the stipulated fifteen year period. Nehru gave an assurance to the people of the South that Hindi would not be imposed on them.\textsuperscript{48} Nehru also emphasized the importance of English, emphasizing that it did help in understanding each other especially the people of the North and South and other parts of India. It was also a link between India and the outside world.\textsuperscript{49} Nehru blamed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{48} For text of speech refer J. Das Gupta, op. cit., pp.226-227.
\end{itemize}
the overzealousness of the Hindi leaders and emphasized that in the changing world of science and technology, translations could hardly substitute or keep up with the actual language of scientists and technologists.

The Official Language Act of 1963 provided for the continuance of the English language for official purposes of the Union and for its use in Parliament.\textsuperscript{50} The use of 'may' instead of shall in the Official Language Act of 1963 was unsatisfactory to the non-Hindi group. Nehru again assured the people of the South that his assurance given earlier was not his own perception but the viewpoint of his government and was with the approval of the House.

However, Nehru died in 1964 and the Government of Lal Bahadur Shastri sought to implement the Constitutional provisions. (Thus on January 26, 1965, Hindi would replace English as the Official Language of the Union. English would be used for limited purposes.) This once again began a militant phase in the anti-Hindi agitation.

From January 25, 1965, students in Madras started demonstrating against the introduction of Hindi as official language. In Madras, a large number of students marched

\textsuperscript{50} J. Das Gupta, op. cit., p. 236.
towards the Secretariat shouting anti-Hindi slogans. They burnt Republic Day pandals and street decorations and attacked the Congress office. Hindi books were also burnt. Students also boycotted all public meetings attended by ministers. They took a pledge to abstain from NCC parades, not work in the defence forces, compete in the examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission or Central and State Government examinations held in Hindi. Coimbatore was another hotbed of agitation. Resolutions were passed for the continuance of English as sole official language.

On the political front, the DMK to salvage its image and not appear unpatriotic tried to show that they were not against the Republic Day, only against the imposition of Hindi. However by this time, the students could not be controlled by them. They refused to lower the pitch of the agitation. The DMK inspired Tamil Nadu Student's Anti-Hindi Council took an independent stand. The DMK tried to halt the widespread violence that had ensued, but failed. For the first time, power had gone out of their hands to a more militant vanguard.

The mood of the students can be gauged from the fact that at the Annamalai University, the registrar's residence

51. *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, Jan 26, 1965.
was set on fire, and three thousand students marched towards Chidambaram shouting anti-Hindi slogans and damaged cinema houses showing Hindi films. During the course of the agitation two extreme cases of self-immolation also took place. The depth of feeling is conveyed by a note left by one of them: "This is my way of peaceful protest against the alien Hindi. My body belongs to earth, my soul to Tamil."  

When the colleges reopened on February 8, the Tamil Nadu Anti-Hindi Agitation Council gave the call for a strike and demanded a Constitutional amendment. Lawyers did not attend court. The agitators once again attacked trains, post offices, police stations, factories and public buildings. The industrialists and businessmen gave financial support to the agitators.

Chief Minister, Bhaktavatsalam who was from the Congress Party could obviously not go contrary to Party decisions and thus dismissed the students demands that the part of the Constitution dealing with Official Language be deleted. He also dismissed the DMK and Swatantra party demand that English be the sole official language of the Union. He was in favour of a compromise by which English would continue as the official language alongwith Hindi. He

also asked the students and teachers to attend classes, and assured that Hindi would not be made compulsory. Even under the three-language formula, of the state, Hindi, Malayalam or Telegu could be taken as the third language.\textsuperscript{53}

The Congress leadership at the centre had by this time realized the extreme opposition to Hindi especially in Tamil Nadu and were forced to change their attitude. Thus, Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Sastri in a nationwide broadcast on February 11, 1965 reaffirmed Nehru's assurance to the South. There was also a change in the policy decisions front. By the new provisions, every state could transact business in a language/language of its choice; inter state communication would be in English accompanied by an authentic translation; non-Hindi states would correspond with the centre in English, transaction of business at the central level would be in English. An assurance was also given to the students that if Hindi was introduced along with English for recruitment to the Civil Services, care would be taken to see that their employment prospects were not adversely affected.

The question of handicap in employment opportunities had been a major factor behind the anti-Hindi agitations of this period though the perceptions differed amongst different sections of students. The rural students were not very proficient in Hindi. Yet, if it was a choice between Hindi and English, they preferred the latter as it had a wider scope. The westernized urban middle-classes desired the maintenance of the status quo. Introduction of Hindi would make the Hindi region make up for its traditional backwardness. The business class feared the domination of north Indian business.

Thus the anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu in a nutshell, were protests against the social, political and linguistic domination of the south by the north. The social aspect was perceived in the traditional domination of Brahmins/Aryans of the non-Brahmin/Dravidian. In the political sphere, the Congress domination was challenged by the DK and DMK. While linguistic domination was seen in the imposition of Hindi, an alien language, on the south. The economic factor was closely linked to its linguistic counterpart as the question of employment opportunities and language proficiency were inter linked.
What is surprising is that despite most of the offending factors of social, political, economic, and linguistic domination long been removed, the feeling is evident even today and Hindi has not made much headway in Tamil Nadu, three decades after a cessation of hostilities!

3.3.2 Assam

Matters which came to a head in Assam in the post-independence period especially after the late seventies trace their roots back to the pre-independence period, when the colonisation of Assam took place, since the first half of the nineteenth century till the years following independence. The case of Assam especially its problems can be more apply attributed to the colonial legacy than those evidenced in any other part of the country. History, geographical factors, the unique societal mosaic, the demographic configuration and to a great extent economic considerations have gone hand in hand to create an unique situation of conflict. Despite the fact that it is a result of various related and unrelated factors, the linguistic thread runs throughout.
The Migrants Issue

The whole of The North-Eastern region including Assam has had a long history of migrations from neighbouring areas. In the earlier periods, tribes of a different ethnic stock and mostly speaking languages and dialects belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese language families settled in these regions. They generally came from the neighbouring regions of China and Burma. Coming in batches and over the centuries, they settled in the sparsely-populated, hilly and forested regions, and mostly along the river valleys. It may be noted that during this period there was practically no instance of a sizeable migration to this area from the interior or delta regions of India. On and off, various powerful rulers from the subcontinent had tried to conquer these regions but generally with no major degree of success.

Within the region, there was internecine tribal warfare for political dominance, but it was only in the thirteenth century that the 'Ahoms', came who were later able to conquer and dominate the other tribes in the region.

54. For a detailed description of such migrations and the languages spoken by these early migrants, refer to K. Basu, Language, Territoriality and the Problem of Integration, A Case Study of India's Periphery. Dissertation, JNU, 1990, New Delhi, Chapter 4.

55. A group of people belonging to the Tai family.
However, their hard earned position did not bring with it a bed of roses. For they were continuously troubled by the Burmese. It was this problem that made the otherwise aloof Ahoms, seek British help. The Burmese occupation of territory in this region along with their aspirations to command control of the region finally led to the Anglo-Burmese wars. In the long run, the British proved their superior military strength and by the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) the Burmese were finally forced to leave the region for good.

The Treaty of Yandabo can be called a watershed in the history of this region, and especially of Assam as it exists today. It was after this that slowly at first and later at a very pace, the entire social mosaic as also the economic set-up changed. Initially, the region was peopled by the Ahoms and related tribal groups who had more or less become Hinduised and were the overlords. The Bodos, Kacharis and related groups peopled the plains regions of Assam. A rather traditional socio-economic set-up could be encountered in the region. With the aforesaid Treaty, the British gained not only access to the region but also began to command a position of power. They had come into possession of vast tracts of virgin land, sparsely populated
but nevertheless, very rich in its natural resources. The British imperative to exploit these vast resources resulted in the slow but sure change in the demographic set up prevalent in the area.

It has been mentioned earlier, that the region was rich in natural resources. Till then sparsely populated, the region could boast of large forested tracts which were a major source of timber. The prevailing soil and climatic conditions were greatly conducive for tea plantations, a crop which was a major revenue earner. Later, oil was also found in the region. The absence of high mountains and the presence of numerous river valleys especially that of the Brahmaputra made communications easy. The British who had never failed to take advantage of such prime conditions, started a systematic exploitation of this region.

**The Change in the Societal Mosaic**

This aspect of the social history of the region was directly related to the economic and commercial considerations of the British. The administrative adjustments and policies came later, but were no less significant in this regard. As has been mentioned earlier the linguistic conflict in Assam is a direct offshoot of the
migrants issue. In fact, in any discussion of either, the other would inevitably be dragged into it.

Initially, the British encouraged the migration of labour to work in the tea-plantations in the region. They were also required for other unskilled jobs as in the timber industry and communications infrastructure. Though numerically this workforce was not negligible, they did not upset the existing balance of power relations prevailing in the region. A feature of this migrant labour or workforce was that unlike as in other regions these people came as permanent settlers, thus making a claim on the geographical territory of the region. A large number came from Nepal, Bihar and adjoining areas. This feature was also noticed in the case of the later settlers who came from the more advanced, delta regions of the country. These settlers (of both types) never got totally assimilated and integrated with the original tribal and ethnic groups who were already there, but settled in distinct geographical pockets thus creating the socio-spatial mosaic.

The case of migrants who came from the more advanced regions of the country requires more in depth attention, as it is because of them that the existing social structure dissembled, giving rise to new forms of social and economic
relations. The migrant labour though not numerically negligible were integrated if not socially at least into the lower levels of the economic and political framework of the region.

From the beginning of the century till about the late seventies, some six of a half-million people and their descendants had settled in Assam. The nature of this migration may be explained in historical terms. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, Assam and East Bengal constituted a separate province. Before that, Assam was a part of the Bengal Presidency.

As was true in the case of unskilled labour so also in the administrative and services sector, the native inhabitants were either found inadequate to the requirements or else did not profess much interest. The vast employment and economic opportunities that had been opened up in the region encouraged a large number of people from the neighbouring regions, especially the densely populated delta regions of Bengal to migrate to this region. The decadal censal counts (1901-1931) account for the quantum of immigration. A large number of migrants came from the

56. Weiner, Myron, Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India, Delhi, 1978, pp. 80-81.
regions of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur and Sylhet and settled in the regions of Cachar, Goalpara, Darrang, North Lakhimpur, Barpeta etc. The local inhabitants could boast of any sizeable population only in a around the Sibsagar region.

It was not as if that the problem of unrestricted migration into the region had not been taken note of by the policy makers. Such policies as 'line of control' was discarded on the grounds that it would hinder integration and thus were never properly implemented. Moreover till the 1970's migration in various degrees' into the area continued. The census of India records of 1971 show the quantum and nature of migration. While Assameese speakers constituted a majority in the rural areas, they were a minority of just (39%) in the urban areas, outnumbered by Bengali speakers (40%). Hindi speakers constituted another (16%).

Economic Considerations

It was over the economic question or that concerning employment opportunities, that the migrants issue or more

57. R. Gopalakrishnan, Insurgent North Eastern Region of India, Delhi, 1995, p. 143.
58. Ibid., p.144.
specifically that of the Bengali speakers vs. the Assamese speakers came to a flash point. From the geographical-spatial point of view the successive migrations had created specialized workforce mostly settled around their places of work thus giving rise to pockets. As has been noted earlier, the Bengali speakers constituted the majority of the migrants workforce. Whereas the unskilled labourers settled near the plantations, timber mills etc., the Bengalis who came from the more advanced areas of British India - appropriated most of the available jobs in the administrative and modern economic sectors. Thus Bengali speakers were encountered at the more coveted positions of both public as well as private sectors.

Dr. Gopalakrishnan describes the different categories of immigrants as

i) Unskilled workers absorbed in administration as general labourers, some cleared forests and swamps and settled as cultivators.

ii) Young and innovative, and absorbed in plantations, settled around these - also found in service and ancillary industries, as well as transport and communication sectors.

iii) Those in tertiary sectors.

59. Ibid., p. 145.
It was towards the last category that the rising middle-class of Assam was most antagonistic. The historical links with Bengal had initially resulted in Bengali becoming the medium of instruction in schools way back in the 1830s. This gave a definite advantage to the Bengali speakers, especially in the case of competitive Government jobs.

**The Language Question**

As migration has legal sanction in India, sooner or later linguistic minorities are bound to occur in any state. Thus linguistic minorities especially in well defined pockets within the otherwise homogeneous units were encountered at the time of the Linguistic Reorganization of states also later.

In the specific case of Assam, there were sizeable linguistic minorities, more specifically so, the Bengalis who, before partition were almost numerically at par with the Assamese speakers. Moreover, they were found in definite geographical pockets where they constituted a sizeable majority.

The language problem in Assam has been viewed from different standpoints. While some have seen it predominantly
as a migrants' problem, with its socio-economic manifestations, others have been tempted to view it as a clash of people each having their own official language. It was seen as one language group trying to dominate the other both culturally and economically. However by the very principles of linguistic reorganization, territory on the basis of language was the accepted criteria. In this context, the Assamese viewed themselves as natives and the Bengalis as outsiders.

In the linguistic history of colonial Assam, a noteworthy point was that the Bengalis with their greater familiarity with the British were able to convince them that Assamese was a corrupt and vulgar dialect of Bengali. The close relation between language and culture has made some scholars consider this as 'cultural genocide'.60 Others like Hiren Gohain felt that the Bengalis had an air of 'nostalgic superiority'.61 This sort of misrepresentation was partly possible as Bengali and Assamese languages are not diametrically opposite, but mutually intelligible, moreover the script is similar. In actuality, Assamese, Oriya and


Bengali all have a common ancestor - 'Magadhi Apabhramsa' - which corresponded to Eastern Prakrit or 'Prachya Apabhramsa'. Edward Gait mentioned Assamese as a 'sister language' of Bengali and not as a daughter.

Bengali was introduced in schools and law courts of Assam in 1837. Thus the way for both cultural and economic domination was paved. Under the impetus of missionary activities, the Assamese had become language conscious. Successive attempts were made by a small group of Assamese to drop Bengali. This was an important step towards the enhancement of status of the Assamese language. Amongst the Assamese there was a dual fear. The first was that of cultural domination by the Bengalis, the second was that of political domination by the Bengali Muslims. However this fear was reduced after partition, when by the Sylhet referendum, the Bengali population in the state was reduced from 27.56% to 19.64% but simultaneously, there was migration of a large number of Bengali-Hindu refugees into Assam.

64. Weiner, op. cit., p. 93.
In the specific case of the refugees, Oomen has this observation to make: Muslims from East Pakistan/Bangladesh continue to migrate which they see as motivated by

1. Certain politicians in India to create vote banks.
2. Encouraged by previous Bengali immigrants to further their own security,
3. Economic hardship in Bangladesh and,
4. Political designs by the country to create a safe border.65

The Bengali refugees initially came for the white collar jobs as few could venture leaving behind their lands. Later there were more agriculturalists but the majority were into petty trade and shopkeeping. They maintained their distance not as cultural aliens but for their refugee status.

In 1947 and after December 1971, official statistics show that about 10 million people sought refuge, about 7 million were accommodated in refugee camps. Thus there was a massive influx. The fact that these refugees were mainly Hindus caused more tensions. The prior settlers welcomed

them. After this, there was almost a numerical balance between the two communities.

The Assamese middle class and the leaders invoked the linguistic identity to fight this crisis for its mass appeal as the fear of cultural and economic domination had been aggravated by the demands of the immigrant population.

The Role of the Bengali Speakers

It may perhaps not be out of place to review the role played by the immigrants particularly the Bengalis towards precipitation of the crisis. Factors such as migration, occupying territory, becoming permanent settlers, appropriating most of the white collar jobs etc., may still be attributed as natural processes, but the Bengalis also played an active role in precipitating the language tensions in the area. Some of the noteworthy cases are: on the territorial front, they demanded the integration of the district of Goalpara to West Bengal. During the period of States Reorganization memorandums had been submitted from Cachar and Goalpara districts to the States Reorganization Commission in (1953-55) to carve out a new state of Purbachal with territory from Assam.66 On the political

front there was mobilization to convert Assam into a bilingual state. There were widespread riots in 1960 after the passing of the Assam Language Act. There was also resistance to the adoption of Assamese for collegiate education in 1972. Detection and deportation of infiltrators or their dispersal to other states was also resisted. The Assamese had reasons to believe that the main group behind these demands were the Bengalis.

The Congress politics in Assam since independence favoured Assamese, thus there was a positive improvement in economic and literacy standards. Preference was given to them in government jobs as sons of the soil. The Bengalis finding their position at stake resented this.

With the expansion of education in Assam, the linguistic policy became a point of discussion. Assamese became the exclusive language of the state and its implementation was in the hands of the Assam Sahitya Sabha and the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha. These two organizations had been demanding the recognition of Assamese as the state language ever since independence. 67

The Bengalis on the other hand, favoured a dual language policy. The Assamese on their side maintained that only through linguistic nationalism, linguistic imperialism could be challenged.

Initially the Government stand was more flexible. The Chief Minister declared that the issue should be judged by its merits on the basis of merits and appreciation rather than majority and minority.\textsuperscript{68} To this, there was widespread protest throughout the state and a memorandum was submitted. It stated that the issue of official language should not be confused with that of the rights of linguistic minorities. The minorities should not stand in the way of the regional language becoming the state language. The Bengal Sangram Parishad on the other hand, insisted that Bengali should be the second language for the state and the sole official language for Cachar district. The Bengalis in Cachar had always resisted Assamese language. When they spread to the Brahmaputra valley region, the situation got complicated further.

\textbf{The Political Aspect}

After independence, the Congress party had always favoured the Assamese giving them the informal recognition

\textsuperscript{68} Assam Assembly Debates, 3 March 1969.
of "Sons of the Soil. Yet, according the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee decision,

1) Assamese was declared as official language only for such purposes as government desires,

2) it may be introduced in Cachar and the Hill Districts as and when they are prepared for it.

3) The rights of the minorities for the protection and development of their languages would be fully safeguarded.

4) Claims of the non-Assamese in public services would be safeguarded.

5) Facilities for learning Assamese would be provided.

The Resolution failed to satisfy sentiments on both sides. There was sharp reaction both in Cachar and the Brahmaputra valley. Violence erupted and students went out in processions shouting anti-Bengali slogans on June 17, 1960.69

As a result of this, the decision was revised. According to the revised decision, Assamese and English were to become the official languages of the state, Assamese would be used for district administration in the Brahmaputra

69. The Times of India, June 30, 1960.
Valley and Bengali for Cachar. English would continue in Secretariat functions and in the Heads of Departments.

Political parties such as the Praja Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India had also opposed the bilingual character of language policy. There was a second phase of arson and looting in 1960 and the Bengalis were assaulted. It needs to be noted that the other language groups such as the Biharis, Punjabis, Marwaris and the tea plantation workers, supported the recognition of Assamese as the state language. It was only the Bengali speakers who had opposed the implementation of Assamese as the state language. Thus the Assamese sentiment had turned against the Bengalis. They felt that the Bengalis had tried to impose their language even in places where they were in a minority. This was true in the case of Darjeeling also.

In 1972, there was another phase of Assamese - Bengali confrontation. It came about when the Academic Council of Gauhati University passed a resolution to introduce Assamee for the switchover to the regional languages as the medium of instruction. English however was allowed to continue. The Bengalis were given a concession in that they could answer

70. Ibid., July 1, 1960.
questions in Bengali. The Assamese students had no objection to Bengali students from Cahar answering in Bengali but this concession should not be allowed for those Bengali speaking students who hailed from the Brahmaputra valley. Thus there was intense discontent.

Due to agitational and political pressures, the decision was revised on June 12, 1972. By the revised decision, Assamese would be the sole language for the medium of instruction. English would continue as an alternative, but not beyond a period of ten years. The option to answer examination papers in Bengali was withdrawn. The Assam Assembly passed a resolution that Cachar could have a separate University in which Bengali would be the medium of instruction. The Assamese students protested against this clause as they felt that if Assamese could not be accepted as a regional language, Cachar should go out of Assam as it was contracting, to the principle underlying the Reorganization of States.

The Foreigners Issue

Even in this context, the Assamese faced strong opposition from the Bengalis. The movement was started when

discrepancies were noticed in the voters list for Mangaldoi Constituency in 1978 by the All Assam Students Union and by 1979, it had reached the grass-roots level. The All Assam Gafga Sangram Parishad was formed in August 1979. The main issue on their agenda was the problem of infiltration of illegal foreigners mainly from East Pakistan/Bangladesh and Nepal. They demanded the deletion of the names of such foreigners from the voters list and subsequent deportation. In all these confrontations the Bengalis were viewed as the major enemy.

According to them 'foreigners' in legal terms were infiltrators from Bangladesh and Nepal and not non-Assamese Indians residing in the state, but the Bengalis felt that the targets were the Bengalis as most 'foreigners' spoke Bengali. The traditional language rivalry between the Assamese and Bengalis compounded and complicated the issue.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha sent a memorandum to the then Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh which stated that the Bengalis and the Calcutta Press were distorting and misrepresenting facts, giving it the colour of a language
riot, parochialism and chauvinism. 72

In the case of Assam, the basic migrant problem got complicated by geographical factors such as permanent settlement, economic superiority and cultural distinctiveness. Though outwardly a nativist movement, with the chief contenders being the original inhabitants and the migrants, it was in actuality a fight between two rival language groups.

In the 1980s the radicalisation of politics in Assam gave a lead to militant factions throughout the north-east which was to a large extent responsible for insurgency and consequent destabilization of the whole region.

3.3.3 Karnataka

The case of Karnataka as far as language controversies and conflicts go, is quite different from those described earlier. Agitations over the language issue have rocked the state of Karnataka time and again right since the early 1980s till the present day, as late as October 1994. What needs to be noted is that though the agitations have had

language as the motivating force behind them, there have been continuous shifts in focus over the years. Yet, certain threads such as state protection for Kannada can be traced overtly or covertly over the whole period.

The Gokak Movement

The first, language movement in Karnataka took place in the early 1980s and is known as the Gokak Movement. It has been called an unique movement for it aimed at giving sole first language status to Kannada in Karnataka and does not find a parallel in any other part of the country. One would assume that after the Linguistic Reorganization of States, the Kannada language would automatically get first language status for official/education purposes in Karnataka, but this was not the case.

The 1971 census gives a linguistic profile of multi-lingual Karnataka prior to the Gokak Movement. Though Kannada was spoken by the majority, about 65.94% of the total population of the state, in certain pockets like the districts of Kolar and South Kanara, Kannada is spoken by a minority of the total population, 24.29% and 20.44% respectively. Telegu is spoken by 54.64% of the population of Kolar and Tulu by 47.43% of the people of South Kanara.
In the city of Bangalore according to the 1971 census Kannada was spoken by 31.80%, Tamil by 25.37%, Telegu by 16.52% and Urdu by 13.91% of the population. There was a sizeable number of Marathi speakers in Belgaum district. Bangalore, South Kanara and Coorg accounted for about 80% of the sizeable Malayalam speaking population. In the Kolar gold fields region Kannada was spoken by only 3.76% of the population!

The focus of the Movement which had a widespread impact in Karnataka was originally on the choice of language in the secondary education curricula. According to the liberal language policy in education followed by the state, the student could take Kannada, Sanskrit, English, Hindi, Tamil or Telegu as first language. Those who studied English as first language could take Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi as second language. Those who did not take English as first language could take it as second language. Those who studied Kannada as first language would study Sanskrit or Hindi as third language. If taking Kannada as second language, Hindi could be taken as third language. Those who did not study Kannada as either first or second language could take it as third language, but it was

73. B. Mallikarjun, A Language Movement in Karnataka, p.265.
optional. The distribution of marks also needs to be noted -
1st language 150 marks, 2nd language - 100 marks, 3rd
language 50 marks (optional). \(^\text{74}\)

Thus an analysis of the above language policy will show
that it was possible for a student to finish his school
education without studying Kannada at all. In 1979 there was
a decision to remove Sanskrit from the first language list,
but the status quo was maintained.

The anti-Sanskrit lobby was totally against this. Their
arguments for the deletion of Sanskrit from the first
language list were-
(a) Sanskrit was not the mother tongue of any person in the
state, nor spoken or written by anybody.
(b) to facilitate students opting for the subject:-the
syllabus was made easy.
(c) Scoring was easy as compared to any other language.
(d) Sanskrit was a threat to Kannada as many Kannada
speaking students were opting for Sanskrit as first
language.
(e) all other languages were taught in primary school
except Kannada.

\(^\text{74}\) A Strange Row Over Language, The Hindu, December 6,
1981, also Hindustan Times, April 21, 1982.
(f) No state other than Karnataka allowed Sanskrit as first language.

(g) Sanskrit was taken mostly by Brahmin students.

The controversy regarding Sanskrit provided a forum for Kannada protagonists. When the situation became volatile the, government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of V.K. Gokak to come to a decision regarding the relative status of Kannada and Sanskrit in school education in Karnataka.

The constitution of the Gokak Committee which, out of seven members had one English Professor as chairman and Sanskrit and Kannada scholars on it panel did not placate the pro-Kannada agitators, as they feared a biased judgment. In places like Dharwar slogans like "go back Gokak" were sounded. The Committee had very few peaceful meetings with the people.75

However, the most astounding recommendations of the Committee was that Kannada would be the sole, compulsory first language. The anti-Sanskritists, pro-Kannada agitators had not expected such a favourable decision. They now wanted the acceptance and implementation of the Report in toto.

75. B. Malikarjun, op.cit., p.268.
However it was at this juncture that the linguistic and religious minorities who had heretofore been excluded from the picture became vocal. They raised objections to the recommendations on the grounds that the language minorities had not been represented even by a single member. Moreover they felt that the Committee had gone beyond its terms of reference and it had proposed a language formula which was unconstitutional. This would alienate them from their own cultural base. It was not as if the minorities were against learning Kannada as compulsory language, but as the sole compulsory first language. As seen from the distribution of marks, this would give an edge to the students whose mother tongue was Kannada.

The leaders of these minority language groups felt that this would lead to further fragmentation and called it nothing short of cultural 'imperialism'.

In this movement the lead was given by the Urdu speakers. Some of the reasons identified were:-

(a) Largest single minority in state.
(b) Distributed throughout the state, urban (53.7%) rural (46.30%).

(c) Religion as unifying factor.
(d) Mostly in Kannada speaking areas.
(e) Socio-economic backwardness.

Tamil and Malayalam speakers also played a major role in the agitation. The Telegus and other minority speakers like those of Tulu, Lambani etc. did not play any significant role. The pro-Sanskrit lobby also joined the linguistic minority.

The Gokak Committee Report which had been accepted by the Government in December 1981 was revised in April 1982. By the revised decision, at the secondary level, the first language would be Kannada or the mother tongue (Urdu, Tamil, Telgu, Marathi, English, Hindi) and two other languages from the list of Kannada (150 marks) Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Arabic Persian, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi (each 100 marks).

However the government decision was not accepted by the pro-Kannada lobby as they felt that Kannada was not being given the primacy it deserved in Karnataka. The language movement was maintained from Dharwar which had more than 80% Kannada speaking population.
As in the case of Assamese so also in the Kannada case, though in a very different set up, the pro-Kannada agitators felt that if Kannada was not give the status of first language it would never develop. For protecting minority rights, the majority rights could not be curtailed. The case of Urdu was especially cited. The champions of Kannada felt that if Muslims could get assimilated in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, why could the same not occur in the case of Karnataka and why should their language Urdu, be given the same status as Kannada. They showed with statistics that the percentage of Urdu speakers in relation to Muslims in some of the above mentioned states was very much lower than was encountered in Karnataka.

The pro-Kannada lobby also put the argument that as neighbouring states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala were not extending such rights to the Kannadigas, where they constituted linguistic minorities, why should such rights to people from those states. Once again, a comparable sentiment to the one expressed in Assam was encountered. If people were unwilling to learn Kannada, they should go back

77. It needs to be noted that the Urdu speakers identified with Islamic religion were the chief opponents of the Gokak Committee Recommendations.
to such states where the mother tongues were spoken. Moreover statistics from the 1971 census were quoted to show that the percentage of Kannadigas in neighbouring/other states was much lower than the percentage of other language speakers from those states.\textsuperscript{78} Though the language movement in Karnataka had begun with the primary focus on the language in education, it spread to other sectors such as administration, judiciary and mass-communications. The use of English for administrative and judicial purposes was also questioned as it was felt that this was at the expense of Kannada. On the other hand, Urdu speakers demanded that the broadcast by AIR Banglore of Urdu Programmes be increased because 9% of the total population of the state spoke it as their mother tongue.

The government again by two orders of April 30, 1982 and August 2, 1982 made Kannada as sole compulsory first language carrying 125 marks. Any two languages from 2nd languages list given earlier which included Kannada.

The Gokak Movement had religious and political as well as socio-economic overtones.

Initially the anti-Sanskrit sentiment was strong as it was languages of the Brahmins and hence a factor in the

\textsuperscript{78} B.Malli Karjun, op.cit., p.274.
process of Sanskritization. Where there was Brahmin leadership in the government, Sanskrit was retained. Again the pro-Kannada agitation committee had its stronghold in Dharwar which has a Lingayat base. Most of the Lingayat religious heads supported the agitation. Fifteen Veerasiva religions mutts urged the government to accord Kannada, the status of sole compulsory first language. This became a platform for the lingayats to gain political power.

The Urdu speakers on the other hand declared 'Jihad' giving the call 'Islam is in danger'. While the percentage of Muslims in the state was 10.63% only 9% used it as mother tongue. Those Muslims whose mother tongue was Kannada also started speaking Urdu for reasons of religious identification.

The Christian response is also noteworthy. The Karnataka Catholic Christian Kannada Sangh demanded church services in Kannada in Banglore churches. It was alleged that Tamil Christians were imposing Tamil on institutions run by them. The actual reason was that the Tamils were getting most of the jobs in church run hospitals etc. where the church hierarchy was predominantly Tamil.

On the economic side, as minority bilingualism is a common feature many of the state services jobs were going to
Tamil and Malayalee speakers. The Kannadigas demanded reservation for Kannada speakers in Government services as also other public and private sectors and industries. They pointed out, that for certain jobs in Tamil Nadu the essential qualification was knowledge of Tamil, whereas in Karnataka, knowledge of Kannada was only a 'desirable' qualification.

In Karnataka, the Official Language Act was passed initially in 1963. Yet its implementation in administration and other sections has not made much progress. Notifications to make Kannada the language of official communication had been issued with unfailing regularity - 1979, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1988. Karnataka also has a full fledged secretariat department for development of the language.

Though mobilisation around language in Karnataka was seen as early as 1969 in the agitation in BEL where the management encouraged linguistic chauvinism to encounter left wing trade-unionism. The Sarojini Mahishi Report made recommendations for employment of sons - of - the soil79 and attempts were made in 1981 during the public sector strike to drive out Tamils from the work-force.

Yet, it was during the Gokak agitation that the movement became more broad-based and encompassed the entire state. Earlier it was restricted to the elites and intelligentsia among the Kannadigas. This mobilization of the masses was also due to the active part played by actor Rajkumar and his 'fans' associations. Initially it attempted the protection of Kannada films.

The Anti-Tamil Riots

Between the early 1980s when the Gokak movement took place, and the recent protests and violence over the telecast of the Urdu news in October 1994, the other noteworthy language conflict that took place in Karnataka were the anti-Tamil riots of 1990. As has been mentioned earlier the main targets of Kannadiga opposition have been the Urdu speakers and the Tamils as these were the two major groups to oppose the recommendations of the Gokak Committee and were perceived as the main mischief makers. Thus in 1990 when the dispute took place over the sharing of Cauvery waters in which Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were the main contestants, the Tamils in the state were made the targets of vicious attacks. It was primarily the Tamil working class in the city of Bangalore which was attacked. Such groups as
the Kannada Shakti Kendra while were perpetrating the anti-
Tamil riots were activity aided by the state apparatus.\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{The Agitation Against the Newscast in Urdu - 1994}

That such a minor incident as the telecast of a Urdu news bulletin by Bangalore Doordarshan in October 1994 could whip up so much violence was unprecedented in the history of language movements in India. In all, the official figures state that 23-25 people were killed and over 343 people were injured in the communal clashes.\textsuperscript{81} It was not as if there was any deep-rooted hatred against the Urdu language itself or any objectionable item in the news itself, it was more a coalition of other factors, historical, geographical economic, religious and political in varying degrees that had resulted in so violent an outburst.

The lighted spark was struck to the linguistic and communal tensions that had been simmering in the state for a long period. In actuality it was the introduction of a ten minute Urdu news bulletin on Doordarshan in the prime slot,

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., also see Times of India, October 13, 1994.

\textsuperscript{81} Ashgar Ali Engineer, Economic and Political Weekly, October 29, 1994, p.2858 and The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, October 9, 1994, Times of India, October 10, 1994.
between 7.45 p.m. and 7.55 p.m. immediately after the news bulletin in Kannada. The Urdu news bulletin in the prime slot was introduced on October 2, 1994.

Protests began on that day itself by various Kannada organisations, who demanded withdrawal of the news bulletin with immediate effect. As has already been pointed out earlier, the language issue in Karnataka had always been a sensitive one, ever since the Gokak agitation. The argument of the agitators was that the Urdu news had been introduced in the prime-time slot, thus encroaching on the time allotted for Kannada programmes. Thus they felt that a minority language was eating into the time allotted for the state language, thus questioning the primacy of Kannada.

The Muslim population in the city were taken by surprise as the news bulletin had not been introduced in response to any particular demand made by them. Moreover the Urdu press in the city was left rather untouched, yet the Muslims were made the targets of attack. From this, three deductions can be made:

(a) It is the visual media (generally state run) which has a greater impact than the print media (generally private),
(b) It is the allocation of states resources for the protection of minority language at the express of the majority language which was questioned,
(c) Opposition to recognition that minority languages and cultures needed protection,
(d) Political factors responsible for linking issues and the escalation of violence.

Historically it is seen that the speakers of Urdu (in most cases Muslims) and the Tamils were the chief opponents to the recommendations of the Gokak Committee. As in the riots regarding the sharing of Cauvery Waters (1990) and in the present case they were made the targets of attack.

Unlike the Gokak Movement and the anti-Tamil riots, the impact of which were felt all over the state, in this particular instance, it was confined to the city of Bangalore. In fact, the most affected areas were those parts of the city which had a sizeable Muslim population. The Central Market area which bore the brunt of the violence is considered a communally sensitive area.\(^2\) Mob fury and communal frenzy were let loose in south Bangalore. Shoot at sight orders were issued and curfew clamped in the police

station areas of JJ Nagar, Magadi Road, Chamrajpet, Kangeri Gate, Chickpet Kalasipalaya, New Thargupet and Byatarayananpura.83

The relatively better off areas of Bangalore, the so-called elite areas were unaffected while the areas having a larger working class population suffered severe damages. For historical reasons, Bangalore is a city dominated by non-Kannada speakers the middle class and elites have not shown much preference for the local language. Despite the recommendations of the Gokak Committee and tactics of persuasion and coercion the Kannada culture remains a dominated one. Though national and international capital has been flowing into the city, Kannada even as the language of administration has not gained much foothold. This is especially true of commercial, business, professional as also real estate and speculative sectors. In all these, the hegemony of English continues. Since the more influential players in these sectors wield considerable economic if not political power they manage to remain more or less unscathed in pro-Kannada agitations.

The fury of the Kannada protagonists such as the Kannada Shakti Kendra, Raj Kumar Fans' Associations or

83. Ashgar Ali Engineer, op.cit.
Kannada Chaluvaligar movement is turned on other dominated cultures such as the Tamils and the Urdu speakers, generally the Muslims.  

The Political Angle

While the Doordarshan authorities put forward their side of the story saying that they were just implementing a part of the recommendations made by the I.K. Gujral Committee, the Kannada protagonists knew better. With the State Assembly elections just round the corner the introduction of the Urdu news bulletin in the prime-time slot was seen as a ploy of the ruling party to garner minority votes, thus lending a boost to their electoral prospects.

Doordarshan Kendra Director, K.M. Aneesul Haque said in a press release that the Urdu Bulletin had been introduced on the directions of the I & B Ministry to "disseminate information" to the Urdu population of the state about the development, activities "which would help

86. See Kanchan Gupta, The Pioneer, New Delhi October 12, 1994- for Congress and language politics.
the minorities move with the mainstream of society. Through the news their ignorance about the state, the people, the art, the culture...could be removed". However it is a fact that most of the Muslims speak Kannada and follow Kannada programmes.

By the recommendations of the Gujral Committee, it is required that wherever more than 10 per cent of the population speaks Urdu, news bulletins in the language should be telecast. Now it needs to be questioned as to why this decision had not been taken earlier, for the Gujral Committee had submitted its report more than a decade back. Why had no action been taken earlier than this crucial juncture, if it was not an election stunt. Moreover it had been introduced in the prime-time slot that too without any specific demand from the Urdu speaking population.

Some observes believe that "in the absence of state support, the Kannada activists have been joined by another growing social force, the Sangh Parivar and its local allies." The same authority goes on the add that, "this may be only the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration between linguistic chauvinism and the fascism of the Sangh
Parivena so well developed in neighbouring Maharashtra". It was felt that the statements of many of the leading activists many of whom were literateurs and artists and the violent action which was a result of their call, points to a consolidation of anti-Muslim sentiment not perhaps directly linked with the Sangh Parivar. This groundswell of anti-Muslim sentiment in the city was tapped by the Shakti Kendra, The Karnataka Yuvajana Parishad and the Hindu Jagran Vediha. The flag incident at the Idgah Grounds in Hubli in the recent past had also established the link between language, religion politics and patriotism very clearly.

The BJP has been slowly but steadily gaining a foothold in Karnataka. Amongst the four southern states, their best election performance has been in Karnataka. Some observers feel that, "the BJP is aiming now at making Karnataka the doorway to the South." During the controversy surrounding the Ram Janambhoomi issue, Karnataka was the most affected among all the southern states. In no time after the telecast

87. Janaki Nair, op.cit., p.2853.
89. In the Assembly Elections, BJP got second position while Congress came in third. See Indian Express, New Delhi, December 11, 1994.
90. Ashgar Ali Engineer, op.cit.
of the news in Urdu between 7.45 and 7.55 p.m. on October 2, 1994, the issue assumed communal overtones. Many blame the presence of the BJP at the scene of disturbance.

The BJP and Janta Dal allege that it was an election stunt of the Congress to gain minority votes. The state government on its part blames the BJP for communalising the issue to gain votes. On October 6, the active involvement of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad\(^{91}\), in stoning cars, damaging cars of Karnataka Chief Justice G.T. Nanavati and Health Minister, Malakareddy and buses of the Bangalore Transport Services, made the BJP involvement more evident.\(^{92}\) Processions were taken out through Muslim dominated areas and in front of mosques on October 7, when Friday prayers were being offered. This was led by the ABVP affiliated student organisations from V.V. Puram College. The unruly procession attacked some Muslims and this was followed by counter attacks and the whole area became a scene of major violence. Business interests also played a part when some Marwari businessmen took the opportunity to destroy their Muslim rivals by financing the riots in South Bangalore.\(^{93}\)

\(^{91}\) The Student of Wing of the BJP.

\(^{92}\) Ashgar Ali Engineer, op.cit.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.
The areas which had witnessed violence in fact had been strongholds of the BJP and they had openly supported the agitation and called for withdrawal of the Urdu Bulletin.94 In the Janata Colony, Kannadigas, Tamils and Maharashtrians suffered most. A number of houses belonging to poor residents were damaged by Muslims.

**Pro-Kannada Organisations**

Pro-Kannada organisations like the Mico Kannada Sangha, the Channakesavapura Kannada Sangha and the SKF Sangha staged a 'rasta roko' agitation on Hosur Road. Agitations and dharnas were organised at different parts of the city. The Kannada Shakti Kendra and Kannada Sahitya Parishad also gave a weeks ultimatum to stop the telecast.95 M. Chidananda Murthy President of the Kannada Shakti Kendra tried to incite linguistic chauvinism amongst the Kannada people. He is supposed to have said that 'in this country the moment you oppose anything Urdu or Muslim, you are branded BJP, RSS and communal.

In the case of the language tensions in Karnataka, it was seen that linguistic chauvinism as also political

95. Times of India, October 10, 1994.
considerations played major roles. While during the Gokak Movement, the impetus came from the Kannada groups,, the 1994 language riots were a direct outcome of electoral politics of the Congress and BJP. It can be compared to the riots in Badaun in UP in 1989 when Urdu was introduced as second official language of the state just prior to elections, by the N.D. Tiwari Government. Thus once again, language and politics in combination precipitated the situation.

3.4 Conclusion

The three case studies attempted in this chapter project language conflicts with very different causal factors. Social and economic factors were the prime causes of unrest in Tamil Nadu, migration, cultural and economic domination precipitated the situation in Assam, whereas linguistic chauvinism and electoral politics complicated the issue in the case of Karnataka. Moreover, the time periods are noteworthy. The agitation in South India took place between the 1920s and 1960s, the one in Assam was at its peak between the 1960s and 1980s while the Karnataka agitation in two distinct phases covered the 1980s and first half of the 1990s. This points to the continuity of language tensions in India over time and space.