



Language Conflict in Ancient India and M.K. Gandhi's suggestion for its Solution

Dr. Dipanwita Chakraborty, Associate professor, Department of Philosophy, Government Degree College, Dharmanagar, Tripura (North)

Abstract: Language related issue is not a new problem in the present day, but has existed in India since ancient times. The Urdu movement was observed in British India in the mid-19th century. The Hindi-Urdu controversy began in India in 1867. Even linguistic conflicts emerged in the early 20th century on the eve of India's independence when attempts were made to make Hindustani or Hindi a common language in order to establish unity among the various linguistic groups against the British government. When Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari advocated the promotion of Hindi in South India and expressed the desire to introduce Hindi language education, the opposition felt that this was an attempt to subjugate the Tamils to the North Indians and an anti-Hindi conference was organized in October 1937 in protest and later on a statewide protest organized. Gandhi, who was able to foresee the future language related issue, said that to claim ourselves as a nation, in addition to several common things, we also need a common language that must meet certain criteria. Considering Hindi as a Hindustani language, Gandhi said that Hindi deserves the status of national language because it has been prevalent in India for a long and even Urdu was born under its influence. Moreover, he considered Devanagari suitable for the common script as in India most of the provincial scripts are derived from Devanagari.

Key words: Urdu movement, Hindi-Urdu controversy, Hindustani, Devanagari.

Introduction

India has been witnessing language related issues for a long time. With the decline of the Mughal Empire in the mid 19th century, the Urdu movement began in the British-ruled Indian subcontinent with the aim of making Urdu the universal language and a symbol of the political-cultural identity of the Muslim communities living in the subcontinent. The Hindi-Urdu controversy arose in India in 1867 when the British Government agreed to accept the demands of the Hindu community to replace the official Perso-Arabic script with Devanagari and adopt Hindi as the second official language. Opposing the change, when Sir Syed Ahmed Khan called Urdu the language of the upper social class and politeness and criticized Hindi as vulgar; his comments provoked a backlash from Hindu leaders and supporters of Hindi. Thus we see that although language is a medium of socialization, it has some psychosomatic and emotional features that arouse the feeling of ethnocentrism with people belonging to the same language and discriminate against people of different languages.

The main objective of this research paper is to highlight the linguistic conflict in ancient India and explain the solutions proposed by M.K.Gandhi.

The method of the present research work is critical and analytical in nature. The work is a theory oriented and so I had to depend on different books, journals and articles available in different libraries of India. Moreover, I attended many seminars, conferences and workshops related to the subject.

Discussion

it can be said that linguistic conflict is a conflict between different ethnic groups who belong to different languages in different regions and which creates obstacles to national integration. Language conflict was seen in India even on the eve of India's independence. During British rule English was official language in India. In the early 20th century, attempts were made to make Hindustani or Hindi a common language to unite the various linguistic groups against the British Government. M.K. Gandhi established "Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha" in South India in 1918 to promote the learning of Hindi in the non-Hindi speaking provinces of India. When the Indian National Congress won the Madras presidency elections in 1937, Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari supported to propagate Hindi in South India and intended to introduce Hindi language education in the presidency. The opponents viewed that it is an attempt to destroy Tamils by subordinating them to North Indians and in protest against this the Anti-Hindi conference was organized on 4 October 1937. Later when a government order was issued on 21 April 1938 making Hindi teaching compulsory in 125 Secondary schools in the presidency, statewide protest against C. Rajagopalachari and Hindi broke out. Gandhi had already thought about the future language related conflicts and in order to solve it he said that to claim ourselves as one nation besides several things in common, we also need a common language. In his words: "Muslim kings could not make Persian or Arabic the national language. They accepted the Hindi grammar, only they used more Persian words in their speech and employed the Urdu script for writing. But they could not carry on intercourse with the masses through a foreign tongue."¹

According to Gandhi, Hindi deserves the status of national language as it has been around in India for a long and even Urdu was born under the influence of it. Gandhi considered Hindi as Hindustani, a combination of Hindi-Urdu that is neither higher Sanskrit nor higher Persian or Arabic. A common language should have a common script. Gandhi opined that as a common script Devanagari is the most eligible one as it has wide application in India. In India provincial scripts are mostly derived from Devanagari. Thus it is very easy for millions of Hindus as well as for Muslims to learn it. Gandhi, however, believed that neglect of provincial languages was neglect of the nation, as no language other than the mother tongue is able to bring out the underlying meaning of "Swaraj" to the masses. Although Gandhi considered the mother tongue as the medium of education and suggested giving primary importance only to the mother tongue, he also said that only secondary importance can be given to Hindi as a common language in India. Side by side he said: "Provincial patriotism is good where it feeds the larger stream of all-India patriotism, as the latter is good to the extent that it serves the still larger end of the universe."²

According to Gandhi a language in common throughout a country or a national language must congregate the following requirements:

- (i) It should be easy for Government officials to learn.
- (ii) It should be able to act as a medium of religious, economic, and political union throughout country.
- (iii) It should be the language of the majority of countrymen.
- (iv) It should be easy for all countrymen to learn.
- (v) Temporary or passing interest should not be considered in choosing this language.

Since English was not able to meet the above mentioned requirements, it was unfit to become national language. However, the idea that English could be national language of India was also a symbol of weakness. Gandhi opined that only Hindi can meet the five requirements of the national language. It is very easy for Maharashtrians, Gujratis, Sindhis and Bengalis to acquire enough command of Hindi within few months. He also admitted that to learn Hindi is difficult for Tamils since Tamil as well as other Southern languages belonging to the Dravidian group differ in their structure and grammar from Sanskrit and the only thing in common is the Sanskrit vocabulary. But he further added that it is wrong to say that only English

can be applied in Madras. In his words: “I have successfully used Hindi there for all my works. In the trains I have heard Madrasi passengers speaking to other passengers in Hindi. Besides the Muslim of Madras know enough Hindi to use it sufficiently well.”³

Gandhi regarded that the difficulty with Hindi was confined to educated classes of Madras only. He appealed to their patriotic spirit and hoped that they would make special efforts to learn Hindi. According to Gandhi, if Hindi gets proper status in Madras, it will be taught in every school there and only then will Madras be able to relate to other provinces of India.

Conclusion

In short, it can be said that the language problem is one of the problems of ancient India that stood as an obstacle to unity among Indians. Gandhi wanted to establish unity among the people of different regions of India through the application of common language Hindi. Indeed he played a key role in shaping one's thoughts and ideas by expressing his view with regard to language.

Notes and Reference

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