

10. FEUDAL LANGUAGE VERSUS PEOPLE'S LANGUAGES

I am outlining my views on language as compactly as I can, so that should criticism or ridicule be still poured on them, it should at least be well founded.

1. English does harm to India not so much because it is foreign but because it is in the Indian context feudal. Only a tiny minority of 1% of the population achieves such efficiency in the language as to be able to use it for power or profit. To this tiny minority, English is an instrument of domination and exploitation over the vast masses.
2. English is not a world language. French and Spanish are already there and Russian is coming up. No more than 30 or 35 crores out of a total world population of around 300 crores which comes to about 1 in 10, know this language even moderately. Similarly as Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, Greek or Latin appeared to be growing into world languages in their own time but never able to do it, English is already on the decline, particularly in view of the expansion of Russian. If ever a world language comes, it shall not be any of the existing ones.
3. English is an elegant language in its own sphere, not as spiced as French, nor as deep as German, but more competent, inclusive and generous. When we say 'banish English', we certainly do not wish to banish it from England or America, nor even from India's colleges, if it is an optional subject. There is no

question of banishing it from the libraries.

4. India is the only civilised country in the world assuming that we are civilised, with an ancient way of life that refuses to die, which runs its legislatures, courts, laboratories, factories, telegraph, railways and almost all government and other public activities in a language which 99% of the people do not understand. In fact there is no other country in the world, civilised or uncivilized, which does so. Whichever country has adopted English, for its public purposes, bar India, it has done so only after the native languages have been more or less extinguished and English in whatever pidgin form has become their language of speech. The 'banish English' movement wishes to remove the use of English from the country's public or collective life. English must go as a medium of expression. It may be retained for the purposes of added comprehension as an optional subject of study. Everybody knows that France or Germany have been able to produce significant Shakespearian critics, because they read the English text of Shakespeare but wrote in their own language. India, with Shakespearian scholars a hundred or a thousand times as many has not been able to produce a single significant critic, for she has been using English as medium of expression as well as comprehension.
5. Original thinking in India died nearly a thousand years ago. It has not yet been revived. A major reason is the stranglehold of English. If some first-class scientists, that only a very few and not really the very top, have been produced in recent decades, it is because scientists do not deal with language so much as with numerals and symbols. The complete bankruptcy in social sciences and philosophy, I do not mean the descriptive aspect, but that of their foundations, must be ascribed to the fact that Indian

scholars devote as much time, if not more, to accent, phrase and idiom as to depth and consistency of thought. From the school student to the scholar, who struts ephemerally on the stage, a curse has befallen knowledge. Not knowledge of the subject but phrase-making and empty style have become the lode-stars of Indian thinking.

6. To industrialise, India needs an army of at least 10 lakhs engineers and scientists and a crore of foremen or mistris. Anybody who thinks that this army can be created with the medium of English is either a knave or a fool. That Japan and China or Romania have been able to do so well in the sphere of industrialisation must be ascribed as much to the fact that they operated through the language of the people as to their sounder economic arrangements. It is one of the great tragedies of our time that the mind and the stomach which interact so profoundly, not only for the individual but also for society, should have been so crudely separated in the recent thinking of coloured people particularly the Indian. One cannot rationalise the stomach or an economy of the country without at the same time trying to rationalise its mind.
7. The question of adequacy of Hindi or other Indian languages should not at all arise. If they are inadequate, they can be made adequate only through use. Not through committees that fix upon technical terms or through the compilation of dictionaries and text-books, does a language become adequate. It becomes efficient only through use at laboratories, courts, schools and the like. Its first use may occasion some confusion but shall in no event be more than that caused by a feudal or minority language. The establishment of a language comes first and its evolution afterwards. By reversing this process, India has stultified herself. India's languages shall never

evolve to equal degree with English through this process and the question of their establishment would not therefore ever arise. There shall always be a lag between the evolution of Bengali, Tamil or Hindi and that of English unless the drastic remedy is applied. The establishment of these languages may overcome the lag and bring them up to a level where they would be able to compare and perhaps favourably with the most modern and excellent language in the world today.

8. The enemies of Hindustani are in reality also the enemies of Bengali, Tamil or Marathi. This has been perfectly obvious over the past decade to anybody who has seen through the nervous anxiety of the upper classes to maintain their domination and exploitation. The attempt to introduce Bengali as medium in Bengal colleges raised a howl precisely from people who shout provincial slogans of vague but dangerous character. I have tried to make it absolutely clear that the banishment of English does not mean the substitution of Hindi. To those who so desire, it may mean substitution by Tamil or Bengali and all along the line.
9. How little thought has been given to the problem of language is evident from the fact that a stupid opposition between the north and the south has become a permanent mode of expression and it does not at all correspond with reality. The opposition is, if such it can be called, between the coast lands and the mid-lands. The coastal areas of the country speak languages other than Hindi. The mid-lands speak Hindi. I may here point out that ignorant people are further messing up the situation, trying to introduce Tamil as a subject of compulsory study in northern schools and already the Bengalis and the Marathas are rumbling with disquiet, for why should not their

languages be considered. The coast speaks Bengali, Oriya, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi and Gujarati. The mid-land speaks Hindustani and Assamiya is another language of the non-coastal north-east. If the interest of the masses is taken into account, this distinction between the coastlands and the mid-lands is of no consequence. The present conflict is purely an artificial one. In fact, this conflict has been brought into being again because the interest of the upper classes belonging both to the coast-lands and the mid-lands coincides. This coincidence of interest of the upper classes of the two areas demands the retention of English. The same coincidence of interest of the masses should demand the abolition of English, but they are not vocal and are often easily misled.

10. The Indian people are caught in the grip of a scissors one of whose blades is the coastal cry of Hindi imperialism and the other the mid-land's cry of the country's disintegration. I do not suggest that Mr. Nehru and Mr. Rajagopalachari sat down to evolve this formula; but objectively that is what has happened. The upper classes of both areas want to retain English. The coastal upper classes mislead their masses by raising the cry of Hindi imperialism. The mid-land's upper classes mislead their masses by raising the cry of national disintegration. I should like to think that the mid-land's upper classes are the greater enemy of Hindustani, for everybody knows that Mr. Rajagopalachari is working for English while very few are able to see through Mr. Nehru's game.
11. The upper classes of India are by and large the same set as under British rule. The greatest single failure of the Indian revolution or perhaps of all political upheavals in the past thousand years lies precisely in this. The upper classes continue, while the king or

viceroy goes. Everybody knows that freedom was won after a long struggle by the masses, in particular the lower middle class and the peasantry; and the language through which they operated was Hindi for national purposes and any of the coastal languages for their own provincial purposes. This change was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi in 1919-20. To say that the English language won the country's freedom is the greatest hoax and this is said only by those who served the British and even those who protested did so in the pre-1920 collaborationist way but who were clever enough to retain their privileges including their language even after the advent of freedom. Their own cleverness did not perhaps stand them in such good stead, for what mattered was that the top leadership of the national struggle was drawn from their ranks. The languages of the freedom struggle have given place to the language of feudal domination.

12. The upper classes do not in fact enjoy much authority, prestige or luxury in absolute terms; they are only relatively superior to their own people. Compared to their European counterparts or even the European mass, their living standards are low. But a panic has seized hold of their minds now for nearly ten centuries. They are either afraid of their own people or hold them in contempt. They have therefore acquired a restrictive mentality. The country needs an expansive mentality. We have to expand in all directions, in economy as in learning if we are to live equally with our neighbours. But the upper classes are afraid of such an uncertain expansion and are more concerned with retaining or expanding their own little share in a miserably small national produce. I do not think that the upper classes can as a whole abandon this restrictive mentality. The youth among them or at least a section of them should be able to rise against

this misery of a short-sighted self-interest that sinks them and their nation in lowly conditions.

13. One often hears hortations that the people should be weaned away from their affection for English. We are advised to seek to change the mentality of the people rather than the attitude of the government. This advice is ridiculous. As long as prestige and power and money go with the English language, it will be foolhardy to expect a parent who can afford it not to give his child an English education. I may here point out the utter criminality of the double standards of education that have prevailed in the first decade of our freedom. Private and missionary schools have been permitted to teach the English language right at the start of a child's education or even to use it as medium, while municipal or government schools have been obligated by certain rules, which are now slackening. Children of men of means or in authority have gone to these fancy schools. There ought to be just one set of schools at least at the primary level.
14. Banishment of English from public use can now no longer take place through legislative action. It can be done only through people's action, for a hardening of attitude has taken place. In relation to a people's movement, the distinction between coast-lands and mid-lands is of paramount importance. The upper classes of the coast-lands can mislead their masses with the cry of Hindi imperialism, which the upper classes of the mid-lands obviously cannot do, and the main offensive must therefore be launched in the mid-lands. The people of the mid-lands must agitate and struggle to remove English from public use not alone at the provincial level but also at the level of the central services, the armed forces, the railways, the telegraphs and the like, in so far as their own areas are concerned. Let there be two departments of central

transactions, one Hindi and the other English. Such coast-lands as desire may attach themselves to the English department in Delhi. The mid-lands must immediately operate through the Hindi department in Delhi. If Gujarat and Maharashtra and any other states opt to join the Hindustani department, they should be gratefully welcomed with whatever reservations in the services and the like they desire.

15. The bifurcation of Delhi into two departments of Hindi and English is a last remedy, but one which must be applied here and now, unless the coast-lands agree on any of the earlier formulae. On the basis that Hindustani is introduced immediately at all levels, alternative safeguards have been suggested for the coast-lands during the past 5 years and more. A 10-year reservation for all gazetted services at the centre may be made for the coast-lands. In the alternative, permanent reservations may be made on the basis of population. If neither of these recommendations is acceptable, a multi-lingual centre has also been contemplated. I have always wondered why Tamil or Bengali should not have been permitted to be spoken in the Indian Parliament and Hindi translations made through earphones. I would here recommend to the people of the mid-lands not to bother about what happens in the coast-lands except that English should be banished even there at the provincial level. The effort to persuade coast-lands to accept Hindi must be given up, for it only leads to further irritation and embitterment. Once these coast-lands have abandoned English at the provincial level, including the high court, the university, the Secretariat and all such public institutions, it would be only a matter of time when they apply for admission into the Hindi department in Delhi. I am confident that the growth of knowledge and industry in the mid-lands would be

very rapid, once English is given up as a medium. This rapid growth would invite the coast-lands to review their stand.

16. A dateline was set for the replacement of English. This has been a most disastrous event. It has poisoned the wells of national honesty. The Constitution is clear about the need to remove English. Even if it may be argued, although wrongly I believe, that the dateline of 1965 or an earlier one for the provincial high courts was not competently set in view of various administrative and educational complexities, I can never understand how it has not been possible for individuals to learn Hindi. Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Ministers and Members of Parliament have all sworn their fealty to the Constitution. The nation pays them and exceedingly well for this oath. Under their oath, they were committed to the use of Hindi in place of English. Everyone of them could have learnt Hindi in a matter of six months or at the most a year. They have shamelessly violated their oath to the Constitution. Never again must people be tempted to such violations. This can only be done, if datelines are not set.
17. A new-fangled agitation not to let English go beyond 1965 is good as far as it goes, but somewhat dangerous. It is in a sense a repetition of the earlier mistake. To have agreed upon a dateline meant agreement with the viewpoint that Indian languages were inadequate or that the situation was complex. As soon as these concessions are made, it is only a matter if dateline to get shifted almost indefinitely. Once again the people are faced with the problem of deciding between a dateline or none at all. It is a question of mental attitudes. Those who assert that English must be abandoned here and now are

perfectly well aware of the fact that they cannot achieve their assertion unless they have acquired the strength for it. In adopting this attitude of revolution here and now, they are fundamentally different from those who want evolution along the dateline. The former are advocates of establishment and the latter of evolution. Furthermore, these agitations to retain the dateline are in the nature of a rearguard action, which continually loses ground to the opponent. Once the act to extend this dateline perhaps indefinitely is put through Parliament, what will these agitationists of the dateline do. The time has now come for patriots of people's languages to open their offensive clearly and without hedges. Nevertheless those who agitate of banishment of English here and now will do well to support the dateline agitators in their meetings and demonstrations. After all, both travel in the same direction. Some stop short of the goal or are not clear where they are going.

18. Hindi propagandists and a majority of Hindi writers are quite another story. They are so integrated with official policy that they become its advocates, at least outwardly. Most of them are paid by government or semi-government agencies. The more sensitive among them keep quiet. An overwhelming number among these Hindi propagandists and writers, after paying deceptive lip-service to Hindi, do it great damage in a three-fold way. They call for constructive work in place of an agitational destructive approach; they are content with the association of Hindi with English in the hope that gradual replacement will take place; they criticise the Angrezi Hatao Movement as negative. English has long been an imperialist language to the masses and association with it gives to Hindi as well an imperialist character in the eyes of the non-Hindi people. It is again untrue to say that

English has been receding in the years of freedom; its growth has been phenomenal. Where less than three hundred thousand appeared for their metric examinations for which English is a compulsory subject, in the pre-freedom year, over fifteen lakhs did so this year and the number grows steadily. This compulsory acquisition of English is most inadequate either for purposes of knowledge or for high posts and money, but it is adequate enough to instill in the knower certain complexes. He begins to look down upon his relations and people as rustics, who do not know English. He obtains posts, however ill-paid or lowly. His esteem for his own languages, particularly Hindustani, always thin, begins to vanish. In short, this increasing army of matriculates becomes the ill-paid mercenaries of the upper classes in their conspiracy to retain English. Against this day-by-day advance of English constructive work of Hindi propagandists in the coast-lands is like a drop in the ocean. I would still have praised them for their small work, had they not tried to become devil's advocates. The plea that "banish English" is negative, while the effort to make Indian languages grow is positive in the ancient argument of all collaborators with evil. The "Grow Bengali or Hindi" movement does not demarcate the frontiers of evil; everybody is welcome to it. The "Banish English" movement draws a line, the line between good and evil, between a feudal and a people's language. These gentlemen never bother to ask themselves why almost all of Gandhiji's great movements were negative from boycott of foreign cloth to quit India.

19. I have been using Hindi and Hindustani interchangeably and I should like to say that of Urdu too. They are three different styles of a single language, actually only two. I trust that the next two or three decades will

achieve a coalescing. Let the purists and the mixers quarrel among themselves. But they should both be part of the "Banish English" movement, but also beware that the great conspiracy for the retention of English is on and it is engineering all kinds of quarrels. All the three styles should be welcome to the movement, for a settling down will inevitably take place. Furthermore, traces of revivalism are bound to be in evidence, for among those who wish to banish English, will be some who yearn for their ancient idylls. Let us not be frightened of them, for they will soon enough see that their Hindi or Marathi or Tamil must become generous and spiced, a vehicle for philtering as for chastity, for unravelling of the truth as for travel to the moon, a language of the widest possible sweep, elegant in its total correspondence with reality.

20. Hindustani possesses 6 to 7 lakh words, while English only half that number. English has lost its capacity for compounds, which is, to create new words, while not so Hindi and other Indian languages. India's languages are potentially the richest in the world. Continual talk about their inadequacy is just balderdash. Their words are indeed somewhat loose of meaning, because of long disuse for the affairs of a world, that is ever growing in complexity. Those words and these affairs must be immediately brought together. Any delay for whatever reason worsens. The plea of scarcity of text books and translations is most ridiculous. It is generally untrue. In any event, the vast army of college teachers, who must be nearly a lakh, can be put to the job of translation, on pain of dismissal. The will is lacking. Possibilities are all there. English has not been removed, not because Indian languages are poor or inadequate but because the will to remove English has been lacking.

21. Contrary to what the upper classes are dinning every day, English is disintegrating the nation. Because of this language, whose centres are elsewhere, India knows only provinces and the world and the intermediate link of the nation is snapping. Delhi is only the administrative capital of India. The cultural, intellectual or spiritual capital of most of India, whether Bombay, Calcutta or Madras, lies elsewhere. The sources of intellectual inspiration are there, London to most, New York or Anglo-Paris to the more sophisticated. The intellectual route from Calcutta to Madras or from anywhere to anywhere passes through London. Who will integrate whom? Each province in India is getting integrated directly and separately to a world centre, I may add one restricting centre among many. The national centre just does not exist culturally or intellectually. If Indian languages had died out and we had adopted some kind of English as our mother tongue, Delhi could have struggled to become both the administrative and the cultural capital of India. This is not to be. The English conspiracy, despite the British Council and the Americans, is doomed to failure. In the process, it will however do its best to disintegrate the nation.
22. I have sometimes been accused unthinkingly of acting against my own doctrine, of publishing *Mankind* a journal in the English language. No civilised country prints a daily newspaper in a foreign language for its own nationals. All of them publish journals of ideas, the sciences and views in as many foreign languages as they can, and of course also books. If we had money so that *Mankind* could be regularly published and incidentally also the monthly *Jan* and the weekly *Chaukhambha* in Hindi, the authentic voice of India and of the new world of equality and non-violence would be to some extent heard the world over. Daily

journals in foreign languages have no rationale. Whenever patriots take the government over and end the use of English on telegraph and transmitter, these eye-sores of daily newspapers in English will die overnight. Indian language newspapers are severally handicapped, for they have to translate. No civilised country runs its telegraphs and transmitters in a foreign language, so convenient for espionage.

23. Worst of all, English has made the Indian people feel inferior. Not knowing English, they think they are no good for any kind of public activity and they abdicate. It is precisely such abdication by the mass, which is the foundation for minority or feudal rule. Not through the gun alone but more so through an incomprehensible speech are the people held down. People's rule is impossible without people's language. Some persons think erroneously that their children given the chance can acquire the same proficiency in English which those of the upper classes do. One in a hundred apart, this is impossible of English in their homes and have been doing so for generations. The people cannot compete with these hereditary slave in the study of foreign languages.
24. English must go. People's action alone can accomplish it. The capacity of the upper classes to deceive the people is if anything growing. When such ignorant hardening takes place, legislative solutions are not easy and people's action and sacrifice can alone effect a change of attitude. Many such actions are open to the people and some have been tried out sectionally, from shouting down the lecturer, who uses the medium of English, to its erasing from nameplates, particularly governmental. More such action is necessary. The third All India Angrezi Hatao Conference is meeting in Hyderabad from twelfth to fourteenth October. This conference has not yet been

able to build up a live organisation. This it can do only if all active elements pledged to the removal of English here and now come into it. Together in Hyderabad on those dates should be everybody's endeavour. May I hope that this conference will be a fit assembly for deliberation as also the achieving of necessary executive agencies.

[1962]