

## INTER-UNIVERSITY CENTRE NOTES

### Linguistic Diversity and National Integrity in India

The notion of 'national integrity' has become an obsessive concern not simply with the Indian state but even for a large number of scholars and statesmen. As seen in relation to the process of nation-building, 'national integrity' certainly is a noble concern, but only when it is envisioned in terms of peoples, cultures and societies. Unfortunately, in recent years, the entire 'national integrity' enterprise has been perverted into territoriality. Thus, there has been so much of rhetoric on provincial and national geographical boundaries in recent years. This rhetoric manufactures populist consent that legitimizes the apparatus of governance at different levels to embark on a large scale war, declared or covert, for even 'an inch of our land'.

The obvious and natural consequence of such a pathological concern for national integrity has been that the country has built up a massive military and bureaucratic establishment which is used to annihilate chosen adversaries. In the process, we end up destroying our own best defenses. We have sacrificed our health, wealth and the best hands and minds to the false gods of domination (if not, assimilation) and war. Why have we come to such a pass? Why have we tied ourselves to military options? In fact, any voicing of equality, pluralism and democratic solutions is seen as a threat to national integrity and security. This results in a vicious circle where yesterday's solution becomes today's problem. The issue can well be illustrated through our national language policy and planning.

Since the Constituent Assembly Debates on India's language policy, both the rulers and scholars have found the country's linguistic diversity an untractable problem. It's a different matter that the number of language and speech varieties spoken within the territory of India have kept fluctuating from census to census. Through the constitutional provisions to the innumerable legislative and executive measures, the attempt, by and large, has been to reduce the number of languages to be used in public domains such as the school, the court of law, in different technical spheres and the like. This, in consequence, has provoked people to engage in language

movements and conflicts throughout the country ever since Independence. A case in point is the Eighth Schedule (hereafter ES) of the Constitution of India.

Why do groups and communities want their languages to be included in the ES? No doubt, it is an enterprise that seriously concerns most people who speak non-scheduled languages. These people feel their mother tongues as being endangered because of the encroachment of certain exogenous languages, particularly Hindi and English, into their communicate space, both public and private. The moot point that is intriguing is the fact that both the parties negotiating the struggle, i.e. the people who demand the inclusion and the Central Government (irrespective of party colour) that refuses to take cognizance of the demand, search for a set of criteria for their inflexible standpoints. I want to suggest that while each criterion on each side may have its own merits, it is ultimately by appeal to a sense of justice, a sense of morality that we might find a basis for the inclusion of a people's language in the ES. Thus, the entire exercise of both linguists and non-linguists searching for a set of 'objective' criteria ends up in a frustrating experience. After all, what set of criteria can be presumed for the inclusion or otherwise of certain rights as 'fundamental rights'? Why is 'freedom of speech' a 'fundamental right' and not the 'tiller's right to land'?

Furthermore, language, identity and related issues are not ends in themselves, but are rather means to other ends. These 'other ends' range from mundane concerns of day-to-day interaction and existence to self-realization at all levels within a framework of a sense of justice and of morality. Languages and cultures reflect a collectivity's image of the 'self' and the 'other'. In fact, one of the most basic functions of language is the construction and creation of a collective self-definition in order to socialize each new generation to seeing itself, its own world, and its relation to the 'other' world much as others do.

It is precisely on the basis of the above understanding that one can assert that every language policy reflects a particular world view, a sense of justice and of morality. Bilingual education (BE) in the U.S. for ethnolinguistic minorities like the Blacks and Hispanics provides us with an illuminating illustration. Since the 1960s, the heightened commitment to BE on the part of the U.S. administration has been moral, not educational. In 1978, the Director of the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education maintained that BE could not be evaluated since it was a philosophy. In fact, as has been proclaimed, it was a sense of cultural sin, not educational failing, that was the driving force behind

the original U.S. Bilingual Education Act of 1968. A large number of scholars have argued, however, that it was the perception of the cultural sin committed by the 'White' Americans on the Blacks for centuries which realized itself in the Civil Rights Movement, which in turn forced the U.S. federal government to legalize and fund BE.

We might see a parallel to American BE in the Three Language Formula in the Indian context. The original TLF of 1961 was graduated and modified in 1964-66 (Kothari Commission) to include a provision which specified that while Hindi would continue to be taught as a second language in non-Hindi-speaking areas, in Hindi-speaking areas a language other than Hindi, preferably a south Indian language be taught as a second language. This provision is not based on any linguistic, applied linguistic or pedagogic theory but on a sense of equality, in terms of language load in schooling. It is a different matter that such a sense of equality is unfortunately negative. If you can't make people strong, make them equally weak.

Clearly, the central basis of demands (and their denial) for official status and recognition of languages is from the language community's sense of justice. It is interesting to note here that recent research in the fields of neurology and bio-chemistry has come out with findings which indicate that the definition of a sense of justice depends on the combination of emotion and cognition resulting from a matching of experience with hope. It has also been hypothesized that while the rules and norms that define the sense of justice (and injustice) are typically culture specific, the processing mechanism underlying them seems to be universal and innate in the genetic make-up. One hopes that further research might throw greater light, but the need to explore the interplay of nature and nurture, of our genetic make up and the environment is real and urgent. Such research contains significant potentialities for moral theory as well as language policies, even though arguments based on a sense of justice and sentimentality are difficult to prove, especially to the powers-that-be who decide language policies and programmes.

The overall implication is that, for example, demands for the inclusion of a language in the ES need to be supported on the simple ground that a community of speakers strongly feel about it and request it. Else, the ruthless and increasing marginalisation and displacement of minority, tribal and other indigenous languages may (perhaps it already has) lead to the becoming of human beings without any language, or what I would prefer to call 'language refugees'. We need to develop a sense of justice and on that basis a language planning framework whereby the 1652 mother tongues

(1961 census) spoken in this country will be transvalued from something of a burden into a rich reservoir. Then the linguistic diversity will not make our country appear as a 'sociolinguistic giant' or a 'linguistic madhouse'. Like the rich bio-diversity of tropical rain forests which might contain solutions to future bio-genetic problems, our linguistic diversity contains a valuable source of alternative worldviews, sense of justice and morality and ways of living in harmony with one's natural and cultural environments. Such a framework would also transform conceptualisations of national identity and integrity, which could be accomplished only through genuine processes of mutuality and reciprocity. Hopefully then, neither linguistic diversity nor national integrity would remain academic pariahs.

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### A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry: A Bird's Eye-View

A.K. Ramanujan is one of the few poets who brought about a welcome change to Indian poetry in English after Independence. Critical opinion, though divided earlier, has now come around to accept him as one of the most gifted and original poets of the later half of the twentieth century. Certainly, with his new approach, admirable linguistic skills, keen power of observation and uncanny but delicate critical touch he breathed new life into Indian English poetry.

Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan, born in 1929 in a family of Tamil brahmins in Mysore was able to capture the attention of the English-speaking world as early as 1966 with his first collection of poems, *The Striders. While Relations* (1971) and the *Second Sight* (1986) continue in the direction indicated in *The Striders*, the fourth and last collection, *The Black Hen*, published posthumously (1994) adds a new dimension to his poetry. Besides these, Ramanujan has to his credit original writings in Kannada and has translated into English great works of Tamil and Kannada. His translation of classical Tamil anthologies and U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* into English have won much critical acclaim.

As one reads the poems of Ramanujan one is convinced of the aptness of R. Parthasarathy's observation: 'The family for Ramanujan is one of the central metaphors with which he thinks'. Though he was