One Nation One Language: Status Of Hindi Language In Indian Constitution

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.” – Mahatma Gandhi.

India is a country that is united in a diversified society. The religions, languages, dressings and everything differ yet the people of our country are united. Being a country of rich cultural heritage, there are various cultural treasures and traditional practices in every state and also in every part of the states. The dances, dramas, music, writing and languages everything is different from one state to another. But if we deeply watch the people of India, they respect and follow that culture and tradition from all parts of India.

Right from its roots, India has grown from its various thriving cultures that have stretched over a span of more than five thousand years. Modern-Day India is a result of the diverse races, such as the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Austrics, and many more than earlier in ancient times settled in the various parts of the country, which has helped to develop the enriching Indian culture with such diversity. It can be rightly said that various ways of life, backgrounds, and traditions have evolved and blended themselves to make one united culture. This can be well observed in the festivals that are celebrated in harmony all over the country or in the soul imbibed in sports like cricket, in which no matter where you are from, or which religion you follow, our hearts beat together for the same team, making it a celebration of a sort. In matters of national importance, especially, the whole country becomes one at the end of the day, such as the instance of the Lokpal Bill, where people from all walks of life came in support of stringent anti-support law.

While diversity is in itself important, we need to also talk about the knowledge systems that are steeped in every spoken language — one that has its own history, literature (oral or written), relationship with the local economy, with people’s lives, the way they understand the world around them and the relationships with other languages around them. As American linguist, Nancy Dorian writes: “A good many people, especially those who speak unthreatened languages, are likely to have trouble imagining that they themselves could ever be brought to the point of giving up on their own ancestral language and encouraging their children to use some other language instead”.

The debate over “One Nation One Language” started in the constituent assembly debates on the official language. — Hindi was voted as official language, however, due to outpour and anti-Hindi agitation from various sections, English was also continued as an associated official language. The Constituent Assembly of India adopted Hindi written in Devnagari Script along with English as the official language of the country on September 14, 1949, under Article 343(1).

The Union Home Minister Amit Shah's comments on 'One Nation, One Language' during an event celebrating 'Hindi Diwas' on the 14th of September have sparked quite a bit of controversy. Home Minister Amit Shah's speech opined that there's a need to impose Hindi as the official language in all states to bring the entire country under one umbrella.

While the speech created hardly a hype in the Hindi heartlands belt, east, west and south, it's created quite a frenzy in the non-Hindi speaking states. Furthermore, the words of the Home Minister were vehemently condemned under the (#HindiImposition) by the citizens from the Peninsular South and the North East parts of India.

Articles Relating to Hindi language in Indian Constitution

- Article 351: It shall be the duty of the Union-
    - To promote the spread of the Hindi language,
    - To develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and
    - To secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule.
- Article 120 and 210 regarding language to be used in Parliament and state legislature respectively gives the option of transacting business in Hindi as well in English.
- Article 343 gives power to parliament to decide by law, the languages to be used for official work.
- Article 344 provides for the constitution of a parliamentary committee every 10 years to recommend to the President regarding progressive use of the Hindi language for the official purposes of the Union and restrictions on the use of English.
- Article 29 gives every Indian the right to a distinct language, script & culture.

The vice-president of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu, recently underlined the importance of preserving local languages. He is reported to have said that when a language dies, culture, traditions and customs associated with it are also lost. His statement is important, especially since it comes at a time when the dispensation seems keen on pushing the case of Hindi as the official language.

Language truly is the lifeline of culture, tradition and customs of people living in a particular region and the best way to preserve or promote any language is to use it extensively. Naidu exhorted people to start using their native languages at home and in the community. In my opinion, promotion of the mother tongue should begin at the primary school level. But the recent comments of the Union home minister, Amit Shah, have stoked tension. “One nation, one language” would slowly kill India’s regional languages.

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- Idea of one country, one language: A colonial Construct: The idea that a language represents a nation is one of colonialism’s constructs. The complex process of modern nation-building in colonial countries involved questions of cultural unity. Language and literature held the key to this project of cultural continuity from a unique and great past.
- Delinking language from cultural Identity: Often it is argued that a national language is considered a language that represents Indian culture; however, we can definitely preserve our culture in spite of adopting other language and also learning one more language beside our regional language would not ruin or destroy us or our culture. So, changing the medium of expression would not change our identity which can be understood by even an ordinary person.

- Issue of consensus: There is a lack of consensus- among the population with respect to one language, as the whole construct of a national language seems more of an imposition of one language over others.
    - Therefore, any such efforts of imposing a language on the unwilling people is hardly unifying, and rather it could turn out to be divisive.
- Diverse structure: A uniform language goes against the idea of a diverse and federal structure of the country, where such common language may not be desirable. It also runs contrary to the spirit of the Constitution and our country's linguistic diversity"
    - All languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution are national languages and must be treated equally. Any attempt to impose any one language will lead to the disruption of our country's unity and integrity.
- The inevitability of English: English is today's language of science and technology in the whole world. Even if we replace English from all technological usage in India with Hindi, still it will remain the language of science as it would be immensely difficult to translate all the scientific knowledge-base in the Hindi language.

To preserve our ancient philosophy, our culture and the memory of our freedom struggle, it's important that we strengthen our local languages simultaneously without being biased towards anyone's language. The need today is to respect, protect and nurture the diversity of our nation so that unity is ensured and it lies in the quality of unity and togetherness.