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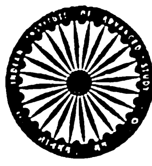

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EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY

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V. V. JOHN

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY

Foreword

by

UMASHANKAR JOSHI

Vice-Chancellor, Gujarat University.

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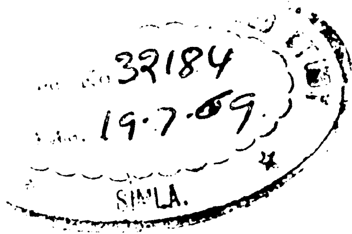

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In the past, the Indian elite seemed to rest content with using the language of the conquerors. At one time it was Sanskrit, then it was Persian, which was eventually replaced by English. The Great Teachers, however, preferred to emphasize the use of the people's languages, e.g., the Buddha and Lord Mahavir in ancient times, the saints in the mediaeval period and Tagore and Gandhi in our own day. Now that India has launched upon a career as an independent country wedded to democracy, the languages of the people, which it is impossible to erase from the people's cultural behaviour and which have, besides, come of age are bound to play an increasingly important role at all levels of community living, as media of education—of higher education even—as languages of state administration and as fit vehicles for articulating the subtlest and most complex thoughts of the finest minds.

Being, however, a vast multilingual country, we have always been in need of a link language, and the great languages of the conquerors, let us gratefully acknowledge, have stood us in good stead. How are we going to solve the problem, when there is no conqueror to oblige us? English and/or Hindi seem to be the obvious claimants. How to sell either or both of them is the task before Indian educationists to-day. Indeed, the languages have to commend themselves to their prospective users.

The local language and English, one might suggest, would deliver the goods: academic, administrative, scientific, and those regarding world relations. But nationalism, which is not obsolete yet and more than nationalism democracy, which we do not want to get obsolete, demand the adoption of one of the Indian languages to play the role of a link language. Hindi will do it, and that too, sooner, the more it were left to the non-Hindi-speaking people, who really are

in need of a link language to come in contact with the various sections of the people of our country.

English could not have posed such a national problem in the pre-Second World War period. Our achieving independence synchronized with the world shrinking into one world, turning itself into, say, a 'global village'. And English, it cannot be denied, is fast becoming the common language of the contemporary world. The result is: Exit English as a language of the erstwhile conquerors; enter English as a language, which acts for us as a window on the world, links us with the rest of mankind and works as the key to the vast store-house of human knowledge, especially in the fields of science and technology. Even advanced European countries, which speak languages that are fully developed for scientific studies, find a use for English and provide for its study in schools and colleges. A developing country like ours undoubtedly has to have one of the modern Western languages as a library language in the seats of higher learning. Not to have English (or some other modern Western language), at least at the comprehensional level, would mean a great set-back to a university student because, however much reading material we might produce in our languages—and produce we will—it would be impossible to keep pace with the rapid growth of knowledge only through translations. Nor do we wish to be reduced to 'a nation of translators'. How, then, to give an adequate quantum of English to the university student, so that he can cope with the present-day knowledge-explosion is one of the pedagogic problems of contemporary India. Are the English books garnered in the countless libraries of our country to be read by us or fed upon by white-ants? They remain unread only at great national peril.

The use of English (or any other modern Western language) should, with the subsiding of the language fever, go well with the use of Hindi as a link language and of the various Indian languages as media of higher learning. Indeed, one might venture to add that the various Indian languages would really flourish and succeed as media of higher learning to the extent they are aided by the students' knowledge

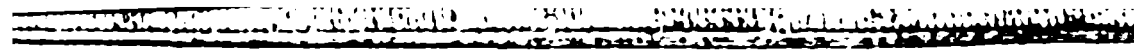
of English or any other modern Western language.

It was opportune that Shri V. V. John selected this ticklish subject, 'Education and Language Policy' for this year's Tagore Lectures at Gujarat University. He is one of the few Indians who are eminently qualified to discuss it. Himself a lover of languages (yes, one who truly loves one language, loves all languages), he has been keeping a sharp watch on the changing educational scene in India and recording seismographically even the faintest cultural tremors as an indefatigable columnist. It is a treat to listen to his genial voice, more especially because of his puckish humour and delicate sense of irony. He is a rare educationist who goes on crusading against prejudice and fanaticism of every kind almost single-handed.

I hope Shri John's lucid and interesting presentation of the problem will contribute immensely to a proper understanding of a very complex and vital problem our country faces today.

UMASHANKAR JOSHI

Gujarat University
Ahmedabad-9
November 22, 1968



PREFACE

THE TAGORE LECTURES on 'Education and Language Policy,' which form the principal contents of this book, were delivered at Gujarat University on March 21, 22 and 23, 1968, at the invitation of Vice-Chancellor Umashankar Joshi. I profited by the lively discussion that followed each lecture, and have revised the text in the light of the discussion. It was a stimulating experience, for which I am deeply grateful to the Vice-Chancellor and faculty of the University.

In the last few months, I have had occasion to write rather frequently in the national press on various aspects of our language problem. Material from articles I had written for *The Statesman, The Hindustan Times, The Times of India* and *Weekend Review* were made use of in preparing the Tagore Lectures. A few pieces that supplement the argument of the lectures are also included in this book. But the most important piece, the Appendix, is not mine; it was written by Mr. N. S. Jagannathan of *The Hindustan Times,* who has kindly allowed me to use it as intellectual ballast for this volume.

I am grateful to the editors of the journals in which some of this material originally appeared, for permission to use it again. And a special word of thanks to the hard-headed idealist who founded Nachiketa Publications, and who relaxed the hard-headedness in agreeing to publish this book.

V. V. JOHN

Jaipur
December 1, 1968

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1

THE ROAD TO BABEL

IT IS AN honour to be asked to deliver the Tagore lectures. I like to think that I was impelled by a proper sense of this honour when I chose the subject of these lectures. In seeking the regeneration of this nation, Tagore put his faith in education, the sort of faith that, despite our loud protestations, does not currently inspire our plans or our performance. The hope and the vision that sustained him to the end of his days were beautifully expressed in his last message to students in 1940: "You are here with the gift of young life which, like the morning star, shines for the unborn day of the world's future...What a delight, and what a responsibility, belonging to a period which is one of the greatest in the whole history of man." In the twentyeight years since those words were spoken, much has happened to destroy the delight, and little has been done to discharge the responsibility. This has largely been due to a failure of education. And to this failure, our decisions, indecisions and confusions over language policy have contributed.

Tagore dreamt of a heaven of freedom 'where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls.' When freedom arrived, it was accompanied by divisive forces of the most alarming virulence. Twenty years ago, those forces took the name of religion, largely under the inspiration of the irreligious, and India's leaders, in weary desperation, accepted the partition of the country. Less than ten years later, another fanaticism led to the reorganization of the States on a linguistic basis. The proposal for the ex-

periment of two or three bi-lingual States was resisted with fury. Later, proposals made by the National Integration Committee came up against resistance by vested interests, and only puerile exercises such as the Integration Pledge were all that was salvaged out of the discarded heap of the Committee's recommendations. And today, language is being allowed to grow into as divisive a force as religion was two decades ago.

In Bihar last year, a hundred persons were killed in a so-called anti-Urdu agitation. In Orissa, students went on the rampage, objecting to the screening of Telugu films for the entertainment of the Telugu-speaking public, and demanded that employment in the State be reserved exclusively for Oriyas. In three of the Hindi-speaking States, and in the national capital, love of Hindi was sought to be expressed almost exclusively through hostility to English, extending itself illiterately to the Roman alphabet and Arabic numerals. This was matched in the South by anti-Hindi fury resulting in the destruction of much public property, and culminating in insults to the national flag and a clamour for secession. In a Mysore town, when rioting students could not find any Hindi-speaking persons to molest, they turned their attention on poor shopkeepers from Kerala, on the ostensible ground that Kerala had not taken a violent anti-Hindi stance in our language squabbles. Kerala too experienced some disturbances briefly, and the fact that an anti-Hindi mob attacked the USIS library at Trivandrum provides an interesting sidelight on the motivations behind the riots. To the recent riots in Gauhati many factors contributed, and one suspects that, strangely, linguistic fanaticism was used as a facade for concealing something even more sinister. We seem to have reached a stage when linguistic bigotry is deemed to be almost respectable, compared to the more evil forces that are currently operating among us.

If we could forget for a moment the tragic aspects of this predicament, we would be struck by its comedy. Is it not, for instance, comic that, when we talk of our language problem, we should not be talking of the 350 million people in the country who do not know how to read or write any language?

One should have thought that *this* was our chief language problem. In view of this large ocean of illiteracy around us, our language squabbles amount to a quarrel to decide which language we shall be illiterate in. Present indications are that we are opting for extensive areas of ignorance.

The comedy does not end there. While we are loud in our squabbles over the official language, link language, library language and other language categories, we are, in another part of the wood, learning how to do without language altogether. This is the meaning of what has lately been happening in our legislative assemblies and in parliament. Parlimentary government has been described as government by talking. Carlyle, in one of his less sagacious moments, referred contemptuously to the British Parliament as 'a talking shop.' One wonders whether the Chelsea hero-worshipper would have preferred a Hitlerian dispensation where one man did all the talking. It is a noble thing that men should get together and argue, dispute, differ and try to persuade one another, over public issues and the public welfare. But we no longer listen to one another; the new parliamentary procedure is to shout all together. Governors' addresses and budget speeches are drowned in orgies of parliamentary hooliganism, and the participants in these unseemly exercises go home in a glow of smugness over thus having advanced the public weal. Latterly, shouts and catcalls have been considered an inadequate expression of political conviction and so we have started hurling things about. If we cannot meet argument with argument, we can burn the paper on which it is printed. The gift of speech that raises man above the animal has no longer any parliamentary relevance.

When they do make speeches, there is no desire to communicate; it is merely an exercise in the currently fashionable linguistic ostentation. In the old days, the language you spoke was like the clothes you wore; you did not seek to draw special attention to it. This etiquette is now considered old-fashioned. If the present trends continue, members of parliament will travel to Delhi from different parts of the country, and having arrived there, will proceed to talk to one another in their respective languages, and none would be

the wiser for this exercise in mutual bewilderment.

In this, as in several other areas of our national life, the basic malady is that there is too much politics and too little thinking. In fact, politics is a large ogre that has been devouring everything in this country. We saw how it devoured the cow a little while ago. It has gorged itself on the food problem and almost the entire economy. It is currently engaged in supping on the languages of India.

The rational grounds on which linguistic States were brought into existence have long been forgotten, and what has survived are divisive attitudes fostered by the kind of politics that may finally destroy the integrity of this nation. Language policies, particularly in the field of education, are being subordinated to political exigencies of the moment, or to unintelligent outbursts of emotion.

In twenty years of freedom, while the noise of battle has been loud, our linguistic proficiencies have come down to a lower level than in the days of British rule. Everything has been, meanwhile, sloganized into substitutes for clear thinking, from the 'three-language formula', to 'link language' and 'library language'. One could dispute the thesis that every educated Indian needs three languages. And some would need more than three. What the happenings in Parliament and in the streets of our cities portend, and what is confirmed by the continued illiteracy of 75 per cent of the population of the country, is that at the moment we are working on a 'no-language formula'. As for the 'link language', are we clear what we are hoping to link? And do we realise that the limited proficiency envisaged for the 'library language' would vary considerably, depending on which section of the library one wishes to use?

The three-language formula would have won more sincere adherence in the country at large, if its origins had been educationally respectable. In its original formulation by the Chief Ministers in 1961, one of the major considerations was the equalization of disadvantage or difficulty. It is rather like what our special brand of socialism has been trying to achieve, namely, equalization of poverty. We did not succeed in this, for our 'socialistic pattern' has only made the fat ones fatter.

On the language issue, our approach was from the beginning unscholarly and anti-educational, for we started with talking of the 'language load' in the curriculum. Learning is primarily an experience of joy, and ultimately the acquisition of mastery. No one who thinks of a language as a load is in any psychological condition to learn it. What we did with Sanskrit in school, and are currently doing with English, and may be doing eventually with the rest of the formula, would prove this point. It reminds one of the story of the old man, his son and their donkey. When the story begins, they are riding the donkey, but at the close, they are carrying the donkey. That is a symbol of our language load. Instead of language being to us a charger that we mount and ride into the wonderland of knowledge, we have turned it into a donkey that we painfully carry on our back. No wonder we protest against any suggestion that we might carry three of these beasts.

If equal distribution of learning difficulty were a serious consideration in fixing on a common language for the country, one should examine the case for Sanskrit more carefully than it has been. The late Dr. Katju advocated it in a convocation address he delivered in 1947, but it did not find favour with his political associates, and he did not persevere, possibly on account of his political commitments. F. W. Thomas, the noted orientalist, also made the same suggestion, about the same time. Apart from the rather churlish point of the equalization of difficulty, Sanskrit has certain weighty considerations to recommend it, if only we could decide at what level and for what purposes we need a common language. I would support Sanskrit for a special reason, namely, that it will discourage the volubility of politicians and administrators. I think we should watch the results of what Israel is doing with Hebrew.

A great deal of our squabbles arises from a basic flaw in our view of education. With us, education is not the pursuit of excellence, which it should ideally be, nor even, on a more modest level, the pursuit of employable skills; it is the pursuit of personal advantage—if possible, undue advantage. And if we can have the advantage without the learning, we would welcome the arrangement.

The Hindi States are right when they plead that their young pupils do not have an adequate 'motivation' for learning another Indian language. It is odd that they should be obliged to learn a language they do not need, on the principle of 'the equalization of difficulty' for all school children in India. The answer to this problem is not the bland recommendation that absolute equality is impossible in these matters, and that the Hindi States may therefore be permitted to reduce the 3-language formula to 2 as one publicist has suggested, but the more patient procedure recommended by Dr Triguna Sen, of replacing 'compulsion' by 'motivation' in both Hindi and non-Hindi areas. It is irrational to oblige children to learn languages to satisfy a political formula and to solve the difficulties that grown-ups have created. The expedient way is to learn languages to meet identifiable needs. The Government should, instead of compelling pupils to learn three, four or five languages according to the political whim of the moment, indicate what cadres of the public services will need language proficiencies beyond the mother tongue. Similarly, universities should indicate what languages will be required of those pursuing programmes of higher studies. In the present political temper of the country, it would be wise to define language requirements for careers and for programmes of advanced studies and leave the students to choose, rather than compel them—vainly—to conform to patterns set by people whose memories of classrooms are distant and not very reliable.

When the British were here, their senior officers were specially rewarded for acquiring proficiency in additional languages. This was not an ideal arrangement. But in the present squabble over languages, when everyone's effort seems to be to get by without learning anything else besides his mother tongue, there is a case for relating salaries in certain cadres of the public service to proficiency in more and more languages. This will be a partial answer to the Know-Nothings who are holding the centre of the stage today.

Amidst the succession of confident formulations of the three-language pattern, there was one that showed great

realism and wisdom. But it was soon smothered and suppressed amidst all the din that followed. One is reminded of what Churchill once said of Baldwin. Every now and then, he said, Baldwin stumbled into something sensible, but he soon picked himself up and went on as though nothing had happened. I refer to the suggestion made by the M.P.s' Committee that considered the Education Commission's recommendations. They recognized that not every Indian needed three languages. The M.P.s' Committee produced a two-plus-one formula, which would oblige every secondary school pupil to learn two languages, with an option to learn a third, for which facilities would be provided. Except that one of the languages should be Hindi or English, they would leave the choice of languages to the schools and the pupils. In the long run, this pattern would eliminate certain ugly elements in our language situation: namely, the resistance to compulsion, the complaint about the language load and the hypocrisy in implementing the three-language formula. It would have enabled the learner to relate his choice of languages to the needs of the career and the programmes of advanced studies he had in view.

This suggestion did not receive due consideration in Parliament because the tempers that had been frayed over the Official Language Bill were in no condition to approach the matter dispassionately. On the subject of the 'official language', I should like to make a brief observation. With our talent for excessive verbalization, we have a tendency to turn administration into a mere matter of words. The bureaucrat who writes a twenty-page note on a matter that calls for only a crisp paragraph, is held in high honour. Strictly, in administration, the less language we use, the better. We have eliminated language, for all practical purposes, in our voting procedure in the elections to Parliament and the State legislatures. One wishes a similar elimination of words were achieved in administration too. Meanmhile English has to be replaced for two very good reasons. One is that in the much-publicized welfare state that we are building, the hapless citizen should at least be able to understand the language in which he is being bullied by the bureau-

cracy. The other reason is even stronger, namely, that though English could be used like a precision instrument and its idiom could be forthright and direct, it is also rich in the sort of woolly verbiage with which the public functionary can befuddle both himself and the people. Until the nature of bureaucrats changes radically, it would be expedient not to let them employ any but the most undeveloped languages. If I had my way, I would restrict bureaucratic verbiage to a basic vocabulary such as Ogden devised for Basic English, and would penalise excessive verbalization in administrators as constituting serious delinquency.

When most people talk of 'the link language', one wonders whether they are talking of the language of federal administration, or the language of inter-State commerce, or the language of communication among intellectuals. If it is the latter, one can only be amazed at the outrageous effrontery of half-educated and self-important public functionaries trying to decide in what language scholar will communicate with scholar in this country. One is even more amazed that the intellectual community in this country should stand aside and let such decisions be made for them by persons who hardly know what they are talking about. The trouble is that the academic community abdicated its legitimate functions long ago, and have left it to the ignorant to make decisions for the nation even in academic matters. What is worse, the intellectuals seem to be all too willing to let their skills be hired by those in power, in the service of causes and programmes that intelligent men should despise. Hence, the skill and the expertise of the scholar and the intellectual are not available for considering such issues as a common script, and the viability or otherwise of Nagari or Roman for the purpose. It is a matter that only scholars could advise us on.

I was talking of the link language. One recalls Mr Chagla's "nightmarish visions of interpreters being needed in a high-powered conference to interpret what one Indian is saying to another". What was the high-power conference that Mr Chagla saw in his vision? Was it a conference of politicians, where they go round the same mulberry bush year after year, say the same things, and do not coin even a new platitude?

Each would know what the others were saying before the interpreters began, even if the speeches were made in fifteen different languages. Or was it a conference of bureaucrats who have long ago bartered their birth-right for a mess of potage, and were content to be their masters' voices? In which case, too, interpreters would be superfluous, for each participant has his brief, and would scrupulously avoid the risk of being subjected to civilized persuasion. Or would it be a conference of scholars? I do not think so, for when have we called a conference of scholars to consider national issues? Meanwhile, one keeps wondering what the link language will link.

I was born in a non-Hindi-speaking State, but have spent the best part of my working life, very happily, in a Hindi-speaking region. And I have come to wish that the Hindi-speaking people had a clearer appreciation of the perfectly good reason why Hindi was chosen as the common official language of India. Hindi is the largest of our linguistic units, and it is easier to learn than other languages, even for the people of the South. During the years of the national movement, it won for itself a certain emotional adherence even outside the Hindi-speaking area. Some Hindi spokesmen have during recent years done everything to destroy the memory of this historical association of the learning of Hindi with the nation's goals of freedom and unity. They have shown no appreciation of the courtesy that the nation showed in deciding to adopt their language as the common language of the country. Instead, they arrogantly invoke the Constitution, an argument that is being as arrogantly countered by others talking of amending the Constitution. The acrimony over this issue has reached such a pitch that any proud lover of Hindi would ask the warring politicians to leave his mother tongue alone. The language that he cherishes has no need of the reluctant adherence of anyone.

The true lovers of Hindi have not yet spoken. They will surely have no use for those who hope to trick or bully the rest of the country into learning their language. It is a fine and virile language and has no need of political stilts to heighten its stature. Its natural advantages once made it

acceptable to the whole country as its common second language; when the fanatics and the fools have departed, it will come into its own again, and will be sought by the educated Indian for what it is, the language that Mahatma Gandhi commended to us for very practical reasons, the idiom through which the urge of our freedom was once voiced, perhaps in half-understood phrases, throughout the land, and the inheritor of a rich and composite linguistic tradition. Its replacing English as the idiom of the bureaucrat in Delhi is not the highest felicity that its devotees can bring about. They should aspire to so enrich Hindi that it could repay to the world some of the debt we owe to English. Such high aspirations cannot be promoted by infantile exercises like shouting 'Angrezi hatao,' and defacing road signs in Roman script.

Even more serious than the recession in our language proficiencies, at a time when, more than ever before, we have need of expanding and deepening such proficiencies, is the damage that our language squabbles and riots are doing to the character of the nation. To mention but one instance out of hundreds, the newspapers reported last December how 400 students attacked the house of a woman member of parliament in Kanpur, manhandled an elderly female relative of hers and threatened even direr action if the M.P. did not change her stand on the language issue. The same day, the papers also carried a statement by a spokesman of the Hindi Sena, in which he claimed, "We want to preserve Indian culture and Indian values". The juxtaposition of the two news items was more expressive than any editorial comment that the newspaper could have made.

Before this hypocrisy goes any further, one should ask why the grown-ups should not be prepared to fight their battles themselves and leave the students alone. At the moment, students are being used by persons and parties who lack somewhat of the courage themselves to fight. Only an utter lack of scruple would explain the phenomenon of grown-ups abetting the young in the neglect of their primary duty of giving themselves a better education than the older generation received. Our standards of learning are low. Our

investment in education is inadequate. We have a long way to go before we are able to conquer our penury and ignorance and our consequent dependence on others even for our subsistence. If self-respect is at the back of the language riots, our pride could be better expressed by a decision not to beg for aid from other people. No man is disgraced by seeking knowledge wherever he can find it, even from alien sources. But a habit of beggary may do much harm to his soul. And the way work and study are neglected by both the young and the old these days, our state of beggary seems likely to continue.

We are turning education into a costly device—costly in human resources even more than the material—whereby the young cheat themselves of their birthright. I suspect that the older generation watches this with wicked glee. On the language front, we are feeding slogans to the unsuspecting young, so as to ensure that they do not get round to bothering about things that matter, and resort to the kind of revolt that youth is entitled to and old people live in fear of. The younger generation, which seems all too ready to rally forth into the streets at the behest of the rabble-rousers, has no awareness of what is happening to their heritage. They have no suspicion that our priceless possession of freedom will have evaporated by the time the grown-ups have done with it. Our education so discourages the art of clear thinking that the young are unable to see that even more than a common language or linguistic nationalism, what should hold this country together is integrity in public life. Is it not ominous that the Roman script in Uttar Pradesh and the Nagari script in Madras send the youth of the land into a fury, while they take no notice of the writing on the wall that tells of the doom that awaits our freedom, our unity and our well-being?

2

THE MOTHER TONGUE IN SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

WHATEVER ELSE might or might not be expected, one would expect the new language policies to restore the mother tongue to its rightful place in education and lead to a great enrichment of the language, particularly in respect of what is called the literature of knowledge. There are however indications that this may not happen in a hurry. For one notices the pitiful uses to which the ardent supporters of the mother tongue have been putting it in our schools and colleges; there is no sign that under the new language dispensation, they have any ambitious programmes in which the mother tongue would be used to achieve the desired transformation of the quality of our education.

I shall illustrate my point with something that happened a little while ago in one of the universities in the Hindi-speaking area. A controversy arose in the university over a decision of the academic council to reduce the compulsory study of Hindi in its degree courses from two years to one. According to the new decision, the undergraduate would take a general Hindi examination at the end of the first year of the three-year degree course, and would not have to bother with Hindi again unless he took it as one of his optional subjects.

Critics of the decision said that since the undergraduate had to do two years of English in college, any reduction of term requirements in Hindi only showed how the colonial mentality still survived in us. They also pointed out that the Hindi that most undergraduates wrote was so defective that

this was not the appropriate moment to reduce the syllabus in the subjeect.

Supporters of the new decision claimed that the reduction in the duration of the course did not mean a reduction in standards. They alleged that the only advantage in spreading the course over two years was that one could extend patronage by prescribing more textbooks and appointing more examiners. That a foreign language would need a longer course in terms of years than the mother tongue should be self-evident; the question, they said, had no political implications. (A little later, however, compulsory English succumbed to an anti-English agitation.)

Language has become such an explosive subject amongst us that it is difficult these days to discuss the teaching of Hindi or any other language unemotionally. It is however the duty of scholars and educators to rescue the subject from the street agitator, and deal with it on the academic and intellectual plane. Anyway, I am not at the moment concerned with the question of the common language for the country or with the medium of instruction. Those of you who get excited over these themes may therefore relax till tomorrow evening, when I undertake to provide some provocation. My attempt this evening is to indicate the place and scope of the mother tongue as a compulsory subject in the general programme in school and college.

In any assessment of the quality of our academic programmes, it would be convenient to look at the end product. We shall begin our study, therefore, with what may seem to be the wrong end, namely, college. And there are those who ask: Since the student knows his mother tongue already, and could be expected to have acquired some proficiency in it by the time he leaves school, why does he have to do it all over again in college? Colleges do not exist for teaching students what they already know. Some teachers in science faculties also say that science students should not be obliged to bother with literature and the niceties of language, and the time thus saved could be put to better use in the laboratory.

There is a point in the objection that college seems to repeat what is, or ought to be, taught in the school cur-

riculum. In the controversy that I referred to, one of the protagonists indignantly asked: How can we reduce the Hindi syllabus in college, when so many of our undergraduates do not even spell correctly? This exactly indicates what is wrong with our attitude in the matter. Can it seriously be suggested that, since some students do not know how to spell, and their grammar is weak, colleges should concern themselves with the elements of grammar and spelling in the mother tongue? Should we accept the position that schools do not teach properly, and that the chief function of colleges is therefore remedial? Given the snail's pace at which language skills are being acquired, there is no guarantee that two years in college will impart the proficiency in the mother tongue that eleven years of school failed to impart; even twenty years may not be enough.

The basic error is in not clearly deciding what minimum proficiency in the mother tongue should be required of a pupil leaving school. This applies, in fact, to standards in other subjects too. The excessive concern with the duration of courses, without regard to the standards aimed at, would be about as sensible as hiring professors by height, weight and girth. With the prevailing attitudes, the extension of eleven years of school to twelve will only add another year of sloth and futility to the present programme. We may extend school to twenty years and still get the same half-baked product.

Universities should firmly decide what minimum proficiency in basic subjects, such as languages and mathematics, they require of a student before he is admitted to a university course. Until such proficiency is acquired, the student should be debarred from admission to a degree course. Remedial teaching should precede the degree course, and not be a part of it.

Any firmness on this point would seem to be ruled out by the Education Commission's bland acceptance of the fact that our first degrees are not to be compared to first degrees in educationally advanced countries. The equivalence would seem to be between our first degrees and matriculation in other countries. Even this is doubtful, however, in view of

the objectives that secondary education in Western Europe places before itself. Let me quote from the Crowther Report on Secondary Education in England: "In Western Europe, as in England, the Secondary School is traditionally concerned with educating an elite, an intellectual aristocracy on whom the most stringent academic demands can be made and in whom there can be awakened a real love of learning. It treats them as adults capable of a reverence of knowledge, beginners in a life-long quest for truth, which they can share with those who teach them." (*Fifteen to Eighteen*, p. 259). This claim, I must add, is made for the English Sixth Form and equivalent classes on the continent, and may not apply to all streams of the modern comprehensive schools in England. But, by and large, university education in Europe is built on the intellectual foundation that the Crowther Report describes. That is one of the reasons why there is considerable doubt in regard to the wisdom of the Robbins proposals regarding the expansion of university education in England. Many educationists deny the availability of any considerable degree of additional, youthful talent that is now unable to find places in the universities.

In any effort to alter the very different situation in our schools and colleges, we could begin with the mother tongue, which should set the pace for other disciplines. For there is no subject in the curriculum where the objectives can be more clearly seen by student and teacher, and a self-assessment of performance more easy, than in the study of the mother tongue. If the challenge offered by the general lament over the decay of academic standards could first be met on the home ground of the mother tongue, we shall have set the pace for other subjects in the curriculum.

As it happens, the university syllabus in the mother tongue is one of the weakest in the curriculum. I remember the amused contempt with which my classmates and I used to treat the Malayalam syllabus which we had to follow, when we went to college in Kerala many years ago. We were not Anglophiles, but we could not respect a syllabus that indicated a lower standard in the mother tongue than in English. In the latter, we did Shakespeare and some other

major writers; in the mother tongue, not a single classic was prescribed; we had read on our own better novels and poems than the ones prescribed.

The prescribers of textbooks had obviously been more busy with patronage than with scholarship. The two-year course in the mother tongue taught me nothing I did not know before. I suspect that students doing the compulsory course in the mother tongue in other universities had the same story to tell.

I doubt if things have changed very considerably since my college days. A young college teacher told me two years ago that the pre-university syllabus in Hindi, which he was handling in his college, could not keep him or his students busy for more than two months. I reported this to the head of the university's department of Hindi and he was greatly concerned. The next I heard about it was a student agitation against the Hindi syllabus because the number of prescribed text books had been increased from two to four. I helpfully suggested that the four books should be bound in two volumes. This however was considered frivolous, and finally some concessions were made and little was done to raise the curricular requirements.

This contrasts with the ambitious programmes in the mother tongue that schools and universities set for themselves elsewhere in the world. An example is 'Project English' in the United States. This is a programme sponsored by the US Office of Education, with a view to raising standards of school pupils' attainments in the mother tongue. The experimental material prepared by the Project's Centre in the University of Minnesota gives an idea of what is aimed at. The statement of philosophy by the Language Arts Department quotes the words of the Danish Linguist Hjemslev: "Language is the instrument with which man forms thought and feeling, mood, aspiration, will and act, an instrument by whose means he influences and is influenced, the ultimate and deepest foundation of human society".

As Niels Bohr said, "We live suspended in language" and therefore, the understanding of language operations and the development of competence in language operations are re-

levant to the pursuit of any subject or career, not excluding those involving science.

As an example of what the best American schools do in the study of their mother tongue, I may mention the language study programme devised under Project English in the University High School at Minnesota. The School has lively sections learning Russian, Spanish and French. But the liveliest programme is in the study of the mother tongue, English. It is grouped under such categories as: 'the nature of language, our language changes, the description of our language, and the uses of our language'. The last category concerns itself, in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, with such matters as types of discourse, persuasion, argument, critical thinking and listening. The thematic categories through the six-year course in school are: man's heroism; man's conflicts; the currents of man's thought; the codes men live by; man's perspective on his universe; and man's imagination.

The reading list in the twelfth grade includes such titles as *The Iliad, Don Quixote, Utopia, Othello, Brave New World, 1984, The Adding Machine. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* and *The Death of a Salesman.* The unit on the 'Nature and Evaluation of Argument', prescribed for grade eleven, includes exercises in the critical analysis of selected specimens of editorial writing, public speeches and even the transcript of the cross-examination in a famous trial.

This is a far cry from the literary slop that we feed to our schoolboys, in the mother tongue. What should be aimed at is not a half-awake response to mushy poetry and undistinguished prose, but the sharpening of intellectual power and the deepening of sensibility—or briefly, the trained mind, which is the goal of liberal education. After such training, the student would be ready for specialization.

A well-designed school curriculum in the mother tongue will serve two high objectives that have a bearing on the effectiveness of all programmes of education. One is that the course in the mother tongue, more than perhaps any other subject in the curriculum, could introduce the pupil to the joy of learning. The gravest error that the ordinary school makes is that it takes no notice of the joy of learning. We

may, with great profit, bear in mind what Ben Jonson said in the sixteenth century: "A youth should not be made to hate study before he knows the causes to love it, or taste the bitterness before the sweet; but called on and allured, entreated and praised: yea, when he deserves it not." An introduction to the treasures of the mother tongue is the simplest lure that could eventually lead the young student to the rigours of serious learning.

The other great benefit that a well-designed and ambitious course in the mother tongue will bring to the pupil, is the cultivation of intellectual self-confidence, a vantage point whence he can advance to the study of other languages and subjects without the timidity and fear that characterise so much of school and college studies amongst us today. The educational system that we are now endeavouring to change is one that failed to capitalize the heritage of the mother tongue. It is not as if our principal languages were undeveloped like some tribal dialects in Africa or in our own country. A wise use of the classical heritage and a firm foothold amidst the riches of the mother tongue would have made our study of world literatures like English an even more rewarding pursuit than it has been. It is a tale of wasted opportunities, but it does not have to be a longer tale than it has already been.

The Education Commission has recommended that the language proficiencies required for higher education should be imparted in school, and there should be no compulsory language courses at the university stage. It may be some time before we are able to follow this perfectly sound counsel of perfection, even in regard to the mother tongue. To the extent that school currently fails to give the pupil a firm foothold in the mother tongue, it becomes necessary that the mother tongue should continue as a compulsory subject in college. But such continuance is justified only on the basis of a curriculum that prescribes comprehension of mature writing, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the practice of effective communication.

There are two ways in which the mother tongue could be dealt within the undergraduate curriculum. One way is to

prescribe a minimum proficiency in comprehension and communication; once this proficiency has been acquired and satisfactorily tested, there should be no need for the student to continue with the compulsory study of the mother tongue. He could be allowed to take the test at the time of admission, or as early in the course as he chooses.

The alternative is to make the syllabus in the mother tongue the means to impart all that is meant by "general education." This would call for more than linguistic proficiency, and should include the study of selected writing of the highest quality, not only in imaginative literature, but also in the area of current issues, knowledge of the contemporary world and the basic worries of the human race. The freshman English programme in a good American university would give us some idea of the ambitious curriculum that could be prescribed in the mother tongue. I take up at random one of the anthologies prescribed for a freshman course, and I begin envying the American collegeman this course in his mother tongue more than I envy him the Empire State building. The book I look into is entitled *The Reader,* edited by William O.S. Sutherland and Robert L. Montgomery of the University of Texas. The contents range over a variety of themes such as Albert Camus' 'What is a Rebel?', Arthur E. Besto's 'On Aimlessness in Education', four selections on automation, three on evolution, three on 'Science, Conscience and Nuclear Tests', and Cleanth Brooks on 'What Does Poetry Communicate?' There is a penetrating study of prejudice by Gordon W. Allport. Besides studying it as an exercise in identifying prejudice in its various degrees and kinds, the editor, in his notes, uses it to illustrate the hazards of defining words, and calls upon the student to consider the problems of definition in words like 'phlogiston', 'powers of darkness', 'spontaneous generation', 'witch', 'tired blood', 'magic', and 'unicorn'. "Are there concepts behind these words? Which of these words probably cause the least trouble? Which the most?"

This is a far cry from the puerile exercises that constitute the compulsory course in the mother tongue in our universities. No part of the university curriculum is at present as

unambitious as the syllabus in the regional language. I must however qualify this indictment by acknowledging that I cannot talk of the practices of Gujarat University with any degree of first-hand knowledge. Privileged as it now is to be presided over by a distinguished and progressive Gujarati poet, it would not, I reckon, hesitate to offer to the undergraduate the highest intellectual challenges, in its Gujarati course. There is no other area in which the University could more effectively present to the undergraduate 'the vision of greatness' that Sir Richard Livingstone recommends as the most vital ingredient of good education.

This would not mean merely the study of great works of literary art. It should include examples of how articulate men have dealt with great ideas, and contemporary writers have dealt with current issues. I would, for instance, suggest a study of the Kutch award with the aid of the original documents and other data, and involving an examination of the reactions of public men and publicists. It might prove a valuable exercise in scholarly documentation, in political psychology, in the processes of decision-making, and in the quality of our public life. There would be some who would say that a subject like this should be left to the department of political science or of history or both. These departments have their uses no doubt, and could be counted on to assist with documentation and expertise. But ultimately public issues should be decided by informed public opinion, and where else will the training for the formation of such opinion be given except in school and college? Such training is not meant only for the specialist. We must heed Henry George's warning that we may not wisely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to professors. While it is true that we have not nearly enough specialists in the various disciplines, it is also true that we too willingly allow the few we have, to live in isolation from one another. I would venture to suggest that in the courses in the mother tongue could begin the much-talked-of inter-disciplinary approach to various problems.

The practices of good universities abroad point the way. Some make the curriculum in the mother tongue perform the

function of almost all of liberal education. Others do not have a specific compulsory course in the mother tongue, but, like Monteith College in Detroit, make composition in the mother tongue an indispensable skill in the pursuit of every subject in the curriculum. Our universities should make up their minds about the choice of one of these alternatives.

This brings me to the question whether modern Indian languages are rich enough and ready to perform the functions I have outlined. We have to take note of the circumstance mentioned by Professor D. D. Karve in a recent article, namely, that India has never used its languages (i.e., languages of the common people) as the languages of education; it has used one of the advanced languages for this purpose. This refers to Sanskrit in ancient times, later replaced by Persian, and in more recent times by English. I shall deal in my next lecture, among other matters, with what this leads us to, namely, the medium of instruction. My endeavour in this talk was to indicate what could be done with the curriculum for the study of the mother tongue, even if it was not the medium of instruction.

There is a lesson for us in the fact that there have been earlier instances in history, of timidity in regard to the fitness of the mother tongue for the high purpose of scholarly communication and for education. Sir Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* in Latin. Francis Bacon wrote his ambitious works in Latin, for he feared that these modern languages "would one day play the bankrupt with books". That this was said after the English language had experienced the splendour of Shakespeare, would show how ignorant even the learned could be. At the end of the same century, Newton wrote his magnum opus, *Principia Mathematica,* in Latin. He too did not see any future for the vernacular.

In our attitudes to learning and to the mother tongue, it is not necessary to repeat such history on our soil. One of the functions of education is to ensure that history does not repeat itself unless we want it to. Our urgent concern in education should be to make up for lost time, but that calls for greater academic daring than we seem to be possessed of at the moment.

3

TOWARDS A NATIONAL POLICY ON LANGUAGE

IN DETERMINING language policy in eduction, we should begin by finding answers to three questions: (i) What language or languages will give us access to the knowledge we seek? (ii) What language or languages will help us most in achieving effective self-expression and communication? (iii) What language or languages shall we need for securing good employment?

What most people seem to desire is that the answer to all these questions should be the mother tongue. The mother tongue would always provide the answer to the second question in so far as self-expression (creative or otherwise) is concerned. It will also be the most effective means of communication within a single language unit. The answer to the other two questions may not be provided by the mother tongue.

The adoption of English as the normal medium of self-expression and communication among the educated, created a highly artificial situation. This had to be changed, unless the nation were content to get along with a second-hand culture and a second-rate quality of thinking. In reacting against this situation, however, some of us have tended to ignore the other consideration that makes the study of English still relevant and even indispensable. This consideration is access to modern knowledge.

This point has been greatly obscured in the current discussions of the medium of instruction. A measure of the

confusion is presented by the habit of some public men to talk of the 'medium of education' as though instruction and education were the same thing. They would, in their more foolish oratorical flights, even speak of changing the medium of instruction 'right up to the doctoral level'. This conjures up an agreeable vision of candidates for the Ph.D. being put through their spelling and grammar by earnest instructors. The trouble is that the sort of person whom we in our electoral wisdom put into positions of authority, would not know that instruction is not the whole, nor even a major component, of education. No education is effective unless the student, at some stage, emerges from the need for instruction, into a capacity for self-instruction and discovery. This is the stage that the university should represent. The effort of any sound educational system would be to advance this stage to as early a point in college or even school as possible. Our practice at present is to defer it as long as possible, and most students do not arrive at the stage even when they leave the university with master's degrees. To the extent that university students are still largely receivers of instruction, universities are mere extensions of school, and the language of such instruction is relevant to the determination of educational policy.

Instruction should be in a language that the student knows well. But a university man is not a receiver of instruction. He seeks knowledge wherever he can find it, instead of waiting for it to be syphoned into him through the vernacular. As Ivor Jennings once put it, the university man has no vernacular.

It will however be unreal today to concern ourselves excessively with this ideal and currently non-existent university man. So, while we dream of his coming, we have at the moment to concern ourselves with the requirements of instruction in colleges and universities.

Yesterday I suggested a scholarly study of the Kutch award as an exercise in identifying the principles that should determine public policy. If that is too political for your taste, I would suggest a study of the pronouncements, both official and otherwise, that have been made in the last twelve months

on the subject of the medium of instruction. It would be a rewarding exercise in the art of critical thinking. Most of these pronouncements will, on examination, be found to be based on certain assumptions, and all the assumptions are wrong.

A basic assumption is what I have already dealt with, namely, that higher education is largely a matter of instruction. Another is that English today serves as an effective medium of instruction in colleges and universities. Yet another is that if we abandon English as the medium of instruction, we shall not be able to ensure an adequate proficiency in English among university men so as to enable them to make use of English books of an advanced standard; presumably, the only way to learn a language is to make it the medium of instruction. Another assumption is that the regional language cannot be used as an efficient medium of instruction until the books available in it are as abundant and up-to-date as those available in English. An assumption —made by the opposite group—is that the regional language will be ready for acceptance as the medium of instruction as soon as a few textbooks in each subject are translated into it. To cap all, is the assumption that what has been proposed is a sort of regional self-sufficiency in education.

The habit of learning everything through a foreign language encourages verbalism, and the student comes to give more attention to learning the mechanics of the language than to learning anything through it. Owing largely to inefficient methods of instruction, most students give up the effort to achieve mastery of the language, and end up with neither any language proficiency nor any significant learning in the other subjects of study. Among the few who do master English, some are so pleased with their own accent and their ability to manage the foreign idiom, that the rest of their lives are spent in a haze of unavailing self-adulation. It is relevant to recall what R. S. Trivedi, then Principal of Ripon College, Calcutta, said in a memorandum to the Sadler Commission in 1917. According to Trivedi, though India has been greatly enriched by Western education, nevertheless "there has been a cost, a cost as regards culture, a cost as

regards respect for self and reverence for others, a cost as regards the nobility and dignity of life." All that is proposed by the more sensible advocates of the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction is to reduce this cost.

This can, and should, be done without giving up the study of English and the use of English books. The balance sheet on our study of English has been variously drawn up by experts. Mr. Sachchindanda Vatsyayan, addressing the fifth All India Writers' Conference in 1965, bewailed "the debilitating effect on Indian languages and on the country as a whole, of a dependence on English". On the other hand, Firaq Gorakhpuri, writing amidst the anti-English fury in Uttar Pradesh last year, declared that "during a century or more, the best creative or otherwise valuable work in the fourteen languages of India has been done by those who have been masters of English. Is it not a fact that English has been the most active and effective force in the rise and the renaissance of every Indian vernacular?"

While you may take time to make up your mind between these two points of view, you will perhaps have no hesitation in acknowledging that, for nearly all courses of advanced studies today, we have to depend on books and periodicals that are available only in foreign languages, chiefly English. It may be asked: If our proficiency in English, even when it is used as the medium of instruction, is poor, how much worse would it be when it ceases to be used as the medium of instruction? My guess is that the difference will not be significant; and anyway, the average student's present level of proficiency in English is not a sound enough basis for any worthwhile programme of higher education. This problem should perhaps be dealt with quite separately from any question of the medium of instruction. For, the present low standard of proficiency in English is of a piece with standards in other areas of study. What we need is a determined effort to raise standards in all areas of study. No one need hope that our present standard can be raised merely by retaining English as the medium of instruction or by changing over to the mother tongue. As things are, we should not underestimate the difficulties involved in either proce-

dure, nor overestimate the advantages that will accrue from either course.

Two serious objections have been raised to the change-over to the regional languages as the media of instruction at the university stage. One is that the regional languages are not rich enough—and in the current phase, viable enough—to make them adequate media for university teaching. The other is that with each linguistic region going its own way, the common bonds between the regions will be snapped, the community of India's scholars will break up into several isolated groups, and the unity of the country, already menaced in various ways, will be in still further jeopardy.

Those who worry thus about the impediments to the mobility of scholars and to the unity of the country, have obviously no use for the three-language formula (in any of its different versions. Nor even in efficient bilingualism. In their calculations, the Indian scholar will be proficient only in a single language. If, on the other hand, he has acquired the necessary proficiency in the other two languages included in the formula, he need not be tongue-tied when he moves outside his own linguistic area. Meanwhile it is important to remember that in choosing the medium of instruction, the mobility of scholars and even the unity of the country are secondary considerations. The first thought should be: What is the most effective means of communication between teacher and student?

Whatever be the medium of instruction, however, every university should be multi-lingual. Apart from meeting the needs of the multi-lingual composition of our urban population, this will enable the university to profit by the discourses of visiting scholars from other linguistic regions and from abroad. This is a familiar pattern in universities outside the English-speaking countries. To mention but one instance: Asian and African scholars were invited recently to participate in a special course in economics in the University of Warsaw. Though the medium of instruction in the university was Polish, the language used for this course was English, and only one or two of the professors needed the help of interpreters. If a university is to live up to the true signifi-

cance of its name, it has to be polyglot. But this will not invalidate the use of the mother tongue as the normal medium of communication in the classroom.

But are our regional languages suitable media for university teaching? When Ghana became free, it found its own native languages unsuitable as vehicles of modern knowledge and decided to stick to English. Those who would advise a similar course for us are particularly emphatic that we need English for teaching science and technology. Our glassy-eyed worship of science and technology is pathetic enough. To this, they would add the further superstition that science and technology cannot be taught through the languages of India. Actually there is nothing easier to transplant from one language into another, than technology. No verbal subtleties or fine shades of meaning are involved. Mr C. Rajagopalachari who disapproves of the proposed shift to the regional languages but cannot help being wise even when he takes untenable positions, has pointed out that in technology, the right instruction is through *things* rather than words, and the less language there is, the better.

The higher reaches of pure science may however call for a high degree of linguistic skill. And the requirements for dealing with the various subjects in the humanities will be even more exacting. No one should minimize the magnitude of the difficulties involved in equipping our languages for the high tasks of higher education. Those who, in this connection, worry greatly about transplanting technical terminology into our languages, and mildly brag about the thousands of terms so transplanted already, have an insufficient idea of the nature of the problem. Pure technical terminology can be borrowed or translated without much difficulty. Semi-technical matter (like the physicist's co-efficient of expansion or heavy water, or the economist's elasticity of demand) calls for a different treatment. The non-technical language of the higher learning would present the most serious difficulty. It may be more difficult to pour the thought of Teilhard de Chardin or Toynbee into an Indian receptacle than to adapt the PSSC course in physics.

Most discussions of the change-over to the regional langu-

age concern themselves excessively with programmes of translating standard works and textbooks from English and other rich sources. And those who disapprove of the change-over warn us that translations would prove a futile exercise, as the original texts may have become out of date by the time the translations are ready. That catching up with modern knowledge through translations is impossible, would be evident from the figures for books-in-print in the world languages, and of new publications coming out every year. In the library that I use at Jaipur, which is one of moderate size, 1300 journals arrive every month, the vast majority in English, and it gives one some idea of the magnitude of the tasks involved.

Our programmes of 'instant translation' of all this material into the languages of India are unrealistic. All that may happen is that we shall devote to this exercise of translation the energy and resources we should devote to generating knowledge ourselves, putting it into our own languages, and mastering languages other than our own. Indian scholarship should recognize that it has a higher duty to perform than that of being echos of foreign writers. In most subjects, what we draw from the world's pool of knowledge will have to be interpreted and transmuted to give it relevance in the Indian context. Literal translations, even if we could catch up with the scholarly output in other countries, will not meet the situation. In certain subjects and areas, it would be necessary to insist that the students read standard works and source books in the original languages in which they were written.

It is not only in pure literature that translation would be an unsatisfactory exercise. The genius of each language puts limitations on what can be transplanted into another language. (The Eskimos have 40 or 50 words for 'snow'. There is no exact equivalent for 'dharma' in English, nor for 'home' in some Indian languages). We have to go beyond translation into original writing by persons who have assimilated the best and the most advanced work done in different branches of studies all over the world. This is a challenge to the 70,000 teachers currently working in our colleges and universities. To rescue our instruction from the verbalism that

the use of English has fostered, to enrich our languages with the fruits of scholarly labour, to raise communication through the mother tongue from a trivial indulgence to a high intellectual level, to produce books that the foreigner would want to translate into his language—these are more important and urgent tasks for the Indian scholar than the puerile programmes of research on which so many of them now spend their energy and time.

An impression that needs to be removed is that the change-over to the regional languages will be a narrowing of our intellectual vision. In truth, unless decisions are left to bigots and ignorant fanatics, what should happen is not a shrinking but a widening of the vision. For the student will start his quest from a position of vantage, where the mother tongue will give him self-confidence as he contemplates the world of knowledge, and he need not be continually oppressed by the thought that the mechanics of the English language mean more to him than anything else the world of learning has to offer. An enriched mother tongue will be the beginning, not the end, of his quest.

It is, however, wise to be cautious. Our economic nationalism has given us such products as motor cars that begin to rattle the day they come off the assembly line. We do not want to match this with an educational nationalism that will give us graduates whose rattle may be even less agreeable. The danger of such a product emerging from our seats of learning is however real. This is evident from the time-schedules that have been discussed for the change-over in the medium of instruction, and such unintelligent slogans as "angrezi hatao." Some want the change to be made in five years, others would make it in ten. And we have Seth Govind Das's brash declaration that if English were abandoned tomorrow, we should be able to produce all the books we need in the regional languages in four months. One writer declared that the change-over to the mother tongue was a matter of conscience with him. It is an interesting conscience, for some of us happen to know that he gets his books written by indigent college teachers, and publishes them under his own name.

The quarrel over the time schedule for the change-over is, to say the least, being carried on in the wrong place, namely in ministers' conferences and legislatures. In 1833, it was possible for the British Government in India to prescribe the medium of instruction in the colleges they were establishing in this country. This power does not at present vest in the Government of India or the State Governments; it vests in the universities. There is no indication that a compulsory change-over in the medium of instruction will be sought through an amendment in the Constitution or through uniform amendments in the university acts. What may come from the Central Advisory Board of Education or even Parliament would be an expression of the nation's aspiration, and it would be up to the academic community to take appropriate action. In any programme of action, it is expedient to indicate a time schedule. The academic community is perhaps yet to discover what a great deal can be done in five or ten years. If, after the maximum effort has been put forth during the period, the scholars do not still feel confident about the academic feasibility of the change-over, there will be time enough to think again. Meanwhile, the scholars owe it to the country to disclose what they are doing about the change-over that has already taken place, in haphazard fashion, all over the country.

What the Ministry of Education has been doing is largely an expenditure of funds. Last year they spent Rs. 9 lakh for enriching the 14 languages other than Hindi, and Rs. 1.4 crore for Hindi. In the five years from 1961 to 1966, they spent Rs. 36 lakh on the 14 languages other than Hindi, and Rs. 4.5 crore on Hindi. Lovers of Hindi should try to find out how much was accomplished with this money. It will also be good to remember that a good part of what we wish to see done in our languages consists of what money cannot buy.

A simple reform that could be immediately introduced is that every undergraduate and post-graduate student be obliged to write at least one theme or essay in his mother tongue, on a topic covered by the syllabus in each subject of his study. This will be a reliable test of whether the learn-

ing that has been unloaded on him in English by his teachers has touched any deep layer of understanding within himself. (What is now happening is that the learning retailed by the professor stays on the purely verbal level in the student's consciousness, ready to be disgorged on demand at the time of the examination). The compulsory use of the mother tongue for writing at least one essay in each subject would be more useful than the compulsory courses in the regional languages that most universities prescribe for undergraduates. This does not have to await the production of the desired quantity of text-books in the regional languages.

Wittgenstein characterised thinking as digestion. This process of organic assimilation is not a conspicuous element of our education. On the contrary, as Robert L. Gaudino said in his book on *The Indian University*, "The most important fact about the Indian student's education is that he is untouched by it". In seeking to correct this state of affairs and to induce intellectual digestion, the use of the mother tongue is a readily available device.

Yet another measure that could be taken immediately is in regard to competitive examinations for the public services. The UPSC has bravely offered to conduct its examinations through all our 15 languages. It is difficult to comment on this until the details are disclosed. One dreads the possibility that this may lead to fixing regional quotas for recruitment to the public services, thus aggravating the evil consequences of the linguistic reorganization of States. A simpler way to deal with our multi-lingual situation would be to hold one part of the examination through the common medium of English, the other being devoted to tests of a high standard in two other languages. The latter tests would set off the undue premium the present examinations put on education received through the English medium. The pattern could be altered suitably when Hindi comes to be accepted as the common official language. It does not, however, look as though, despite public invocations of the three-language formula, anyone in the Central Government or in the State Governments is prepared to insist on a proficiency in three languages for every recruit to the higher ranks of the public

services. Such a decision would be too simple and forthright for our political word-spinners who like to enunciate a new language policy every morning.

This is what makes one despair of the adoption of any sensible policy on language. I was personally attracted by a programme that a friend of mine in Delhi, who holds a senior position on the editorial staff of one of the national dailies, outlined the other day.* What he urges is that we make a new beginning. He would urge that whatever language formula we would adopt should be decided immediately, and the programme should start with the first grade at the beginning of the coming academic year. If languages other than the mother tongue are to be taken up at different stages at school, say in grades 6 and 9, those grades may start the other two languages with the pupils who would bé arriving in them in the new academic year, on as teachers become available. (In UP, they say it was impossible to find the 20,000 teachers who would be needed to teach the third language in the three-language formula.) He would not too rigidly prescribe which languages should be learnt. But he would specify that all those who would seek public employment or go for higher education should learn, besides his mother tongue, another Indian language and a world language. Neither Hindi nor English would be specified by name in this programme, but it could reasonably be expected that the choice of most pupils would be Hindi and English. Those with special language aptitudes will be encouraged to do Sanskrit or other classical languages in lieu of the modern Indian or world language. The latest methods of learning languages should be employed. Having started the new programmes in grades 1, 6 and 9 (or at other stages as decided by each individual institution), give the children fifteen years. After they have left school, or graduated, they should be allowed to decide which will be our link language, official language or federal language, whatever you are pleased to call it. Grown-ups have too long made decisions for the young, without running the risk of themselves having to do any of the learning. As Dr Triguna Sen said in exasperation,

* See Appendix, *A Consensus on Language* by N. S. Jagannathan.

when newer and newer proposals for increasing the language component in the curriculum were made at last year's conference of Education Ministers, "Ah well; we shall not be children again; so I suppose we can prescribe this for the children." Let us make amends for the disastrous recession in language studies that we have brought about through our language squabbles, initiate ambitious programmes of language studies, and leave it to the children to make the decisions from a vantage point of knowledge, instead of our making decisions for them as we do now, from a position of half-learning or no learning at all.

4

*LANGUAGE IN A PRESSURE COOKER**

I BORROW the title of this article from the similitude with which Mr N. S. Jagannathan concluded his 'Consensus on Language' (See page 72). He warns us that having wasted 18 years without doing anything significant to implement our professed language policies, we may not now try to compress an educational span of a generation into five years by a process analogous to pressure cooking. He would have us make a new beginning, and proceed with due deliberation to impart the required proficiency in three language to every pupil at the right stages in his progress through primary and secondary school. He would postpone decisions about the official language and link language until a new generation, skilled in three languages, emerges from the universities. Considering what has happened and is happening, the process cannot be hurried.

There is unanswerable logic in the contention that decisions about the use of languages should be made by people who know the languages. And if they did know the languages, problems of communication may be solved by processes other than formal legislation. At the moment, however, with 350 million illiterates in the country, and with a serious recession in the level of language studies even among the literate, our language squabbles are largely a dispute over which languages we shall be illiterate in. Among us today, the resistance to learning language is a more powerful force than the desire to learn them. Our own experience and happenings

* *The Hindustan Times*, April 18, 1968, (slightly abridged).

in other countries like Canada and Belgium should warn us not to underestimate the explosive character of this resistance and of language disputes generally. Hence the wisdom of making our language decisions in a calmer environment than the present.

Once we accept a rational formula for our language studies, the way to implement it effectively is to adopt the procedure that Mr Jagannathan has suggested. Since we do not at present have the language proficiencies we seek, and the present situation is one of some confusion, there is the need for making a new beginning. Far from being a plea for postponement, it is a plea for going into meaningful action instead of endlessly conferencing and making speeches. The problem is not solved by someone in Delhi deciding that as from a specified date, every educated Indian would be deemed to know three languages, even though we have not made any arrangements for imparting the required proficiencies. (It reminds one of the way we eradicated cholera. Cholera did not vanish according to schedule, but we decided to call it gastro-enteritis henceforth.) Uttar Pradesh has already discovered that to implement the three-language formula it would need 20,000 teachers of Indian languages other than Hindi, and so nothing can be done in a hurry.

The time schedule that Mr Jagannathan would suggest for implementing his proposal can however be abridged. Beginning at the beginning, that is, with the first grade in the next academic year, he allows fifteen years to produce the first generation of linguistically competent persons to come out of the universities and make an informed and intelligent decision about a common language and related matters. Since the mother tongue is already being taught in the primary schools more or less effectively, the new schedule could be reckoned from the stage at which the pupil begins to learn a second language. This would normally be grade 5 or 6. Working on a twelve-year schedule for schools, those pupils who begin on the new programme in grade 5 will be ready to leave school in 8 years, and could be expected to have taken a third language at some stage, perhaps grade 9, during this period. It should be made a part of the new pro-

gramme that the second and third language should be taught so efficiently that at the end of twelve years of schooling, the compulsory study of all languages could be discontinued, as recommended by the Education Commission. This would mean that the new programme would produce its first linguistically competent school-leavers in 8 years. Any enforcement of the three-fold skill in languages for entry into the public services for which university degrees may normally be required, will have to be deferred till these school-leavers take their degrees. A maximum of twelve years should, however, be sufficient.

The success of the plan, as of any version of our language formulae, will depend on our use of modern methods of language learning. Before we try to force the pace of change in the matter of official languages and such-like, it is necessary to force the pace of our learning process. The procedures now followed in our schools take too long to do too little. This is true of the entire curriculum, but it is particularly true of language studies. This would explain why, even after eleven years of the mother tongue and five or six years of English in school, we still continue compulsory courses in these languages at the college stage. This must stop. A student should not take more than five years for acquiring a reasonable proficiency in any language. Any use of the language beyond the five years would be justified only if it is used as a tool for thinking and self-expression of a mature order.

In the period between now and twelve years hence, there will have passed through our schools and colleges several million students, for whom special transitional programmes will have to be devised. To preserve the status quo for them and to leave them alone, would be unwise, for in the immediate future their numbers may have the effect of counteracting the effectiveness of the programme prescribed for those who would be leaving college twelve years hence and after. Somewhat of the pressure cooker procedure will have to be designed for their language studies on an optional basis; without the language imperatives that will come into force twelve years hence, their learning may be even more

effective because it would be optional and could be made competitive.

It is not true that languages can be efficiently learnt only at an early stage in a child's development, and that once that stage has been missed, later efforts would be unavailing. But it is true that language policies cannot prevail in a democratic society until people have had the time and the opportunity to learn the languages concerned. If this obvious fact is not taken into account, it will spell disaster either for our language policies or for our democracy. May be, for both.

5

*THE USES OF ENGLISH**

OUR CONCERN at this conference is with language studies, the palce that English as a foreign language should occupy in the general pattern, the most efficient ways in which this language could be taught and learnt, and the mutual stimulation that this and other subjects in the curriculum should give one another. A profitable discussion of these themes is possible only if we get certain misconceptions out of the way. And one of them is that you can learn English only if you throw your mother tongue out of the window.

This is the colonial attitude still prevalent in many quarters. And this is what Naomi Mitchison had in mind when she wrote her little poem entitled 'Unesco Problems':

With what arrogance
The great languages,
Sanskrit, English, French,
Demand of their followers
Complete obedience.

Yet is our need now
Of a Grande Maistresse
Or a working wife?

One of the unreal battles that are being currently fought

* Presidential Address at the Eighteenth Annual Session of the All India English Teachers' Conference at Chandigarh, December 29-31, 1967.

in the field of education is over the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. The champions of the change-over to the regional languages are pushing doors that are already open. And those who nostalgically identify good education with education through the English medium are rather like Sydney Smith's Dame Partington who, equipped with mop and pattens, was seen vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. Into the shadow-boxing that those who want English to stay and those who do not are engaged in, to the accompaniment of student riots in many places, have stepped amateur sociologists who would have us believe that there could be no common ground between those whose addiction to English and English ways has made them a class apart, and the disinherited multitude that had long endured these proud men's contumely and have now come into their own and would be avenged. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has entertained his readers with a description of the Anglicized minority in the country who go through agonies of training in order that they may speak English like Englishmen. He puts it this way: "They (the Englishwallahs) even treat as inferiors those Indians who do not pronounce the English vowels and consonants in the exact English way. So, a man who pronounces *o* as a simple open vowel and not as a diphthongal vowel, or pronounces the consonant *b* as a simple voiced labial, and not as a voiced, lip-stopped and plosive labial, will be treated with the same snobbery. By trying to speak English correctly, they also get all their vocal mechanism so changed that they cannot speak any Indian language with the correct accent, which increases the dislike of those who do not want English."

Foreign commentators too have observed this class. Some of them have even seen the possibility that standard English as the Victorians knew it may survive only among this Westernized class in India. This is what provoked Malcolm Muggeridge's quip that almost the only Englishmen left in the world today are Indians. It is fun to read what Muggeridge wrote after a visit to the Lok Sabha: "The Lok Sabha was debating the continued usage of English for official purposes. It was a theme which brought out the mental ingenuity and

verbal agility of Indian parliamentarians. For the most part, they spoke in English even when they were pleading for its obliteration or railing against its use, in that characteristic lilting tone, due, it has been suggested, to the fact that the first language teachers in British India were unpaid Welsh missionaries. . .

"One wonders at what point . . . Indian English will be so different from English English as to constitute another language needing to be learnt. Or whether, as is perhaps more likely, in India there may be conserved, with museum exactness, the form and nomenclature of an English way of life which, in its place of origin, has been submerged by an American one, or in any case disappeared. Already leading articles in Indian newspapers, lectures in Indian universities, the oratory of Indian parliamentarians, the raillery in Indian Army messes, have a decidedly old-fashioned flavour. Perhaps sociologists will one day explore these for the light they shed on their extinct originals."

Those who are deperately looking for a subject for jokes, or are engaged in the currently profitable exercise of transferring academic and educational issues to an emotional plane, may like to discuss the question of English studies in India with reference to an Anglicized minority who until a little while ago fancied themselves to be our new brahmins and have now brought upon themselves the troubles that exclusive caste eventually invites. The use to which this class put English, namely, as a social ornament and may be for social climbing, is not relevant to the serious discussion of language studies. I would even hazard the generalization that this class tasted but scantily of the riches of the English language, and has not made any significant contribution to the world's enlightenment either through English or any of the Indian languages. The management of the linguistic veneer used up all their mental resources and this would account for their consequent intellectual sterility.

The predicament of this class was described by the Tamil writer, Ka Naa Subramanyam, in a poem which I should like to read to you in the author's translation:

Situation

Introduced to
the Upanishads
by T. S. Eliot;

and to Tagore
by the earlier
Pound;

and to the Indian
tradition by
Max Mueller
(late of the Bhavan);

and to the Indian
dance by
Bowers;

and to Indian
art by
what's his name;

and to the Tamil
classics by
Danielou
(Was he Pope?);

Flesh nor fish
blood nor stone
totempole;

Vociferous in
thoughts not
his own;

Eloquent in
words not
his own
(The age demanded . . .)

This is not the class, and theirs not the use of English, that we should seriously concern ourselves with. We may leave these haw-haws to provide material for Muggeridge and Chaudhuri and the comic playwright. There are certain other classes of users, too, from whom English has to be rescued. One consists of bureaucrats for whom official verbiage provides comfortable upholstery in their seats of authority. Another class consists of the academics to whom English jargon has been providing a viable substitute for genuine learning.

Talk of the bureaucrat's use of English takes me uncomfortably close to the official language controversy. I shall make but one observation. The Hindi writers who lost their tempers and their sense of the ludicrous over the bilingual formula, seem to have little faith in Hindi triumphing over its rival, not through legal provisions, but through obliging the Hindi-using administrator to put plain things plainly and get on with his job—which is largely non-verbal, while his English using colleague will still be struggling through (or snuggling comfortably in) a mass of unmeaning verbiage, and never getting on to the plane of action. For alas, despite Fowler and Gowers and hundreds of clear-headed schoolmasters, English has served as a cocoon for the bureaucrat to slumber in till he emerges into retirement. Having been a bureaucrat myself for a while, I can testify how consistently the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of verbiage

And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

Some time ago, the Prime Minister, referring to material prepared by the Planning Commission, had occasion to complain, "Can't we make our language crisp and short? Here is: 'non-resort to inflationary tendencies.' Can't we say: 'without inflation?' " The files and the reports on which administration fattens itself contain hundreds of thousands of monstrosities such as the Prime Minister picked out for ridicule. I would go so far as to say that one of the reasons why

the even tenour of our planning suddenly vanished like the river Saraswati was our habit of excessive verbalization unrelated to reality. Over the passing of English as the language of normal government, therefore, no tears need be shed at a conference of English teachers.

The other baneful use of English is one to which academics are greatly addicted. I refer to the rich jargon of the social sciences, aethetics and literary criticism, that we have been importing from England and even more extensively from America. It is a measure of our failure in language studies that we should ignore the use of English as a precision-instrument, and should be avid in the pursuit of the cliche, the catchword and the pretentious neologism. The emperor's new clothes have not had such ardent admirers anywhere else.

The story of English teaching in India in recent years is a story of wasted opportunities. If we could forget for a moment Macaulay's cocksure rhetoric and the ignorant pleading by certain so-called supporters of English, we can think of two great uses for English in our curriculum. One is that it gives us access to modern knowledge. The other is that, wisely handled, it could give us the same training in precision of thinking and communication that a classical language could give and this training will be of immense value in developing our skills in the mother tongue. I should like to take some of your time to deal with these two uses of English.

It is a measure of the sad plight of our English studies that, year after year, the presidents of the English Teachers' Conference should have considered it necessary to expatiate on the place of English in the curriculum, leaving hardly any time for discussing the true business of scholarship and of teaching. It is like the perennial preoccupation of our educational decision-makers with the question of the medium of instruction, to the exclusion of any consideration of the content of the instruction. We are content to stand around, arguing, at the threshold of the house of learning. You will have guessed that that is my present location and the nature of the present exercise.

It is with reference to English as a means of access to modern knowledge that the Education Commission invented the phrase, 'library language.' The phrase has achieved a vogue which could be embarrassing to its originators, for they had not intended to suggest that the capacity to understand English is a passive mental response and could be acquired much more easily than if one wanted to use English as the medium of communication. The standard of proficiency you need in a 'library language' will depend on which part of the library you want to use. The language you need for technology and for the lower levels of science could be learnt in less than two years, though it would take much longer to learn to use a foreign language in the social sciences and the humanities.

In making this claim, I go by the experience of students who have been to Germany and Russia for technological training. But in making this claim, I may seem to be ignoring our Sisyphus-like labours in language-teaching, whereby high school repeats the middle school curriculum and college repeats the high school curriculum. After eleven years of learning the mother tongue in school, a compulsory, elementary course in the mother tongue is still prescribed for the undergraduate course. This, I am given to understand. is done on patriotic grounds. As for English, six years of it in school and another two or three years of it in college, do not achieve a breakthrough to literacy. This too, we are now to understand, has a patriotic significance. In fact, patriotism has become such a habit with us that all our misdemeanours are to be explained in terms of it. Freud explained human conduct in terms of sex, Marx in terms of the economic urge; we await a new prophet, exclusively for national use, who will explain all our follies and our crimes in terms of the patriotic urge. At the beginning of this century, we were warned that we were all socialists nowadays. That is old hat now. We are all patriots nowadays.

Unfortunately, the teachers of English have not been unwilling to use this alibi to cover up their incompetent performance. They blame their ineffectiveness on the politician and the change-over in the medium of instruction. The poli-

tician is a convenient whipping-boy, but the truth is that in the last twenty years the poor fellow has not been guilty of initiating any new movement or trend, for good or ill, in this country. He has lived by shouting at the top of his voice whatever everyone else was saying in quieter tones. Long before he started shouting "Angrezi hatao," the teachers of English had killed English openly in a thousand classrooms.

It is almost comic that teachers of English should suggest that the fall in the standards of attainment in this foreign language is due to our not using it as the medium of instruction, that is, not using it in classes devoted to learning subjects other than English. This amounts to saying that teachers of English expect their work to be done by the other teachers in school and college. It is true that the limited use we make of the language in the classroom has some effect on our search for proficiency in it. At the same time we should know that great advances have been made in recent years in the techniques of teaching foreign languages. Some of these methods were developed during the last war to impart to members of the armed forces a knowledge of foreign languages. Teachers of language in India live in seeming unawareness of the revolution in language studies that is being accomplished elsewhere; and these too quick despairers have also given up whatever is still valid in the traditional methods of language teaching. They too easily allow themselves to be discouraged by environment; forgetting that the whole idea of teaching is to triumph over environment. It is no use blaming anyone or anything else. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars.

I have not done with the concept of the "library language." Learning a language involves the four processes of hearing, speaking, reading and writing. The new jargon about learning English as a 'tool' would not enable us to dispense with any of the four processes, unless we are also willing to dispense with efficiency. May be, all that the new gospel of the 'tool' aims at is to take the joy out of learning the language, and give us the illusion that the residual product is highly technical and businesslike. No wonder the

proponents of this approach are fairly helpless in dealing with protests against the language 'load' in the curriculum. For, talk of 'tools' would seem to equate learners with manual workers, and ultimately with workers resentful about 'work load.' We soon forget that the only relevant approach to language learning is one of 'mastery,' and any learning that is devoid of the joy of learning is no learning at all.

My mind goes back, at this point, to many years ago and to the man who first taught me English. We were a class of ten-year-olds who knew no English before. He took us from the alphabet through many exciting passages to the first English verse we learnt to recite:

Over our heads the sky,
Under our feet the earth;
Here in the playground we lie:
Learning is nothing but mirth.

The school did not use the English medium except in the three highest classes, which meant that the English teacher did not receive any assistance from the other teachers in imparting to us the required proficiency in the language. His methods were orthodox, and yet I think of him as a wizard. He made us listen to him; he made us speak; he made us read; he made us write. He followed whatever was orthodox procedure for learning a language. Long before the experts turned the obvious into an esoteric doctrine, we practised the structural approach, proceeding from the simpler to the more difficult sentence forms, and learning to frame sentences on given patterns. The fourth line of the verse I quoted, was not easy for us in the beginning and there were whoops of delight when one of my class-mates caught the spirit of it and matched 'Learning is nothing but mirth,' with the gem: 'Your head is nothing but mud.' From that point, our progress in mutual denigration was rapid.

While we thrilled to the rumblings of the freedom movement, there was no antipathy to learning English. The large clientele that the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha attracted was among pupils who were also learning English

with great zeal. The zeal had nothing to do with any desire for crumbs of employment under the British Raj. Living in an Indian State, thoughts of serving the British administration did not come to us easily. Such foolish longings came later. All I remember of that first year is the joy of mastering the language. And that joy was imparted to us by our teacher.

The delight was not combined with any yearning for an alien way of life. This would be evident from a remark another teacher made a few years later in our class. He was explaining to us the shades of meaning that words acquire through usage. He told us, "I have always wanted to visit England; I shall then be able to call Englishmen 'natives.'"

To me, our first teacher of English embodied the spirit of intellectual adventure. He took us on picnics; some of our classes were held in the school playground and in the garden, not for want of classroom accommodation. He produced plays in English and Malayalam. He was rumoured to have read every book in the well-stocked school library, which, years later during vacations, I was able to use for advanced courses in language and literature. He was a devoted philatelist. Incidentally, he also grew in his garden the best mangoes in the locality, and his pupils learnt this without his instruction. It was only much later that I learnt that during all those years this remarkable man had been passing rich with the equivalent of forty pounds a year. He is now dead; every time I remember him, it fills me, who have done a quarter century of teaching, with a feeling of unworthiness. Otherwise too, this story has a sad ending. I visited the school a little while ago. The buildings are now bigger but a great part of the mirth has vanished.

While I was digressing, you were probably distinguishing, in your mind, between skill subjects and content subjects in the curriculum, and thinking of language as a tool. Let me join you in your speculation, and add that if our language studies are divorced from the joy of learning, and do not lead to mastery, the end product of our exertions will be scholars obsessed by the mechanics of language, or inclined to get their thinking bogged down in verbalism. There

may be a case, at the present moment, for making a functional approach to the study of foreign languages, so as to be clear about our objectives and be rid of emotional overgrowths. Each department of studies at the university level should make up its mind about the kind of books in English it would want the students to read. This would indicate the proficiency that the teachers of English should, as a service agency as it were, impart to the students who pursue higher education. At the moment, however, there is a wide gap between the actual proficiency imparted, and what is required for the efficient use of the bibliography that is given to the student.

This situation has to be corrected both by raising the student's proficiency in the foreign languages that offer us access to modern knowledge, and also by an ambitious programme of enriching the languages of India. On this latter theme, some highly credulous and incredible propositions have emerged in recent months. Programmes of 'instant translation' of all necessary material from foreign sources into the languages of India are being gaily discussed. It is bad enough that a politician should have declared that if English could be banished at once, we shall be able to produce all the books we need in four months. But recently, at a University teachers' convention, the same glib proposals for translation were accepted as a complete policy in regard to the change-over in the medium of instruction. No thought was given to deciding which languages the translations would come from, who would do these translations, and what arrangements should be made to teach those languages. Apparently the present generation of those proficient in English will be the last of the species, and will be expected to do all the translation immediately, before they are stoned to death for their unpatriotic erudition.

It does not seem to have occurred to anyone that those who would banish English and hope to thrive on translations from English represent a degree of dependence on foreign learning, more disastrous than anything we have so far known in our education. The translation enthusiasts have perhaps no idea of the perils ahead. It is not necessary to

probe deep into the concept of meaning and the nature of communication, in order to realise that except at the sign-language level, where the same sign is not used for different significations, translations are largely misrepresentation. The linguist Bronislaw Malinowski warns us that "the words of one language are never translatable into another" and that though the similarity of the cultures to which the languages belong may make translation easier, "even when two cultures have much in common, real understanding and the establishment of a community of linguistic implements is always a matter of difficult, laborious and delicate readjustment; when two cultures differ as widely as that of the Trobrianders and the English, when the beliefs, scientific views, social organization, morality and material outfit are completely different, most of the words in one language cannot be even remotely paralleled in the other."

This warning has no application to texts dealing with technology and the less analytical and speculative areas of science. Where there is an exact one-to-one correspondence between words and objects, there could be a one-to-one correspondence between words in one language and another. In the subjects that involve analysis of thought and speculation, such correspondence is unlikely, and this is what makes large-scale programmes of translation a disturbing prospect. The use of English as the language of learning induced amongst us an imitative and second-rate quality of thinking. In the shadow-world of translations, that quality will sink even lower.

What we need is a spirit of linguistic and academic daring. The enrichment of our languages is to be accomplished by scholars who, soaked in the world's knowledge in their chosen specialities, are able both to generate new knowledge and to write effectively in their mother tongue. One wishes to see the teachers of English involved in this daring venture. We need, for instance, books on linguistics, literary criticism and aesthetic theory. Teachers of English could, in collaboration with teachers of other languages and the humanities, produce such works. This has been done by some scholars, but there is a great deal waiting to be done.

This brings me to the need for greater intellectual traffic between the department of English and the other departments in a college or university, particularly the departments dealing with other languages. Good fences make good neighbours, said the poet. But the fences that separate English from the Indian language departments in our universities have promoted neither good neighbourliness nor the ends of scholarship. This segregation would partly explain the arid and pretentious pursuits of the English faculty and the resentful narrowness of certain Indian language departments. If the fences of segregation came down, English might be able to render to India's education somewhat of the service it failed to do all these years. To my mind, even more than the riches of an English bibliography in the different subjects of academic studies, English, at its best, could be an invaluable discipline in the use of language as a precision instrument. This is what, pre-eminently, Sanskrit should do for us, but currently does not. In this respect each one of us is 'the base Indian' who

threw a pearl away
richer than all his tribe.

Historical accident brought another rich treasure into our possession, namely English; and we put it to base uses. There is a larger illiteracy than the inability to read and write. It consists of the inability to tell the important from the trivial, the genuine from the spurious, the noble from the ignoble, or in other words, lack of precision and discrimination. Language studies are expected to fight this evil, and in this high task, the role of the teacher of English is the same as that of the teachers of the other languages in the curriculum. Together, they could make the most vital contribution to making the university 'the critical, reflective intelligence' of the community.

6

*ON NOT LEARNING SANSKRIT**

AT A CONFERENCE of lovers of Sanskrit at Manoharpur in Rajasthan, Dr Karan Singh spoke feelingly about the neglect of Sanskrit. At the same conference, Dr Sampurnanand accused the Education Commission of grave default in their scanty reference to Sanskrit. He attributed their lack of enthusiasm to the presence of foreigners on the Commision. He worked himself up to such a pitch of annoyance that he even suggested that the Commission's Report should be burnt.

Sanskrit studies could however be discussed without the aid of the idiom of angry revivalism. The zealots have in some ways done more harm to Sanskrit studies than those who doubt the value of classical languages in the curriculum.

In 1957, the Sanskrit Commission, headed by Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, recommended the compulsory study of Sanskrit by all pupils in school. Their recommendations amounted to a four-language formula, with the mother tongue, English and Sanskrit as compulsory subjects in school, and Hindi being learnt at a later stage by those who wished to join the public services. The Commission expected the knowledge of Sanskrit to make such late learning of Hindi an easy chore. They also suggested that Hindi could be an alternative to English in non-Hindi areas. In special cases, an alternative to Sanskrit could be another classical language, such as Arabic, Persian, Old Tamil, Greek or Latin.

These recommendations have nearly been forgotten by

* *The Hindustan Times*, January 14, 1968.

our Departments of Education. On being called upon to implement the three-language formula, however, educational authorities in the Hindi-speaking States have found it convenient to add Sanskrit to Hindi and English, to make up the number. This has diminished the willingness of non-Hindi areas to learn Hindi; for argument's sake, they too would like to include Sanskrit in the three-language curriculum.

The late Dr Katju and other advocates of the acceptance of Sanskrit as the common language of the country used to refer to the familiarity of every Indian with some Sanskrit. Haven't even the languages of the South of non-Sanskrit origin enriched their vocabulary with large-scale borrowings from Sanskrit? But the fancy that the average Indian already knows some Sanskrit is rather like what G. K. Chesterton said of the average Englishman who goes through life under the impression that he has read *The Origin of Species*.

The battle for and against classical languages in the curriculum have been fought elsewhere too. Oxford and Cambridge have been under heavy pressure to abandon their insistence on Greek or Latin as an entrance qualification. In the United States, until 1925 or so and the ascendancy of John Dewey, nearly 50 per cent of those who finished high school did Latin. Attitudes have changed, but the Crowther Report of the Central Advisory Council, England (published under the title *Fifteen to Eighteen*) refers to a minority of the Council members who "believe that the present examinations (and, to some extent, the present methods of teaching) in English and French did not offer satisfactory safeguards of linguistic teaching in the lower school, or satisfactory training in logical thought and the disciplined use of words. They believe that for the present Latin remains a valuable bulwark against facile and imprecise work, and that, when there are so many external pressure on the schools for premature specialization, some countervailing pressure from outside is necessary if the job is to be done properly. These members would, therefore, like to see the Latin requirements in university entrance retained, until such time as thought and experiment have shown that there are other ways of doing what Latin does."

'Training in logical thought and the disciplined use of words': these high objectives do not seem to be among the ingredients of the new fervour that is sought to be worked up for Sanskrit. One would look for them in vain in the primitive methods of teaching employed in the classroom, which involve an almost exclusive use of the faculty of memory. A headmaster reported many years ago that as soon as the compulsory paper in Sanskrit was distributed in the examination hall, a low hum rose from all over; it was the sound of pupils repeating to themselves all they had learnt by rote till memory yielded what the question paper required. A few years later, none of this learning was left in the pupil's mind. This was the way Sanskrit was killed in the classroom.

The lifeless pedagogy to which Sanskrit is subjected is matched by the puerile uses to which the language is put by some adherents. The latest example was the astrologers' meet in Delhi, which asked for the establishment of a University of Astrology to provide for study and research in the various branches of astrology.

The Education Commission's lack of enthusiasm for Sanskrit may be a by-product of their preoccupation with 'national development' reckoned in terms of economic well-being. While they would not include Sanskrit in the three-language formula, they are in favour of adopting a combined course in the mother tongue and Sanskrit. But they do not press it because 'this is not a very popular proposal'. (If popular proposals were all that we were in search of, the Commission's job could have been more expertly handled by the Institute of Public Opinion.) All that the Commission could bring themselves to do was to suggest the inclusion of Sanskrit as an optional subject to begin in Class VIII. This is interesting, because elsewhere they disapprove of the idea of optional subjects in the curriculum until the pupil finishes Class X. The Report is so large that not even the authors could be expected to have read all parts of it.

The Commission recommends the advanced study of Sanskrit and other classical language in all universities, and the establishment of advanced centres. Only recently, Mr A. A. A. Fyzee wrote to the papers asking for facilities for

the study of Arabic in some centres. The Commission would approve of this, but they have no use for Sanskrit universities, and they say so twice over in the same paragraph.

This is what has roused the wrath of Dr Sampurnanand, who has been a sponsor of the idea of Sanskrit universities. It is an arid controversy. What is needed is a rediscovery of the right reasons for learning Sanskrit. One use of a classical language is the 'training in logical thought and the disciplined use of words'. That the quality of precision is not beloved of our Sanskritizers may be exemplified by the translation they provided for 'compulsory education'. *Anivarya Shiksha,* the equivalent now commonly in use, strictly means 'unavoidable education'.

The study of our heritage, treasured in the Sanskrit classics, would rank below the search for precision, in our list of objectives, for, access to the sources of our heritage is now possible even without Sanskrit. Even the use of a classical language as a training of the intellect and in the skills of expression, can perhaps be achieved through other disciplines. The cause of Sanskrit is not served by exaggerating its claims.

The right place of Sanskrit studies is in the centre of humane studies in every seat of learning. It is a pity that the Education Commission did not work out in any detail the proposal to combine the study of the mother tongue and Sanskrit. Such combined curricula could be made obligatory for those who would specialise in modern Indian languages at the university stage. To the extent that this would oblige some students to learn Sanskrit in school, the scope of the three-language formula could be modified. If it will not add to the prevailing confusion, one would even suggest that pupils be given a choice of three languages out of such a list as: (a) the mother tongue; (b) Hindi; (c) English or another modern European language; (d) Sanskrit or another classical language or a modern Indian language.

7

*A LANGUAGE LESSON FROM ABROAD**

Since everyone gets so easily worked up over our language problems, confusing self-interest with national interest, and failing to distinguish between the promptings of reason and emotion, it may be helpful to study the language problem of a foreign country. We shall be able to contemplate other people's quarrels without raising our voice and losing our temper. Belgium provides such an opportunity.

Belgium has two principal languages, Flemish and French. The small German-speaking group, some 60,000, is so inconsiderable that it has not made any contribution to the linguistic squabble; 4.5 million speak Flemish, 3 million speak French; and 1.5 million, largely of Flemish stock, are bilingual.

Flemish is Dutch spoken with a different intonation: it is to Dutch what American is to English. Owing to cultural and political reasons, French had been the dominant language until, in recent times, Flemish nationalism raised the cry that Flemish culture was in danger. The consequent political pressures led in 1962 to the statutory recognition of the *frontiere linguistique,* which made Dutch the official language north of an east-west line running through Liege, and French the official language south of the line. The exceptions were Brussels, the capital city, and Louvain, the seat of the great university; both are north of the language frontier, but are officially recognized as bilingual.

The arrangement was more rigid than anything contem-

* *The Hindustan Times,* October 16, 1967.

plated in the linguistic reorganization of the States in India in 1956. The linguistic minorities on either side of the line were ignored. But even this and the recognition of complete linguistic parity (all Government documents are published in both languages) and cultural autonomy for both sectors did not satisfy the Flemish extremists.

In 1965 a constitutional commission was appointed to advise on measures to improve the situation. While the two major political parties, the Christian Social Democrats and the Socialists worked on the commission, it is noteworthy that the Party of Liberty and Progress (the old Liberal Party) withdrew from the commission in protest against a proposal to write the language laws into the Constitution.

Among the recommendations of the commision are the appointment of a permanent linguistic commission for improvement of communal relations between the Flemings and the Walloons (that is, the French-speaking section), and a provision that the language laws may not be changed if such a change is opposed by a simple majority of the delegates representing either language group. A further safeguard was that if three-fourths of the members belonging to any language group signed a special motion that any Bill (other than a finance Bill) was likely to "do grave damage to the relations between the two communities," and if the Bill was then opposed by two-thirds of a language group in two successive readings, it would be returned to the Government for reconsideration.

These have not satisfied the Flemish nationalists. They have pressed for a federal solution of the problem, but neither of the major political parties would accept the proposal. The extremists, in their desperation, have even suggested that Belgium be partitioned, the French-speaking region being merged in France, and the Flemish-speaking region in Holland. Neither France nor Holland would, however, accept the offer. France has no desire to be burdened with the responsibilities for an economically undeveloped region like Wallonia, and Holland would not want its present small Protestant majority to be swamped by the anti-Protestant Flemings.

In June 1966, when the Chamber of Deputies approved a permanent commission for the improvement of relations between the two communities, the Premier, M. Venden Boeyants made a plea for a two-year truce on the language dispute, but it had no effect, largely because of feelings over the future of the Catholic University of Louvain.

There have been several strikes in Louvain by Flemish students demanding that the French-speaking students and faculty be transferred to a new establishment south of the language frontier. They regularly black out French name plates and road signs and resent their university being known by the French name of Louvain; to them it is 'Leuven.' This great university survived the destruction of its library and other amenities by invading Germans twice in this century but it is not certain that it will survive the destruction that is now being wrought by the Belgians themselves.

Louvain, older than the Belgian State which was founded only in 1830, has been a proud name in the story of the higher learning in Europe for more than five centuries. As an alumnus wrote recently, "Erasmus studied here. Bellarmine taught here. Renaissance humanism took root here, as did the far less human Jansenism. Here Justus Lupsius innovated modern textual criticism, Vesalius pioneered the study of human anatomy. Mercier and Marechal put Catholic philosophy on speaking terms with the secular world, and Lemaitre fathered the 'big bang' theory in modern physics. The University graced the recent Vatican Council with 13 of its leading theologians."

From 1425 till the eighteenth century, Latin had ruled at Louvain. Then French took over. It was only in 1932 that Flemish was used in a few of the courses. Since then the language pressure has grown, and in 1962, the fifty odd departments of the University were each divided into two linguistic sections, and every course came to be taught in the two languages by two separate faculties. The co-existence has not been peaceful. The venom generated by the squabbles in the University has so spread through the country that *La Libre Belgique* commented bitterly that 'only in

cemeteries do the Flemish and the Walloons join hands in peaceful co-existence.'

The demand of the militant Flemish students that the 10,000 French-speaking students and 2,000 French-speaking teachers be transferred elsewhere, would, even if it were politically acceptable, involve an outlay of 500 million dollars for duplicating the facilities, and no one has indicated where the money would come from. This and the deeper considerations of national solidarity do not, however, prevent the students and a certain type of politicians from organizing provocative street demonstrations, crying *Walen Buiten* (asking Walloons to get out).

Among a crowd of 3,500 that held a day-long demonstration in Louvain on December 15, 1965, were many clergymen, despite episcopal disapproval of such participation. A much bigger demonstration, in which 100,000 people took part, was held on August 21, 1966 during the annual pilgrimage at Dixmede in memory of the Flemish war dead. In Ostend the police had to intervene to break up a fight between Flemish nationalists and French-speaking tourists at the city's principal church, where the Flemings objected to the use of French in the evening service. In the light of all this, one sees the point of the Paris *Le Monde*'s question, with reference to the situation in Louvain: "What sort of authority has the Church to issue appeals for peace and ecumenism if it does not succeed in establishing them in the very city that was the seminarie of Vatican II?"

The Church has not been passive. Despite the ambiguous stand that the Bishop of Bruges took on occasion, the hierarchy under Cardinal Suenens has firmly declared that the University will not be divided, but instead promised increased autonomy for the two linguistic sections, each with its own budget, and some dispersal of preparatory classes in the two linguistic regions. Proposals in Parliament for the division of the University were turned down in the Chamber, though in the Upper House the votes were evenly divided, whereupon the Government referred the matter to the Linguistic Commission and the Commission on Higher Education. Another hopeful fact is that the Flemish towns are

largely bilingual, and the shopkeepers of Louvain and elsewhere have begun matching the *Walen Buiten* sign with another: *Extremisten Buiten,* asking the extremists to quit.

A Flemish psychologist has compared the Flemish predicament to that of the French Canadians and characterized it as "a collective inferiority complex that feels easily menaced in its rights and overly sensitive to its privileges." One of the extremists' spokesmen put it blandly thus: "We shall demonstrate practically every week; it is necessary for the average Fleming's psyche." At the moment, there are no indications that this attitude—which has expressed itself in violence and some acts of terrorism—will change, though the responsible leaders of the major political parties have been able to hold it in check. A 1966 leaflet claimed the establishment of a Flemish Liberation Army of 2,000 which would consider itself at war with the Belgian State.

Our linguistic situation is not analogous. Even so, a study of problems elsewhere should warn us what an explosively divisive force language could be. It should also warn us that the solution of the problems is not to be sought in slick formulae and political trickery, nor in glib over-simplifications and angry slogans. The matter calls for deep understanding and careful handling.

*A CONSENSUS ON LANGUAGE**

BY N. S. JAGANNATHAN

THREE PROPOSITIONS have to be accepted as axiomatic before a national consensus on a viable policy on a link and official language for pan-India purposes can emerge. The first is that the present situation is a dead-end and it is an appalling error to suppose that we can somehow muddle our way out of current discontents into some kind of national acquiescence in the present policy. In particular, it is a pathetic delusion to imagine that by tinkering with the policy currently holding the field uneasily, we can allay the widespread misgivings over the acknowledged unequal burdens it casts.

The second assumption is that none of us has a vested interest in disorder and linguistic divisiveness: that the ghastly goings-on over language policy in various parts of the country and the threat to stability and national unity posed by them have chastened us into a mood in which we are ready to examine on merits any new initiative that may be forthcoming.

Thirdly, however painful it may be to some of us to own it, a common allegiance to a single language founded on a love of it can never be one of the instrumentalities of forging a sense of a single Indian national identity. Therefore, any new initiative on the language policy should deliberately deflate the importance of language as a factor in national integration. In all discussion, therefore, the link language should be emptied of its emotional content and reduced to the status of a *lingua franca,* a bazaar language of conveni-

* *The Hindustan Times,* April 4, 1968.

ence. All the emotional overtones—English or Hindi elitism, Hindi or Tamil chauvinism—should be kept severely out of the discussion.

On these assumptions, the best approach to our linguistic dilemma would be one which would ensure the most complete linguistic equality as a starting point for a viable language policy. All the variants of the present policy have failed and will fail because they attempt to solve the question of a link and official language before this equality is an accomplished fact, in the hope that with time, a rough and ready equality will come about. This is a ghastly error.

Instead, what should be done is something along the following lines: beginning with the coming academic year, the three language formula (the compulsory study of English, Hindi and one other Indian language of the choice of the student) should be implemented in every school in the country in the first class in which language begins to be taught in schools. This should be extended to the next class the next year and to the next year after and so on, rather in the manner of an intermediate college of the old days gradually converting itself into a degree and post-graduate college. If this process goes on, at the end of 15 years (or any other span that educational opinion prescribes as realistic), we shall have created the first generation of Indians as completely equal (linguistically) as a conscious educational policy sincerely implemented can make them. This is the inescapable base for any decision on a link language.

When we have this base (which will be several times larger than our present literate stratum, because of the implementation of compulsory primary education and the hope of steadily enlarged educational opportunities in the coming years) it will be time enough to take a decision on what should be the link and official language or languages. This could well be decided by a referendum at that stage, preferably confined to the new generation at home in more than two languages. Until this happens, the status quo ante 1965 or even 1950 should continue. This suggestion has obvious snags but must be accepted as the price of the solution suggested.

The attraction of the idea consists in its gradualism (which should be welcome for financial and administrative reasons as well) and in its ensuring a common initial advantage to all contenders for the benefits (highly exaggerated, by the way, at present) that a knowledge of a link or official language can confer. No meaningful redress of the present linguistic inequality, acknowledged by everybody, is possible at a mid-point.

I can think of only three important objections to the scheme. The first is that this is the Rajaji formula by the backdoor. I do not share the view that association with Rajaji necessarily puts a scheme out of the pale of discussion. More importantly, this scheme differs from Rajaji's general position (as I understand it) in three ways: First, there is a definite time limit set (20 years from now at the outside) for decisions that Rajaji leaves entirely open. Secondly, and still more importantly, there is a definite commitment here and now to a course of action that will enable a decision in 20 years' time and this course of action will begin to be implemented next academic year. Thirdly, the anti-Hindi overtones of Rajaji's stance are absent in the scheme suggested. Hindi, English and yet another language will have to be learnt by the next generation. But there is no need to disguise or burke the fact that the choice eventually will be between Hindi and English (or both) and no other Indian language can qualify as a link or official language at the Centre. For all we know, to the Indians coming of age 20 years from now in a vastly different world, our present quarrels may look grotesquely old-fashioned. The choice may well be for both English and Hindi, but if it is for one or the other, none will be at a crippling disadvantage in comparison to others.

Secondly, it may be urged that the scheme is not really as equal as made out and under it some are in fact more equal than others. For, in the learning process, the Hindi speaking people have an advantage that the others do not. This is not redressed by the Hindi-speaking people learning compulsorily another language besides English and Hindi,

since the third language has no significance in bread-and-butter contexts.

The answer to this is that what is sought to be achieved is not equality all along the line but at the end of the educational process. Assuming that Hindi is the sole official language at the Centre in the nineties, the position of a non-Hindi young man aspiring to government employment then would be no worse than that of an Indian who competed in the old days with an Englishman in the ICS examination. At that level, articulation in a particular language may safely be assumed to be unaffected by the accidents of one's particular mother tongue, provided, of course, the educational regimen has been sound.

The third objection is that this is the "three-language formula" by the backdoor. There is no need to dispute this except to enter a caveat about the suggestion of furtiveness. The entry is in fact by the front door. But those who cavil at the three language formula should re-examine it in the light of the new time-table proposed. The objection to the three-language formula can be either pedagogic or political. I fear that the pedagogic objections are exaggerated, especially in the light of the experience of countries like the Soviet Union. But if the burdens of learning are indeed unequal or excessive—and I am willing to defer to expert opinion here—I would still ask them to be borne in the same way in which we are bearing some of the other deprivations and disabilities stemming from our economic and social predicaments. Secondly, I would suggest that here is an exciting educational opportunity for devising new methods of learning and teaching languages.

The political objection stems from suspicions about sincerity in implementation. Past experience has been most unhappy and makes misgivings about the future well founded. One can only fall back upon the basic assumption that everyone is sick enough at heart over the present, and apprehensive enough about the future, to give an honest trial to any viable idea. If necessary, the whole scheme of language teaching progressively covering the next generation may be made the Centre's responsibility.

It may be asked—more rhetorically than otherwise—what reason is there for hoping that the three-language formula will succeed now when it has failed so dismally in the past? The answer, apart from the political assumption mentioned earlier, is two-fold at a technical level; in the existing scheme, there is neither an element of progression nor a commitment related to a time-table. The emphasis was not on the creation at a stated point of time in the future of a new generation of Indians equally placed linguistically before making changes in the fields of government employment and language policies. That was why both the three-language formula and the moves over official language have failed so disastrously.

Ideally, this scheme should have commenced in 1950 so that a generation of Indians linguistically equal would have been ready by, say, 1970. This in part must have been the *raison d'être* behind the constitutional provision for a change-over in 1965, though it was an unduly unrealistic deadline for the purpose. But no attempt was made in the early fifties to evolve a time-table of this kind, partly because of the many mutually cancelling mental reservations that then operated. Opponents of Hindi thought that 1965 was too far for worrying about the change-over. Partisans of Hindi thought that there was time enough to prepare for the change-over. If the indispensable educational base for the change-over had entered the calculations, these latter would not have been so complacent and would have realized that they could not have begun too soon on the implementation of the three-language formula.

As of now, the relevant point is this: because 18 years have been wasted, you cannot stampede the people into a solution whose essential precondition of linguistic equality remains unfulfilled. That is the central flaw in practical contexts of the present linguistic dispensation. You cannot compress an educational span of a generation into five years by a process analogous to pressure cooking. Any such attempt will result only in half-baked solutions. What may prove even worse, the excessive pressure may blow up the cooker and the kitchen.

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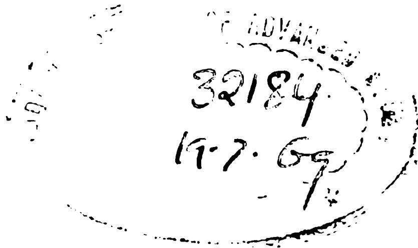
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