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LINGUISTIC PROVINCES

By
M. K. GANDHI

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
SIMLA**

LINGUISTIC PROVINCES

By
M. K. GANDHI

Edited by
BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

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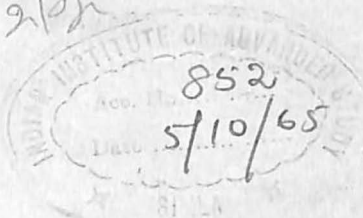
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EDITOR'S NOTE

In view of the fact that the question of redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis is now under consideration by the Government and the public, it has seemed well to put together Gandhiji's views on the subject. It is obvious that cultural growth of a people cannot take place except through the medium of their own language. Hence Gandhiji's concern that without undue delay provinces should be reconstituted on the basis of language, and that education should be imparted through its medium. The two are thus inextricably tied up with each other. But for purposes of convenience, we have separated the topics and are publishing the matter relating to linguistic provinces in this pamphlet, and that relating to medium of instruction in another.

Bombay, 20-6-'54

Bharatan Kumarappa

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THE ANDHRAS

The following has been sent to me by Maharaj Kumar Vijaya Anand of Vizianagaram:

“There is a strong feeling amongst us Andhras that you do not like us, that you are against the formation and establishment of a separate province. Despite Andhra Desh being overwhelmingly Congress, it never received your blessings. If three crores of yearning hearts are asking for a separate existence, would you not allow them the ‘right to sin’ as the great Tilak Maharaj once said? People of my Desh are so definite about your dislike for the Andhras that they even attribute your visit to Banaras recently to the purpose of commanding me to drop the Andhra agitation. The Andhras would like to know whether you ever gave any advice to Tamil Nad regarding Andhras, and also wish to know whether during the last ministry the Andhra question was referred to you or not; if so, what advice did you give them? Do you put the Andhra question on the same footing as that of Karnatak and Kerala whose revenues may not be enough to have separate provinces? Pray, what is your opinion regarding Andhra Desh being self-supporting? Is it not a fact that, owing to steadfast loyalty of the Andhras to the Congress movement, they did not achieve what Orissa did? It is felt that had the Andhras taken a different line of action when the Simon Commission came to India, they would have got their hearts’ desire.”

I can only say that the Maharaj Kumar is in bad hands. Being a novice in the art of handling masses, he has evidently not taken care to inquire into the credentials of his informants. I should like to know the Andhras who have given him the information which he has chosen to transmit to me. I am not a

stranger to Andhra Desh myself. I refer the Maharaj Kumar to Deshabhakta Konda Venkatappayya, Shri Prakasam, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Shri Kalleshwar Rao and Shri Sitaram Sastry. They will probably bear witness to the fact that I was principally instrumental in securing from the Congress the recognition of the redistribution of the Provinces for Congress purposes on a linguistic basis. I have always agitated for the acceptance by the Government of such redistribution. I have indeed advised Tamil Nad, when such advice was needed, not to resist the Andhra demand. I know that the Congress ministry headed by Shri C. Rajagopalachari tried its best to get Andhra recognized as a separate province, and it was no fault of the ministry that Andhra Desh has not yet been so recognized. But it is true that I recognized no distinction between Karnatak, Kerala and Andhra, or for that matter any other province recognized by the Congress as a separate province. I do not know enough about any province to be able to say which can be self-supporting on being recognized as separate. As to my visit to Banaras, the purpose is too well known to need any clarification. The Maharaj Kumar is a sportsman, and he should be above worrying about baseless suggestions made about him. He would be an unworthy leader who can be deflected from his mission even by a Mahatma. I hope this answer will satisfy the Maharaj Kumar, if not even those who duped him into putting the questions he has.

Sevagram, 20-3-'42

Harijan, 29-3-'42

LINGUISTIC BASIS

My reply to the Maharaj Kumar of Vizianagaram on the Andhra Province has brought me lengthy correspondence about Hindi- and Marathi-speaking provinces. The argument is that all Hindi-speaking areas should be regarded as one province, as also should Marathi-speaking areas. So far as I am concerned I am quite in sympathy with the suggestion. I believe that the linguistic basis is the correct basis for demarcating provinces. I should not mind two provinces speaking the same language, if they are not contiguous. If Kerala and Kashmir were speaking the same language, I would treat them as two distinct provinces.

The writers suggest, however, that I should lead the agitation for the redistribution, or in this case amalgamation, of the Marathi-speaking and Hindi-speaking areas. This is an impracticable proposition. The demand for amalgamation has to be made by Congressmen living in the respective areas. If it is unanimous, the Congress cannot resist it. The thing is entirely in their own hands.

Let my correspondents and others not mix up the Andhra agitation with their proposals. Andhra is already a separate province for the Congress. But, whilst the Congress ministry was in office, the Andhras agitated for legal recognition. My correspondents ask for Congress recognition of their proposals.

Whilst on merits I endorse the proposal, I would discountenance any such agitation and diversion from

the main theme before the country—the duty of every Indian in face of the impending invasion of India by Japan. Redistribution of provinces etc., important matters though they are in themselves, pale into insignificance before the question which overshadows every other. These things may easily await the termination of the war. We hope to see a new vision and a new order at the end of the present catastrophe.

Harijan, 19-4-'42

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ANDHRA AND PAKISTAN

There can be no comparison between Pakistan and Andhra separation. The Andhra separation is a redistribution on a linguistic basis. The Andhras do not claim to be a separate nation having nothing in common with the rest of India. Pakistan on the other hand is a demand for carving out of India a portion to be treated as a wholly independent sovereign State. Thus there seems to be nothing common between the two.

Harijan, 12-7-'42

NO NEED FOR DELAY

Surely, it must be quite easy for the Provincial Governments to have a staff which would carry on all transactions in the provincial languages and the inter-provincial language, which, in my opinion, can only be Hindustani written in Nagari or Urdu script.

Every day lost in making this necessary change is so much cultural loss to the nation. The first and foremost thing is to revive the rich provincial languages with which India is blessed. It is nothing short of mental sluggishness to plead that in our courts, in our schools and even in the Secretariats, some time probably a few years, must lapse before the change is made. No doubt a little difficulty will be felt in multi-lingual provinces, as in Bombay and Madras, until redistribution of provinces takes place on the linguistic basis. Provincial Governments can devise a method in order to enable the people in those provinces to feel that they have come into their own.

Nor need the provinces wait for the Union for solving the question, whether for inter-provincial speech it shall be Hindustani written in either Nagari or Urdu script or mere Hindi written in Nagari. This should not detain them in making the desired reform. It is a wholly unnecessary controversy likely to be the door through which English may enter to the eternal disgrace of India. If the first step, that is, revival of provincial speech in all public departments takes place immediately, that of inter-provincial speech will follow in quick succession. The provinces will have to deal with the Centre. They dare not do so

through English, if the Center is wise enough quickly to realize that they must not tax the nation culturally for the sake of a handful of Indians who are too lazy to pick up the speech which can be easily common to the whole of India without offending any party or section. My plea is for banishing English as a cultural usurper as we successfully banished the political rule of the English usurper. The rich English language will ever retain its natural place as the international speech of commerce and diplomacy.

Harijan, 21-9-'47

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LINGUISTIC REDISTRIBUTION

Acharya Shreeman Narayan Agarwal writes to me a letter published in the columns of the *Harijan-sevak*. The following is taken from it:

"I cannot understand why the Congress should take any time in accomplishing this linguistic redistribution. The Congress has held since 1920 that this is necessary for the good government of India. And now that we are free to have this redistribution, efforts are being made in some quarters to defeat the purpose. In the Constituent Assembly too, the matter seems to have been shelved. Without redistribution, it would be very difficult to enforce all teaching through provincial languages in our schools and colleges and it would not be easy to oust English from the position it unlawfully occupies today. Bombay, Madras and Central Provinces will bear out my contention. Any delay would but increase inter-provincial jealousy. We see the danger of tinkering in the terrible form that the Hindu-Muslim quarrel has assumed. If partition had to be accepted on any account whatsoever,

how nice it would have been if we had accepted it sooner? Shall we not learn the lesson from these disturbances that if linguistic redistribution is good, delay in carrying it out is fraught with evil consequences?"

I entirely endorse the suggestion underlying the foregoing letter, viz. that what is proper to be done should not be delayed without just cause, and that what is improper should not be conceded under any circumstances whatsoever. There can be no compromise with evil, and since linguistic redistribution is desirable from almost every point of view, all delay in carrying out the project should be avoided.

But the reluctance to enforce linguistic redistribution is perhaps justifiable in the present depressing atmosphere. The exclusive spirit is ever uppermost. Everyone thinks of himself and his family. No one thinks of the whole of India. The centripetal force is undoubtedly there, but it is not vocal, never boisterous; whereas the centrifugal is on the surface, and in its very nature makes the loudest noise, demanding the attention of all. It manifests itself most in matters communal. This has given rise to fear in other fields. The history of the quarrel between Orissa and Andhra, Orissa and Bihar, and Orissa and Bengal is fresh in our minds. The whole of it has not died out even now. This is but an illustration of an almost accomplished fact. The other provinces were never redistributed in law though they were in 1920 when the Congress had a brand new constitution enabling it to put up a life and death struggle with perhaps the greatest Empire that has ever been. How will Madras, though divided by the Congress divide itself into four provinces, and Bombay do likewise in law? Many other

claimants have come to the fore. They are not recognized by the Congress, but they are not less vocal or less insistent. The Congress does not command the prestige and authority it found itself in possession of in 1920. Despair has given place to hope. Now, when we have freedom, we seem not to know what to do with it. It is almost mistaken for suicidal anarchy. Even zealous reformers would postpone controversial issues to a more hopeful time when, in the interest of the country, the virtue of 'give and take' would be freely recognized and all sectional interests would be subordinate to the one interest of the good of India, which will include the good of all.

Therefore, those who, like me, want constructive suggestions to come into play at this very moment, have to work to bring about a healthy atmosphere, promoting concord in the place of discord, peace in the place of strife, progress in the place of retrogression and life in the place of death. That happy day will be most manifest when the communal strife has died out. Meanwhile, will the Southern linguistic groups settle their disputes and boundaries, will Bombay produce an agreed scheme of redistribution according to language, and will the new candidates withdraw their claims at least for the time being? Then linguistic redistribution can come into being today without the slightest difficulty or fuss.

Let there be no undue strain upon the Congress, whose foundations have been shaken to their roots. It is ill-equipped today either for arbitrating between rival claimants or imposing its will upon recalcitrants.

New Delhi, 23-11-'47

Harijan, 30-11-'47

NO BOUNDARY COMMISSION

Gandhiji hoped that they would not need a Boundary Commission to delimit the frontiers on the new basis. That was the foreign way which they had discarded. The best thing would be for themselves to determine the boundaries on the new basis by mutual agreement and consent and place the same before the Prime Minister for his final sanction. That would be true independence. To go to a third party in the shape of a Boundary Commission for a settlement would be a negation of independence. They must evolve inter-dependence and mutual help.

25-1-'48

Harijan, 1-2-'48

PROVINCIALISM

Gandhiji referred to the provincial spirit that seemed to be infecting the provinces. Thus, he saw in the papers that some Assamese thought that Assam belonged exclusively to the Assamese. If that spirit fired every province, to whom could India belong? He held that the people of all the provinces belonged to India and India belonged to all. The only condition was that no one could go and settle in another province to exploit it or rule it or to injure its interest in any way. All were servants of India and they lived only in the spirit of service.

Harijan, 7-9-'47

As a Gujarati in Bengal, I must quickly absorb all that is good in Bengal and never touch that which is bad. I must ever serve Bengal, never selfishly exploit it. The bane of our life is our exclusive provincialism, whereas my province must be co-extensive with the Indian boundary so that ultimately it extends to the boundary of the earth. Else it perishes.

Harijan, 21-9-'47

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THE UNITY OF INDIA

In his post-prayer speech on 25-1-1948 Gandhiji referred to the proceedings of the Congress Working Committee, which had been sitting for the previous two days. He said that they had been discussing the question of reconstitution of provinces on a linguistic basis. The Congress had already adopted that principle and had declared its intention to give effect to it constitutionally as soon as they came to power, as such redistribution would be conducive to the cultural advancement of the country. But such redistribution should not militate against the organic unity of India. Autonomy did not and should not mean disruption, or that hereafter provinces could go the way they chose, independent of one another and of the Centre. If each province began to look upon itself as a separate, sovereign unit, India's independence would lose its meaning and with it would vanish the freedom of the various units as well.

The charter of India's independence as conceived by the Congress was based on village autonomy. But

all the villages were to derive vitality from the Centre, as the latter in its turn derived all power and authority from the former. It would be fatal if it led to narrow provincialism, mutual bickerings and rivalries—between Tamil and Andhra for instance, Bombay and Karnatak and so on. The redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis was necessary if provincial languages were to grow to their full height. Hindustani was to be the lingua franca—Rashtra Bhasha—of India, but it could not take the place of the provincial tongues. It could not be the medium of instruction in the provinces—much less English. Its function was to make them realize their organic relationship with India. The world outside did not know them as Gujaratis, Maharashtris, Tamilians etc., but only as Indians. We must, therefore, resolutely discourage all fissiparous tendencies and feel and behave as Indians. Subject to this paramount consideration, a linguistic re-distribution of provinces should give an impetus to education and trade.

Harijan, 1-2-'48