

TOPIC – ONE NATION, ONE LANGUAGE

SYLLABUS: PRELIMS: CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION

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Perils of monolinguals in a country as linguistically diverse as India.

The 2011 Census listed 1,369 'mother tongues' in the country. Hindi is only one among them.

CONTEXT

- Recently, Home Minister of India spoke about 'One Nation, One Language.'
- Hindi is spoken by a large number of people in India, but not spoken by a majority of Indians.
- Constitution has made space for 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule.
- Our history and some epoch-making phenomena, whether it is the Buddha, the Bhakti movement or the freedom struggle.

BRIEF ANALYSIS

When a language tries to expand beyond its semantic-carrying capacity, it starts breaking up. It happened to Latin in the past. It happened to Sanskrit. And it is now happening to English as well.

We need one language to unite the country and that language can only be Hindi is genuine belief and not something put out for political expediency. 'One nation, one language, one culture' is a 19th century European idea that failed to create unity. We are a multilingual society. Speaking more than one language comes naturally to us. Many leaders in the national movement visualised a special role for Hindi. Most of them supported Hindustani, a mixed language, not the pure Hindi being pushed today. But all of them were clear that it could not be imposed.

We started creating linguistic States in 1955-56. Today nearly 35% of people are migrating daily for work. In such a situation, we have to conceptualise a new form of language identity for our States. Our cities must be recognised as multilingual entities. This will help us in unhinging the education policy for some large metropolises. The current practice of clubbing together multilingual spaces with monolingual habitats is not fair to the large cities today.

A UN has to have space for diversity. India is united in its diversity. Diversity is a great philosophical idea and should never be seen as a cultural burden. We cannot discard it for a purely majoritarian reason. Any idea of one link language, whether Hindi or English, will be economically disastrous for India. It will slow down migration and reduce the ease of capital flow. It will not be wrong to say that all these emotive issues thrown in the country's face by the current dispensation keep diverting attention away from the economy, which has hit an alarming low.

THREE-LANGUAGE POLICY

Hindi should be introduced in non-Hindi-speaking States from an early stage and the Hindi-speaking States should introduce a non-Hindi Indian language. That was the three-language formula. For a country like ours, this was a reasonable solution worked out by all Chief Ministers and backed by educationists in the Kothari Commission.

Sadly, the formula was sabotaged from two ends. While most non-Hindi speaking States did introduce Hindi, unfortunately the Hindi-speaking States bypassed the requirement to teach a non-Hindi language (preferably a South Indian language, said the original formulation). Instead of learning Tamil or Telugu — languages that are older and richer than Hindi — they fulfilled the third language requirement with perfunctory Sanskrit. What was a move to encourage national integration began to look like an imposition of Hindi.

The other violation was that our elites started shifting to English-only education with perfunctory knowledge of an Indian language. The three-language formula exists just on paper now. The three-language formula is a sound formula, but it is not the three-language determined by the Government of India but chosen by the parents of the child. Language diversity is a great economic proposition. India is uniquely gifted in that out of the world's 6,000 languages, we have close to 10% of the spoken languages. Our pride will get dented if we had only one language or become only a bilingual nation.

DIVIDING THE COUNTRY

The push to language divides in the same manner in which the communal divide is pushed. With Hindi chauvinism, will not work into south India. **We need both; we need all Indian languages. Together they make our nation.**