



The Constitutional Pursuit for Hindi as the National Language Fulfilling Gandhiji's Dream

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Abstract:

Mahatma Gandhiji advocated for Hindi as the national language, considering it as a unifying force for India. He believed that expressing oneself in Hindi fostered a sense of patriotism and was the ideal means of communication for Indians. Gandhi saw Hindi as a bridge across India's vast diversity, encouraging all citizens to learn it as a mark of pride in their homeland. His vision sought to unify the country's regional identities into a cohesive national identity. The Constitution supports this aim, promoting use of Hindi across India to honour Gandhi's vision of a unified nation bound by a common language.

Key words: Mahatma Gandhi, Hindi, National Language, Constitution, Official language.

Introduction

Gandhiji emphasized on accepting Hindi as "national language". He writes "[w]e have impoverished our mother tongue because of our love for English. We demean ourselves by insulting our language"¹. For Mahatma Gandhi, speaking in Hindi embodied patriotism and self-expression. His goal in promoting Hindi was to unify India's diverse regions and to foster collective identity and order. Gandhi's desire for a single language was not about rejecting others but creating a cohesive national spirit, binding the country together under one linguistic umbrella for a stronger, united India. The Constitution, reflecting his vision, originally proposed English for only 15 years, with extensions determined by Parliament as needed. English persists due to its universal acceptance, and Gandhi, while advocating Hindi as the national language, didn't oppose English.

Gandhiji lays down the requirement of a national language as follows:

1. It should be easy to learn for Government officials
2. It should be capable of serving as medium of religious, economic and political intercourse throughout India.
3. It should be the speech of majority of the inhabitants of India.
4. It should be easy to learn for whole of the country.
5. In choosing this language, considerations of temporary or passing interest should not count.

Further Gandhiji write, '[t]hen, which is the language which fulfils all the five requirements?'. To it he answers, "[w]e shall have to admit that it is Hindi"²

¹ Anand T. Hingorani, ed. Gandhi, M.K. *Our Language Problem* p.2

² *ibid* P.9

Constitutional provisions:

The Constitutional provisions official language³:

Article 120: Language to be used in Parliament shall be Hindi or in English; and if the Chairman of the Council of States or Speaker of the House of the People, or person acting as such, may permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his mother-tongue.

Article 210: Language to be used in Legislature shall be Hindi or in English; and if the Chairman of the Council of States or Speaker of the House of the People, or person acting as such, may permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his mother-tongue.

Thus the parliament and the Legislature have constitutional mandate to use Hindi as official language and English would not continue to be so after 15 years of the commencement of the Constitution. As there is a provision that, after the expiration of a period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution, the words “or in English” would be deemed to be omitted unless the Parliament / Legislature by law otherwise provides.⁴

Official language of the Nation:

According to Article 343(1) of the Constitution, the official language of the Union of India is Hindi, written in the Devnagari script. Article 344(1) mention that a Commission and a Committee on Official Language would be set up by the President. This Commission will include a Chairman and members representing the various languages listed in the Eighth Schedule. The President's order will outline the procedures the Commission must follow. The Commission's main role is to make recommendations to the President on matters related to the official language. The progressive use of the Hindi language for the official purposes of the Union;

- (a) restrictions on the use of the English language for all or any of the official purposes of the Union;
- (b) the language to be used for all or any of the purposes mentioned in article 348;
- (c) the form of numerals to be used for any one or more specified purposes of the Union;
- (d) any other matter referred to the Commission by the President as regards the official language of the Union and the language for communication between the Union and a State or between one State and another and their use⁵.

The 18th Law Commission of India, in its 216th Report titled “Non-Feasibility of Introduction of Hindi as Compulsory Language in the Supreme Court of India” (2008), recommended after discussions with all stakeholders that there should be no push to change the language used in higher courts, given the current social context. The Government has agreed with this recommendation.⁶ The use of Hindi has long been allowed in court proceedings and judgments in the High Courts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. Other states, including Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, and Karnataka, requested permission to use regional languages in their respective High Courts. Per a 1965 Cabinet Committee decision, the Chief Justice of India's opinion was sought, and in 2012, the Chief Justice declined

³ Part-XVII of the Constitution of India, Chapter I - Language of the Union

⁴ See Art 120(2) and Art. 210(2) of the Constitution of India. Provided that in relation to the Legislatures of the States of Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura this clause shall have effect as if for the words “fifteen years” occurring therein, the words “twenty-five years” were substituted: Provided further that in relation to the Legislature of the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Mizoram, this clause shall have effect as if for the words “fifteen years” occurring therein, the words “forty years” were substituted

⁵ Article 344(2)

⁶ Cited from Department of Justice website <https://doj.gov.in/use-of-hindi-and-regional-languages/#:~:text=The%20Official%20Language%20Act%2C%201963,purpose%20of%20judgments%2C%20decrees%20etc.> visited on 10/31/2024 6:06:00 PM

these requests. When Tamil Nadu requested a review in 2014, the Chief Justice again, in 2016, confirmed the earlier decision, and the government has followed the Supreme Court's stance.⁷

Under Article 345, a state's official language is Hindi, but the state legislature can adopt any other language(s) used within the state for official purposes. Until then, English remains in use for official purposes as before the Constitution began. Article 346 states that communication between states, or between a state and the Union, should be in Hindi if agreed upon by the states; otherwise, it may be in English⁸.

Chapter IV of the Constitution includes special directives on language: According to the Article 350 People can submit grievances to any Union or State officer in any language used in the Union or State. whereas as per Article 350A, States and local authorities must provide primary education in children's mother tongue for linguistic minorities, with the President able to issue necessary directions. Article 350B mentions a Special Officer for linguistic minorities, to be appointed by the President, monitors safeguards for these groups and reports to the President. The Article 351 states, the Union must promote Hindi, enriching it by incorporating elements from Hindustani, Sanskrit, and other languages listed in the Eighth Schedule⁹.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's key writings, like Hind Swaraj and Satyagraha in South Africa, were all in Gujarati, his native language, despite studying primarily in English. In his writings, he noted the challenges of mastering English, which he found frustrating and time-consuming. Through his own experience, Gandhi realized the power of native language in uniting people against British rule, aiming to create a new space for authority in India. Inspired by Gandhi, the Constitution's framers designated Hindi as the national language, as outlined in Part XVII and Article 351's special directives.

Suggestion:

1. Government may set up the necessary organisations and sponsor officially for propagation of Hindi and take further action on the lines indicated by the Committee¹⁰.
2. Steps must be taken to encourage studies and research in Indian linguistics, philology and literature.
3. The English may continue as the medium of instruction for training establishments but suitable steps may be taken to introduce Hindi as the medium for all or some of the purposes of instruction.
4. The national and State Governments may take suitable preparatory measures such as publication of instruction books, etc., in Hindi to facilitate its use as a medium of instruction, where feasible.
5. Necessary measures may be taken for introducing Hindi as an alternative medium for the entrance examination.

⁷ Ibid note 6

⁸ **Article 346. Official languages for Communication between one State and another or between a State and the Union-** The language for the time being authorised for use in the Union for official purposes shall be the official language for communication between one State and another State and between a State and the Union : Provided that if two or more States agree that the Hindi language should be the official language for communication between such States, that language may be used for such communication.

⁹ Also see Notification No. 2/8/60-O.L. (Ministry of Home Affairs), dated 27th April, 1960

¹⁰ A Committee consisting of 20 members of the Lok Sabha and 10 members of the Rajya Sabha was constituted in accordance with the provisions of clause (4) of article 344 of the Constitution to examine the recommendations of the first Official Language Commission and to report their opinion thereon to the President. The Committee submitted its report to the President on 8th February, 1959.

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