

On Language

.....by S Venkat Ram

The main task involved in finding an appropriate solution to the language problem is the choice of an acceptable point of view. Truth is viewed and, therefore, known from an angle; so also, a problem.

The current language taught in the country should be viewed from the vantage points of the same angle. The angle is the interest of the broad masses of people. The vantage points are that of democracy and of self expression.

It was Abraham Lincoln who aptly defined democracy as the Government of the people, by the people and for the people. The definition cannot be modified or even improved upon without violating the spirit of democracy. Now, the – paradox in India is just this. – We have the Government of the people, by the people and for the people – carried on in a language not understood by the mass of the people. Unless the paradox is resolved, the democracy remains largely a farce. We may consider a few manifestations of the paradox.

Every Lawyer and only a few others are aware of the legal battles waged in the courts, revolving around the – phrases and words, articles and prepositions, conjunctions and verbs used in the states. These statutes are in English. A large number of legislators who get elected are not educated in English, or, in any case, not adequately so. They are the framers of the Law. How can they meaningfully participate in the making of the law in a language over which they have no mastery, often not even acquaintance with? But these are Laws which nevertheless, are so minutely defected, interpreted and applied in Social relation after they are passed. English, therefore, has rendered the system of democracy itself unworkable in our specific context.

There are other collateral dilemmas. In a country desperately trying to improve its economic condition by application of science and technology and smash the strangle hold of the bureaucracy English is a great – It has divided the agricultural expert from the farmer, the technician from the worker, the administrator from the citizen, the lawyer from the client, the physician from the patient and even the worker from his union. It has mercilessly torn a fact the members of the family in the shani of thoughts and ideas. How can there be any progress at all if people cannot at all levels and in walks of life competitively participate freely? An Indian child is oppressed by English. It has to learn the language rather than the subject. It is estimated that about 2 whole study years are wasted on learning English, by a student takes his degree, what a colossal waste! English has here created a gulf between the mass of the people and has elite. It has strengthened the sense of inferiority complex among the people, tightened the isolation of the elite and has in effort become an instrument of exploitation as well as domination. It is converted the Indian into an aliee in its own land.

We may briefly explore the problem from the other vantage point: language as a medium of self expression.

One of our well known writers Sri Raja Rao has said somewhere that educated Indians are instinctively bilingual. Their intellectual make up are English-dominative and their educational make up are mother-tongue dominated. Very few can escape the duality in awareness when communicating experience; they can hardly hope to escape the dualism. While the well educated Indian can manage to use English for Intellectual purposes of a certain kind, such as, Court work reports and notes etc., he can hardly cope up with the problem in giving expressions to his feelings. Where there is no unity between the two facts of the psych, hardly anything worth while can be produced by way of creative writing. This is the duality plaguing the Indian writers of English. Many of them try to overcome the dilemma by clever papering over the gulf. Likewise, because the Indian languages are not used extensively for intellectual and modern purposes, they lack their precisions and expressions to convey modern experience. This is why the writing in these languages, quite often, does not transcend the sentimental and impressionist craftsmanship. We can escape this dilemma only by using the Indian languages for all purposes. Writing has to encounter a limitation inherent in the finite medium of

expression in conveying a complex experience even when the language of experience and the language of communication are the same. When they are different, this limitation can be almost insurmountable. English in India has added a new dimension to the man's alienation so universal to day. How can English be the medium of expressions of the joys and sorrows of the Indian people in this situation?

This is not a wholly Indian problem, though it has a specifically Indian Kuotteduess. Imposition of feudal language in the people is a part of many feudal societies. It is only with the emergence of modern democratic system that people language came into their own and flourished. In England, Latin and Greek ruled connation and public life till English men fought and replaced it by their mother tongue. In assist Russia, the courtiers spoke legated French in cultivated accounts. In India, the elite used Sanskrit, when the people used prakrit. It used Persian and later English, when the masses used their own languages. It is significant that people created Urdu, when the medieval court used Persian. The Indian Bhakti movement and the European protestant movement used the people language as against the language of the elite. The movement to install the Indian language to their pre eminent position in place of English is in fact the logical product the democratic revolution. That it has not yet Ill succeeded simply mean that the democratic revolution still remains to be consummated.

Many of those who accept the validity of the arguments oppose the immediate change over on programmatic grounds. They maintain that the Indian language lack Vocabulary and other equipment. This is like putting the cart before the horse. Unless a language is used for all purposes, it will not grow. A language grows out of the intension of the language and life. This is how ancient languages grew. When Buddhist missionaries went to alien lands with Pali-treatises or when ancient Sanskrit scholars traveled to far off lands or when Scholars from other countries came to India, they did not wait for a Vocabulary to grow before they did their work. It is the same story with English. Any one who is acquainted with modern English knows how the language grows by use. The Israelis and Indonesians have both shown the way how a language grows only by use. Even in our own country, if we see the working in a modern factory with sophisticated machines, spares and processes which are talked about by the English knowing elite and the workers, we now how vocabulary is being created every day. The English music critic does not wait for the English vocabulary to grow when he has to review a karnatic music concert. He freely borrows the words which are already in use in the original language. The ivory tower method of creating glossaries will not create Vocabulary. It will create only synthetic words divorced from life, which will not latch on. The Journalists are creating Vocabulary every day under the stress and strain of the press-dead line. If our languages are used forthwith immediately, they will begin to rise to the occasion in a matter of decade or two.

There are those who in principle at least agree that English has to be replaced by regional languages, but that it has to continue as the link language. We may continue to have English as the link language for some more years, but the argument against Hindi is fallacious.

It is true that Hindi has suffered equally at the hands of its own fanatic, blind adherents as at the hands of its opponents. The simple Hindi of Gandhiji's conception has become the pandit Hindi of official India.

There is also a basic perversion of priorities. Unless decentralization is combined with Indianisation of languages, the fear that Hindi will throttle regional language will persist. In any scheme of language arrangement about 75% the places now occupied by English should legitimately belong to regional languages. Moreover, regional languages should come into their own in the States at all levels in the fields of education, administration and Justices. Only then will the people know that only a residuary position belongs to Hindi. The present anti Hindi agitation flows from this perversion or priorities. The culprits in the Central Government tried to ram Hindi down the throats of the people, while the culprits in the State Governments had not bothered to install regional languages in their places.

It is said that Hindi is a raw language. This is an advantage for, it can be bent to the national purpose and in course of time it can speed its regional Character. After all, Urdu grew up in the bazaars of India and was given finishing touches in Deccan. In course of time Hindi can grow into a genuine national language by freely borrowing from other sister languages as well as from world languages, by achieving an approximation with Urdu which is after all another style of Hindi and by liberating itself from outmoded modes of grammar and structure. Indian people can achieve it but only collectively. It is wrong to say as some English concerted Indian say that Hindi is an alien on English. That is said for effect. About 30-40% of the Vocabulary of the Hindi is common with other regional languages. Any one who has had to translate, particularly on a platform knows, how closer Hindi is to regional languages than English, in its totality of Vocabulary, Syntax and Idioms.

The anti Hindi controversy lacks the sense of proportion. After all, how many people are directly concerned with Hindi? There are 2.5 millions Central Government employees. Excluding regional workers and class IV employees there may be not more than one million employees in the pen pushing jobs. There are may be another half a million at the most like lawyers, contractors, income tax practitioners etc., who have to deal in the link language. We may say that the outer limit is 2 millions. Only two millions out of 50 crores need to know only link language professionally. Distributed prorata, this means about 1 lakh for each southern state and distributed over the normal period of service of 30 years, the rate of annual recruitment is about 3 to 4 thousands. Should all the collides be made by the entry about the alleged handicap of this tiny minority. As an Indian desirous of becoming a lecturer in Mathematics studies and another desirous of becoming a fitter learns that trade, those who wants service under Central Government should learn the link language.

Hindi has better claims to be the link language than English, as it belongs to the same culture and complex on other Indian languages.

- This is the outline of the problem and the solution as we see it. In fact this is the quintessence of what Dr. Lohia said, in spite of so much ridicule and scorn poured on him on all sides.
- It is said that English is our window on the world and our only access to science, technology and higher learning. English speaking world is no longer in the forefront of science and technology. We must take knowledge from whatever country we can. Our courts are dominated by the precedents from the courts of English speaking countries. Our literature is powerfully influenced by English literature. Our Scientists and Technologists are guided largely by science literature in English. There is no reason why only a great country like India should approach the treasure house of world knowledge through Anglo saxon good offices. Instead of every one compulsorily learning English indifferently, we must so remodel our education that some persons learn other languages such as French, Russian, German, Chinese, Spanish, and Japanese and of course English well and do direct translation into our languages.