

CHAPTER III

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

117. The question that has caused the greatest controversy is the position to be accorded to language in the reorganisation of the States of the Indian Union. One of the major facts of India's political evolution during the last hundred years has been the growth of our regional languages. They have during this period developed into rich and powerful vehicles of expression creating a sense of unity among the peoples speaking them. In view of the fact that these languages are spoken in well-defined areas, often with a historic background, the demand for the unification of such areas to form separate States has gathered momentum and has, in some cases, assumed the form of an immediate political programme. The Resolution appointing this Commission makes a specific reference to the importance of language. A careful examination of the pros and cons of this problem is, therefore, necessary as an essential preliminary to the consideration of the question of the reorganisation of States.

The case for Linguistic States

118. The advocates of a rigid and uniform application of the linguistic principle in determining the boundaries of States advance important arguments in support of their claim which may be briefly stated and examined here.

119. A federal union, such as ours, presupposes that the units are something more than mere creatures of administrative convenience. The constituent States in a federal republic must each possess a minimum degree of homogeneity to ensure the emotional response which is necessary for the working of democratic institutions. The States of the Indian Union can achieve this internal cohesiveness only if they are constituted on a unilingual basis, because language being the vehicle for the communion of thought and feeling, provides the most effective single bond for uniting the people. Linguistic homogeneity, therefore, provides the only rational basis for re-constructing the States, for it reflects the social and cultural pattern of living obtaining in well-defined regions of the country

120. In a democracy such as we have in India, based on universal adult franchise, the political and administrative work of State has

of necessity to be conducted in the regional language. A multiplicity of such languages would lead to weakness and inefficiency in administration and rivalry and jealousy in politics. It is pointed out that already in some of the States a large percentage of members in the legislature know only one language and this trend is likely to become more and more emphasised. In some States even ministers know only one regional language. Discussions in legislatures would become difficult, if a considerable number of members are unable to follow the proceedings.

121. Under an alien rule the basic need of unity of outlook between the people and those governing them could be subordinated to imperial and other considerations. But under a democratic form of government based on adult franchise, it is imperative that there should be a real consciousness of identity of interests between the people and the government, and that both should work in an atmosphere of co-ordination and mutual understanding. The success of a welfare state depends essentially on broad-based popular support, which cannot be secured if the processes of government are not brought home to the people. If the Legislature of a State is not to develop into a babel of tongues, it must conduct its work in one language, the language of the people. The various devices adopted in multilingual States to meet the communicational needs of the people have led only to a dissipation of energy and national resources.

122. Educational activity can be stimulated only by giving the regional languages their due place. If the educated few are not to be isolated from the masses, the education of the people must necessarily be through the medium of the mother-tongue.

123. The demand for linguistic States does not represent mere cultural revivalism. It has a wider purpose in that it seeks to secure for different linguistic groups political and economic justice. In multilingual States political leadership and administrative authority remain the monopoly of the dominant language groups, and linguistic minorities are denied an effective voice in the governance of their States. Even where there are substantial minorities having adequate representation in the cabinet, the representatives of linguistic minority groups find it impossible, owing to party discipline and other factors, to do anything effective to safeguard the interests of minorities.

124. Similarly, in multilingual States welfare activity as well as development plans are unequally and unfairly distributed, the areas inhabited by the dominant language groups developing at the expense

of other areas. The demand for unilingual States, therefore, aims at securing for minorities a fair deal not only in the social and cultural spheres but also in the political and economic fields.

125. Conflict and discord are inherent in administrations in which diverse elements are forcibly held together. Where the requisite sense of unity is absent, an unwilling association or co-existence, however long, would not succeed in producing that atmosphere of mutual goodwill and understanding which is essential for the working of democratic institutions.

126. Under foreign domination, when opportunities for self-development were denied to all alike, different linguistic groups could live together without apparent conflict. Now that the people of India have to shape their own destinies, consciousness of the lack of a community of interests between different language groups tends to become deeper and deeper with the progressive realisation of their divergent economic and other needs.

127. With the limited resources at the disposal of States, plans for the economic development of different areas have inevitably to be based on a system of priorities and it is difficult to reconcile the rival claims of different regions. [It is a peculiar feature of multilingual States that in each one of them suspicion of favouritism and charges of partiality have centred round the linguistic division, each language group considering that it is being unfairly treated.] Only the removal of minority consciousness by reorganising the States on a unilingual basis can eliminate this widespread sense of distrust.

128. The argument that composite States provide a common meeting place for different linguistic groups and help them to accustom themselves to living together in a spirit of tolerance and understanding would have had some validity if different linguistic groups were interspersed in these States. Far from this being so, there is, generally speaking, a clear-cut integration of different regions in composite States on the basis of linguistic homogeneity. The argument, therefore, that different linguistic groups in these areas are living together in close amity is unreal.

129. The political atmosphere, vitiated by linguistic differences, has now permeated into the administrative structure as a whole. Important administrative posts tend to become the monopoly of the members of dominant language groups and appointments and promotions are no longer governed by considerations of administrative purity, efficiency and fairness.

130. A majority of the States in the Indian Republic are already predominantly unilingual. The States of West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, the U.P., Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat, Saurashtra, Mysore and Travancore-Cochin are all either completely unilingual or could be made so with only minor adjustments of boundaries. The creation of Andhra as a new unilingual State has left residuary Madras mainly a Tamil State. In these circumstances, the apprehension that the linguistic redistribution of the remaining multilingual states will create new problems or constitute a threat to national unity seems to have little justification.

131. Linguistic redistribution of provinces has been an integral part of the Indian national movement. Having sponsored the linguistic principle for nearly forty years, it is impossible for the leaders of political thought now to reverse the current.

132. The national movement which achieved India's independence was built up by harnessing the forces of regionalism. It is only when the Congress was reorganised on the basis of language units that it was able to develop into a national movement. The Congress under Mahatma Gandhi realised that the same forces which worked for our national unity had also helped to develop the regional languages, which led to the integration of language areas. It is this alliance between regional integration and national feeling that helped us to recover our freedom.

133. With the achievement of freedom, a tendency has developed to overlook the claims of different regions, by denying to them the right to internal integration, on the plea that this will weaken the unity of the nation. This, however, is a false cry, for true development will be possible, only if we are able to utilise genuine loyalties which have grown up around historic areas united by a common language.

134. Finally, it is contended that the urge for linguistic States has now gone deep down into the minds of the masses and a refusal to create such States at this stage would lead to a widespread sense of frustration which might have very grave consequences.

The case against Linguistic States

135. While there is undoubtedly much that is valid in the arguments briefly stated above, there are also weighty considerations which have been urged against accepting language as the determining principle in the creation of States. The more important of these may now be stated.

136. The idea of a federating unit, organised as the political expression of a single language group, would inevitably encourage exclusivism. It may even tend to blur, if not to obliterate, the feeling of national unity, by the emphasis it places on local culture, language and history. The self-image that any such language group creates is necessarily one of superiority as compared to others, and this will inevitably be reflected in its educational and cultural institutions. In fact, experience everywhere has shown that States based on languages are intolerant, aggressive and expansionist in character. Already a sense of irredentism is noticeable in the existing unilingual States of India, which claim neighbouring territories on the basis of language statistics.

137. In view of the uneven development of India's languages, education as a whole is moreover bound to suffer and will lose its national character. If the different States pursue policies of their own without regard to the interests of the nation as a whole, there will be no co-ordination and unity of purpose in education. In fact, this tendency might lead to education itself being used as a vehicle of regional particularism and revivalism, resulting in inter-state conflicts and the weakening of the national tie.

138. Already in the schools of some of the States, songs exalting the regional idea have been introduced into text books. History books taught in lower classes have disclosed a marked tendency to exaggerate the past achievements of the dominant linguistic groups. These inevitable tendencies in language-based States will unavoidably weaken our sense of national unity.

139. Grievances and a sense of frustration in the political and economic field are not the inevitable or necessary features of multi-lingual States. Even after a State is reconstituted on a linguistic basis, there is no reason to suppose that all areas will receive equal attention and that there will not develop an equally strong sense of frustration and neglect in areas which feel that their claims are not receiving adequate attention. The remedy for redressing such grievances lies in the fulfilment of the aspirations of the various groups by positive measures based on the merits of each case, and not in the wholesale reorganisation of States on the basis of language.

140. Planning on a national scale also cuts across linguistic affiliations. Economic development should obviously proceed on such considerations as the capital-income ratio, the more remunerative projects being preferred to the less remunerative ones, the employment possibilities of various projects, the requirements of river valley projects, the optimum utilisation of natural resources etc.

141. The formation of linguistic States would not only not accelerate but may retard the pace of planned economic development of the country, for local sentiment may resent the utilisation of the resources of one area for the benefit of another. Besides any large-scale reorganisation of States may result in the diversion of national energies into unproductive channels, and, to that extent, impair the economic advancement of the people and the execution of various development projects

Importance of language for administrative and other purposes

142. It is obviously an advantage that constituent units of a federation should have a minimum measure of internal cohesion. Likewise, a regional consciousness, not merely in the sense of a negative awareness of absence of repression or exploitation but also in the sense of scope for positive expression of the collective personality of a people inhabiting a State or a region may be conducive to the contentment and well-being of the community. Common language may not only promote the growth of such regional consciousness, but also make for administrative convenience and for a proper understanding of governmental measures by the people. Indeed, in a democracy the people can legitimately claim and the government have a duty to ensure that the administration is conducted in a language which the people can understand.

143. The objective, therefore, of community of language between the people and the government is not only wholly unexceptionable but also highly commendable. The essential point to remember, however, is that if we pursue it as an abstract proposition and not as a practical administrative issue, we are apt to lose a sense of perspective and proportion.

144. The problem of linguistic groups within a state is not unknown outside India, but precedents elsewhere, which are often cited, provide but little guidance. Except in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, there are in the States of Europe no language groups large enough to claim separate political organisation. Linguistic minorities continue to exist in many States even though the political settlement following the First Great War had demarcated the boundaries of Central Europe broadly on a language basis. In view of the intermingling of languages and peoples in Central Europe, this settlement, however, left large minority groups within the new States, for example, over three million Germans in Czechoslovakia and several considerable minorities in Poland. The problem in these countries, however, was one of the protection of linguistic minorities in

sovereign States erected on a linguistic basis. The problem of minorities exists in India also but the character of the problem is different, as the States of the Indian Union are not sovereign independent units, but parts of a national whole.

145. European history, however, clearly shows that language is one of the fundamental elements of social life and influences to a large extent national psychology, so much so that speaking of Central and Eastern Europe, Professor Toynbee has been led to observe that "the growing consciousness of Nationality had attached itself neither to traditional frontiers nor to new geographical associations but almost exclusively to the mother-tongues."¹ It is to be noted that most bilingual or multilingual States have had to face separatist movements. Belgium and Spain are notable examples. Catalan separatism has been one of the most persistent strands of Spanish history. In Switzerland divided sympathy for Germany and France severely strained Swiss neutrality during the war of 1914—18.

146. Only in the U.S.S.R. and Yugoslavia has an effort been made to organise units on a linguistic basis. Though the units constituting the U.S.S.R. are organised generally on this basis, there are in operation adequate constitutional, extra-constitutional and ideological correctives, which could be applied in case any regional loyalties challenge the loyalty to the party or to the State.

Constitutional relationship between the Centre and the States of the Indian Union

147. The problem of linguistic States has also to be examined in the light of the bonds of our unity and the constitutional position of the Centre.

148. It has to be realised that the political unity of India is a recent achievement. It was not, as is generally supposed, brought about by the administrative unification of India by the British. [The former British areas of the present territory of the Indian Union constitute less than three-fifths of the total.] The rest was under the rule of Indian princes, and it is well to remember that from 1917 at least a determined effort was made to separate "Indian India" from the rest and to bring the princely States in direct relationship with the Crown.

149. Even what was British India did not achieve a real measure of unity. It was the determination of the Indian people to rid themselves of foreign domination and to build up a life for themselves

1. A. J. Toynbee.—The World after the Peace Conference, London, 1926, p. 18.

as a free people, that created the present unity of India, sweeping away not merely the alien rule, but also the hereditary Rulers who had divided up India and thus stood in the way of that unity. But this sense of Indian unity is a plant of recent origin. It has not only to be watered and nourished, but protected against hailstorms and gales and against unfriendly climates. This was in a measure recognised by those responsible for the making of our Constitution, and consequently a number of provisions were included in it for safeguarding the unity of India. Of these the more important are:

- (i) the Concurrent List of subjects in respect of which the Union Parliament has over-riding legislative authority;
- (ii) provisions enabling Parliament to legislate in respect of matters in the State List in cases of grave emergency, or in the national interest when the Rajya Sabha by a two-thirds majority decides to so legislate;
- (iii) provisions enabling Parliament and President to assume legislative and executive functions in States when the normal constitutional machinery fails, and provisions authorising the issue of special directives by the Centre in the event of a financial emergency; and
- (iv) provisions empowering the Union Government to give directions to States to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament and to ensure that the executive power of every State is not so exercised as to impede or prejudice the power of the Union executive.

150. These special provisions, however, are primarily remedial in character and are meant to prevent a breakdown in the States and to safeguard the powers of the Union within its own sphere. They do not detract from the fact that under the Constitution the States constitute corner-stones of the political and administrative structure of the country with a real measure of autonomy. In fact, Dean Appleby has recently expressed the view that "the new national government of India is given less basic resource in power than any other large and important nation, while at the same time having rather more sense of need and determination to establish programs dealing with matters important to the national interests".¹ He has further observed: "no other large and important national government, I believe, is so dependent as India on theoretically subordinate but actually rather distinct units responsible to a different political control....."²

151. There has been a tendency during the last few years during which the new Constitution has been in force to lay more and more

1. Paul H. I. Appleby—Public Administration in India—Report of a Survey, p. 16.

2. *I bid*, p. 21.

emphasis on the autonomy of the States. This has to be considered in relation to the encouragement to regionalism which the emphasis on language as the basis for the creation of a State is bound to give.

Group loyalties and nationalism

152. It has to be remembered that linguistic and other group loyalties have deep roots in the soil and history of India. The culture-based regionalism, centring round the idea of linguistic homogeneity represents to the average Indian values easily intelligible to him. Indian nationalism, on the other hand, has still to develop into a positive concept. It must acquire a deeper content before it becomes ideologically adequate to withstand the gravitational pull of the traditional narrower loyalties. In these circumstances, further emphasis on narrow loyalties by equating linguistic regions with political and administrative frontiers, must diminish the broader sense of the unity of the country.

Other Considerations

153. Undue emphasis on the linguistic principle is likely to impede the rapid development of new areas brought under cultivation and the rehabilitation of displaced persons. If the main or the exclusive criterion for the re-demarkation of State boundaries is to be community of language, the State governments will naturally view with concern, and take measures to stop, the settlement in newly colonised areas of people belonging to different language groups, particularly when such areas happen to be on the borders of the State.

154. A concrete case may be cited by way of illustration. The sponsors of the movement for a Punjabi-speaking State have advanced a claim to the Ganganagar district of Rajasthan which came into existence as a result of the colonisation of part of the former Bikaner State under the Gang Canal system. Apart from the fact that the Punjabi-speaking people constitute only about 26 per cent. of the population of the Ganganagar district and that the claim is, therefore, untenable even on linguistic grounds, it has to be remembered that this area is essentially a part of Rajasthan and that the Punjab has no legitimate claim to it. If, in a case such as this, the area is allowed to be separated from the parent State this would create a very unhealthy precedent; and the people not belonging to the dominant language group might be looked upon as alien settlers, who would sooner or later agitate for its separation from the State.

155. Finally, there are certain aspects of the claim for linguistic units, the implications of which should be carefully analysed and understood. The most important of these is the doctrine of an area claiming to be the "home land" of all the people speaking a particular language. Its implication is that a Bengali, an Andhra or a Malayali, wherever he is settled, has his home land in Bengal, Andhra or Kerala; that he has a loyalty to that home land, over-riding the loyalty to the area of his domicile; and that in the same way, the homeland State has claims on him, wherever he may be. We cannot too strongly emphasise the dangerous character of this doctrine, especially from the point of view of our national unity. If any section of people living in one State is encouraged to look upon another State as its true home land and protector on the sole ground of language, then this would cut at the very root of the national idea.

156. It follows from the acceptance of the doctrine of the home land that the home land itself should be demarcated with care, and it has accordingly been proposed that in determining the boundaries between linguistic groups the village should be taken as the unit. In border villages generally the population is largely mixed. If on the basis of the majority belonging to one language group, a village is separated from the administrative unit to which it is now attached, then, it follows that special provisions will have to be made to see that the language composition of such a village does not change at any future time. This is obviously impossible in what is likely to be a dynamic economy.

157. The idea that all people who speak the same language and constitute a majority, whether in a village or a taluk, should be attached to their home land will do immense harm to our national growth and must, therefore, be rejected unequivocally. The allegations that Census returns in the border areas have been tampered with illustrate the dangerous possibilities inherent in this idea.

158. The home land concept must also deepen majority and minority consciousness and thereby aggravate the minority problem. The Constitution of India guarantees common citizenship to all Indian people. There can, therefore, be only one nationality in India and the idea of majority and minority would seem to run counter to it. Unfortunately, in a number of States discriminatory practices against people from other units seem to exist even at the present time. The "home land" doctrine, if encouraged, is bound to accentuate these trends. This is a problem of considerable importance and we have dealt with it at some length in a subsequent Chapter.

Composite States

159. The question whether multilingual states will strengthen the unity of India is not easy to determine. In States having more than one developed language, there has been no marked tendency in the past to develop a sense of loyalty to the state. There was never any noticeable Madrasi sentiment when the State was a composite one. On the other hand, such loyalties as did develop within the area were based on languages. The same holds true about Bombay and Madhya Pradesh. Marathi and Gujarati feeling grew up side by side, practically to the exclusion of any particular loyalty to the province or State of Bombay. In Madhya Pradesh, the Maha Vidarbha sentiment based on the Marathi language has been vocal for many decades.

160. The idea that the creation of multilingual States will weaken the loyalty to language groups does not, therefore, seem to be justified. There is, however, one difference between composite and linguistic States. Undoubtedly, the maintenance of multilingual units will prevent the utilisation of the machinery of the state for furthering programmes of linguistic exclusiveness, and in favourable conditions may lead to tolerance and adjustment, especially if the importance which is now attached to economic development diverts attention from the less important questions and the barren controversies regarding culture and language.

161. A composite state in which languages are integrated territorially may have another value. National loyalties do not demand that other loyalties should be eliminated. It is, however, essential that no political values or social attitudes should be accepted at the State level which would exclude concepts around which we desire our national unity to grow. A composite state which makes adequate provision for the protection of culture and the encouragement of local languages would help to prevent the growth of anti-national trends.

Conclusion

162. We now summarise our final views on the role of language as a factor bearing on the reorganisation of States. After a full consideration of the problem in all its aspects, we have come to the conclusion that it is neither possible nor desirable to reorganise States on the basis of the single test of either language or culture, but that a balanced approach to the whole problem is necessary in the interests of our national unity.

163. Such a balanced approach would appear to be:

- (a) to recognise linguistic homogeneity as an important factor conducive to administrative convenience and efficiency but not to consider it as an exclusive and binding principle, over-riding all other considerations, administrative, financial or political;
- (b) to ensure that communicational, educational and cultural needs of different language groups, whether resident in predominantly unilingual or composite administrative units, are adequately met;
- (c) where satisfactory conditions exist, and the balance of economic, political and administrative considerations favour composite States, to continue them with the necessary safeguards to ensure that all sections enjoy equal rights and opportunities;
- (d) to repudiate the "home land" concept, which negates one of the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution, namely, equal opportunities and equal rights for all citizens throughout the length and breadth of the Union;
- (e) to reject the theory of "one language one state", which is neither justified on grounds of linguistic homogeneity, because there can be more than one State speaking the same language without offending the linguistic principle, nor practicable, since different language groups, including the vast Hindi-speaking population of the Indian Union, cannot always be consolidated to form distinct linguistic units; and
- (f) finally, to the extent that the realisation of unilinguism at state level would tend to breed a particularist feeling, to counter-balance that feeling by positive measures calculated to give a deeper content to Indian nationalism; to promote greater inter-play of different regional cultures, and inter-state co-operation and accord; and to reinforce the links between the Centre and the State in order to secure a greater co-ordinated working of national policies and programmes.

Culture

164. It will be fruitless for us to go into the academic question whether the entire Indian sub-continent has only one culture or whether different regions have distinct cultures. There can, of course, be no difference of opinion on the desirability of ensuring

free and harmonious development of regional cultures, or sub-cultures as they might be called, the ideal being an Indian culture enriched both in volume and in content by a confluence of diverse cultural streams, which, while merging themselves in the main central current, preserve their individual characteristics. We have noticed, however, that in most cases the cultural argument has been pressed into service with very little justification. In fact, there was hardly a political note struck before us which did not carry a cultural under-tone.

165. Culture in its general sense is a social heritage of moral, spiritual and economic values expressing itself in the distinct way of life of a group of people living as an organised community. It covers language, habits, ideas, beliefs and even the vocational pattern of society.

166. It is obvious that the impact of the administrative activity at the state level on the citizen's life cannot possibly be so comprehensive as to have any direct bearing on cultural life in the wider sense. From the point of view of the reorganisation of States, the cultural needs of the people have, therefore, to be considered primarily in terms of the growth of the regional languages, the maintenance of customs and the popularisation of the fine arts.

167. Even in this restricted sense, claims based on cultural homogeneity should normally stand the following two-fold test:

- (a) the people claiming a distinctive culture must constitute a recognisable group; that is to say, it should include a number of persons sufficient by themselves to claim, conserve and develop stable traditions or the characteristics of their culture; and
- (b) such cultural individuality should be capable of being expressed in terms of a defined and sizeable geographical entity.

168. Even when these conditions are fulfilled, claims based on the cultural needs of different groups of people should be considered in proper perspective. The first point to remember is that it is neither practicable nor desirable to impede social or cultural evolution which results from increasing opportunities for social and political intercourse or from impacts such as that of modern means of communication or educational activity on pre-existing modes of living. Secondly, cultural isolation or cultural conflict are inconsistent with the traditions of this country. Indian culture, as is well-known, itself represents the synthesis of different religions and diverse modes of

thought; a healthy interplay of regional cultures is, therefore, vital to the full growth of the composite Indian national culture no less than that of regional cultures themselves. Thirdly, the Constitution provides suitable safeguards for the protection of the cultural rights of the minorities of India.

169. In these circumstances, we are disinclined to attach too much importance to cultural distinctiveness as a factor independent of the linguistic needs of the people.