

CHAPTER IV

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

1. I have referred to this question at various places in the earlier part of this note. Really speaking there should arise no question or argument about what should be the medium of education of a student at all stages of instruction. As Gandhiji said, (This is quoted in the O.L.C.R., Chap. VI), "through what language the boys and girls of a place are to be educated is a question which is already decided for them in every free country." Hence he confidently noted further that "when this country becomes really free, the question of medium will be settled only one way." And that way, according to him, was that one's own language was the obvious natural medium. However, unfortunately the settlement of the question has not been as easy nor as quick as Gandhiji hoped.

2. Thanks to the pernicious habit, formed by our educated classes during the last century, of the use of the alien medium under the English educational system, some have almost lost the right focus to view the question in its true perspective as a free people. They would like to see the Union language Hindi adopted as medium in all or as many places as they can, as a monolithic solution of the question for the whole country. India being multi-lingual, this solution would be obviously in utter disregard of the sound and universally accepted principle of education and culture that we saw above.

3. Democratically also it would be bad to adopt it for a free community and thus dissociate the language of the people from that of the medium of their instruction. As late Shri G. V. Mavalankar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, in his written reply to the O.L.C. Questionnaire said, "The medium of education at all stages should be the regional language. It is necessary to do so for the development of the language as also for spread of higher knowledge..... Remembering the need of levelling up the level of the knowledge in all directions and on all subjects of our people, I cannot think of another medium than the regional language which alone will be able to achieve the final objective. Unless we get an educated electorate our democracy based on adult franchise will be always in danger of being autocracy of power-mongers or a sort of mobocracy." In reply to our Q. 21, he specifically said about the medium at the University stage, "I visualise education as one entire whole, intended for educating the entire personality of the student. Its division into primary, secondary and higher are for the purpose of describing only stages which are suitable to different ages of the student. It is well-known that education is best imparted through the mother-tongue and therefore I cannot visualise change of medium at different stages."

II

4. The O.L.C.R. has unfortunately not corroborated the above universally accepted solution of the medium question and has gone out of its way to suggest various measures which, according to me, are bound to injure the cause of spreading Hindi, by creating misunderstandings and suspicions in non-Hindi speaking areas of our country, about the purpose, scope and use of the Antar Bhasha Hindi in our body politic. I have, earlier in this note, argued that the O.L.C. should recommend that the Union Government should give detailed assurances to the people about the policy of the use of Hindi *vis-a-vis* the undisputed use of regional languages in the legitimate spheres of their respective States. The O.L.C.R., on the other hand, has, in my view, without warrant gone into making suggestions that are bound to give justification to fears and apprehensions which stand to be dispelled even at the present moment.

5. The question of the autonomy of universities is also pertinent here. Just as States are free, under the C. of I., to adopt one or more of their regional languages for official purposes, so also universities too should be free to decide the medium question for their instructional purposes. The O.L.C.R. takes note of such autonomy for them, but it would not respect it if the decisions of universities would not generally follow the 'conclusions' it has laid down in this behalf regarding the use of Hindi as the medium. In that case, it goes further and would invoke the powers of the Government at the Centre to interfere, even though the O.L.C.R. notes that "the Government of India have already decided in principle not to make medium of instruction in Universities an issue of Government policy." In so doing the O.L.C.R., surprisingly enough, has quoted Mahatma Gandhi in support of its view of disregarding the academic view. But it conveniently forgets to note the next sentence of Gandhiji and his view which I have referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

6. The O.L.C.R. has gone further to oblige the Government of India with a veiled hint to intervene in this question under a certain clause in the C. of I. The clause relates to powers of the Centre regarding "co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education....." Surely medium is something different from and above standards and more fundamental. To have an alien medium of instruction is rather putting premium over lowering of standards, one may think.* The said clause obviously cannot cover the matter of the medium, as the O.L.C.R. itself perhaps feels, as can be imagined from its use of the words, ".....would seem to be covered under the subject 'co-ordination and determination'.....".

7. I may not go into discussing further the position of the O.L.C.R. on this question, but may note that the whole treatment of the question by it is an outstanding example of its over-stepping the terms of reference and coming to 'conclusions' which, as they appear to me, compromise the Presidential assurance to regional languages.

*In this regard see para. 14 below.

III

8. Protagonists of the Hindi medium as a monolithic all-India solution forget that Hindi at the present day in our linguistic development is only a regional language like others enumerated in the C. of I. As I have noted in the earlier part of this note, the other Hindi, I mean, the Hindi contemplated under Article 351 of the C. of I., has only titular existence today. And it is this Hindi only that, I hope, is suggested as the medium of higher education. Therefore, to suggest Hindi today would mean the adoption of the regional Hindi. This is obviously not a right thing. Even so, it would be something worth while if Hindi, like Russian in the context of the regional languages of the U.S.S.R.—a multi-lingual country like ours,—were comparatively a richer and more developed language for the purposes of higher education. But it is not so. All our languages, suffering as they have been under the heels of an alien medium, are equally in need of development that stands arrested till now.

9. It may be observed here that, viewing from the restricted point only of being a ready and fit medium of instruction, claims of English are unquestionable; and hence those who stand for its retention may well argue against the Hindi case that, in the matter of the medium, they are on surer grounds than the Hindi medium protagonists. And as Hindi is not known well enough to be used as a medium in non-Hindi areas, and if Hindi is suggested as the medium, it will only land us into the *status quo* of continuing English. This is, however, out of the question, as the language problem is the replacement of English even as a practical measure, because the standard of English knowledge all over the country is going down even among the one per cent. of our people who know that language.

10. Our real problem is not that we wish to have Hindi as the medium, but it is to remove the English medium quickly and well. This can be done by a simultaneous move on the part of all regional languages including Hindi in their respective States. And this process can start immediately. Those who stand for retention of English also agree to change in this way and would be expected to join such an all-India move. Therefore even the Hindi medium School of thought should at least admit that "in the near future the regional languages will be the principal media of instruction at all stages in all the provinces." (Radhakrishnan Report, P. 323, Para. 51.)

11. Therefore, it is very necessary now to begin this change-over of the medium in our universities. If they begin by 1957, it is thought possible to complete the process by 1965 latest. It is needed as a vital part of the general linguistic transition envisaged by the C. of I. also.

12. Along with this, universities should continue the study of Hindi compulsorily up to the first degree course. This will equip our graduates with sufficient Hindi to fulfil the all-India purposes of national and governmental inter-communication.

13. Such a line of work is immediately practical. And the picture of an order that may result by adopting it will be quite satisfactory, as described by the Radhakrishnan Report which is worth quoting here:—

14. "Higher education is the door through which some of the educated youth will pass into federal (*i.e.* Union) services and federal politics. But much the greater proportion will remain in the provinces. Both from the point of view of education and of general welfare of a democratic community it is essential that their study should be through the instrumentality of their regional language. Education in the regional language will not only be necessary for their provincial activities, it will enable them to enrich their literature and to develop their culture. Educated naturally in the regional language, they ought to achieve higher standards* of learning and of thought, and should be able to give a powerful stimulus to research and extension of the boundaries of knowledge. Equipped with the requisite knowledge of the Federal language (*i.e.* the Official Language of the Union), the provincial students will have no difficulty in joining institutes of an all-India character, and the provincial scholars in undertaking to teach them." (P. 323, Para. 50).

15. I may note in passing a fear that the Hindi medium protagonists entertain about such a picture. This was expressed to us in his oral evidence by a V.I.P. at Delhi. He said that he admitted that the regional languages would surely replace the English medium immediately and well enough. But his difficulty was that under that case Hindi will not then have any chance to come in their places, once they delivered the goods! This exposes the Hindi medium case at its most vulnerable point. If with the study of Hindi as a compulsory subject and with one's own language serving fully well as the medium of instruction, it is alright to carry on, why should one worry to have Hindi in place of any of its sister languages of India? Surely Hindi as the *Antar Bhasha* cannot be understood much less pitched as a rival to the regional languages. We must rather be clear to ourselves that "if bilingualism† is fostered properly then the problems

*It will be interesting to remember here the point of medium *vis-a-vis* maintenance of standards, noted above in para. 6 of this chapter.

†*i.e.* as described above, or to quote the Radhakrishnan Report about the meaning of bilingualism from where I am quoting this sentence:—

"We would like to see the introduction of the Federal Language in all schools at the secondary stages, and the teaching should be continued at the University. This will ensure a general knowledge of the federal language of use for all practical needs. In addition, for those who desire to attain greater mastery over the federal language facilities should be provided for intensive study. In the Hindi speaking regions it will be an advantage if students are required to learn another Indian language. This is proposed not merely to compensate for the efforts of students in other regions, but also to secure the eligibility of young men of this region to serve in other regions and to provide adequate supply of those Hindi speaking persons who can mediate between the provinces." (*ibid* p. 322, para. 48).

The O. L. C. R. has gone into the latter question of Hindi regions learning another Indian language. I do not agree with its remarks there. The position taken by the R. Report above is right. This is now corroborated by the scheme of language study in secondary schools that the Union Government has recently notified to State Departments of education (see Draft Syllabus for Higher Secondary Schools issued by the all-India Council for Secondary Education, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India). Such mutual study of our languages will really bring about and foster Indian unity based on mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's life and culture in various linguistic regions linked into one through the common *Antar Bhasha* Hindi.

which arise from the replacement of English by the federal language will be gradually solved." (Radhakrishnan Report, P. 322, Para. 49).

16. The Radhakrishnan Report, in one of the quotations recorded above, refers to the aspect of the medium question *vis-a-vis* the Services, central and provincial. I leave this point for a separate chapter, and end with another point, *viz.* Gandhiji's opinion on this complex question of the medium. I do it because, in course of our inquiry, the question of his opinion was raised by various persons. And this is not surprising; for has he not been the architect of most of the nation-building activities that are occupying us intensely today?

17. It is interesting to know how some have come to think about Gandhiji's views at the present juncture. For example, there was a view that, as Gandhiji was no more and as the conditions of freedom now are quite different from those of foreign rule when he was living and thinking, we should not go into studying what he said on the language problem! There is to be found another extreme view to this which holds that if Gandhiji had been alive today he would have said that Hindi should be the medium! There is the mid-way view which cuts short the matter by interpreting that Gandhiji stood for the mother-tongue medium for the primary stage!

18. All these remarks are mere wishful thinking or arguing, no way helpful to their authors, nor doing justice to the Father of the Nation. If at all we care to know about his views, we should only study what he really wrote and come therefrom to our own conclusions, for or against them. From this point of view I propose to add below, for ready reference, a few selected pieces that in his unique style and concise manner, give us his views not only on the medium but also on the more vital question of the dynamics of replacement of English in our official and non-official life. It is noteworthy that these pieces came forth from his genius at the time when we began to have the touch of political freedom in our land, partially in 1938 and wholly in 1947:

ADDENDUM

[GANDHIJI'S VIEWS]

I

It is already decided

The medium of instruction should be altered at once and at any cost, the provincial languages being given their rightful place. I would prefer temporary chaos in higher education to the criminal waste that is daily accumulating.

In order to enhance the status and the market-value of the provincial languages, I would have the language of the law courts to be the language of the province where the court is situated. The proceedings of the provincial legislatures must be in the language,

or even the languages of the province where a province has more than one language within its borders. I suggest to the legislators that they could, by enough application, inside of a month, understand the languages of their provinces. There is nothing to prevent a Tamilian from easily learning the simple grammar and a few hundreds words of Telugu, Malayalam, and Kanarese all allied to Tamil. At the Centre Hindustani must rule supreme.

In my opinion this is not a question to be decided by academicians. They cannot decide through what language the boys and girls of a place are to be educated. That question is already decided for them in every free country. Nor can they decide the subjects to be taught. That depends upon the wants of the country to which they belong. Theirs is a privilege of enforcing the nation's will in the best manner possible. When this country becomes really free, the question of medium will be settled only one way. The academicians will frame the syllabus and prepare text-books accordingly. And the products of the education of a free India will answer the requirements of the country as today they answer those of the foreign ruler. So long as we the educated classes play with this question, I very much fear we shall not produce the free and healthy India of our dreams. We have to grow by strenuous effort out of our bondage, whether it is educational, economical, social or political. The effort itself is three-fourths of the battle.

(Harijan, 9-7-'38).

II

Need for Quick Action

If the medium is changed at once and not gradually, in an incredibly short time we shall find text-books and teachers coming into being to supply the want. And if we mean business, in a year's time we shall find that we need never have been party to the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy in trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium. The condition of success is undoubtedly that provincial languages are introduced at once in Government offices and courts, if the Provincial Governments have the power or the influence over the courts. If we believe in the necessity of the reform, we can achieve it in no time.

(Harijan, 30-7-'38).

Gandhiji deprecated the suggestion that it would need a lot of research and preparation to enable them to impart technical education through the medium of the mother-tongue. Those who argued like that, were unaware of the rich treasure of expressions and idioms that were buried in the dialects of our villages. In Gandhiji's opinion there was no need to go to Sanskrit or Persian in search of new terms. He had been in Champaran and he found that the village folk there could fully express themselves with ease and without the help of a single foreign expression or idioms. As an illustration of their resourcefulness, he mentioned the word *hava-gadi** which

*Literally air-carriage, meaning a carriage which travels at the speed of air or with the power of air (or gas).

they had coined to denote a motor car. He challenged university scholars to coin a more poetic expression than that for a motor car. (Harijan, 18-8-'46).

III

Take Care

Unless the Governments and their Secretariats take care, the English language is likely to usurp the place of Hindustani. This must do infinite harm to the millions of India who would never be able to understand English. 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 the 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 Centre 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).