Language Pluralism: Breather from Anglophilia

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Languages are seemingly innocuous, but. As societies become highly competitive, cultural identities come under a globalization spanner and are consistently coerced into a defensive position. The foremost tool that social engineers of globalization make spurious use of is language. The easiest infiltration into a culture is through a steady onslaught of language defined heavily by an economic slant. The contemporary global scenario is a tactile shift whose weave and warp are *a* people who willingly create shrouds to their culture, at times unwittingly. It is rather intriguing and intimidating that the world is increasingly becoming a pawn to English. Speaking metaphorically, the world at large mainlines this language as prized acquisition over and above its utilitarian value. Superimposition of foreign languages weakens the mother tongue wherein the local is severely disadvantaged. To gain respectability and stay economically viable, the locals start adopting the foreign language and move away from their own tongue. Since languages are not just words but contextual community and cultural facilitators, adoption and adaptation go hand in hand. As people move towards a foreign language, they internalise its cultural nuances. This translates into a mechanism of empire building, a linguistic imperialism that is borderless and very difficult to roll back if not checked. "Linguistic imperialism" is "dominance asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages"[1] through which a subtle hegemonic control is established by the English language– hegemonic because it wears down the resistance of the masses who gradually consent to and willingly participate in the decimation of their local language and cultural practices as the English language is largely understood to be a passport to better life – a lifestyle represented by the English speaking nations like America and England. A class is born whose epidermis is not white but who aspire to becoming White – as Frantz Fanon discusses in *Black Skin, White Masks*. If not intervened into, this state of affairs creates inordinate imbalances of sorts.

Cultures exist and flourish through languages that are "the primary symbol, or register, or index of identity."[2] The socially marginalized and the economically weak may find themselves increasingly challenged as their user base shifts to languages that have greater market value. As voices are lost, community specific problems go unaddressed. Landlessness, homelessness and joblessness increase, and people resort to criminal activities to survive. Levels of corruption in the country rise. 10% of the world's endangered languages are in India

which is ranked 85 in the World Corruption Index. Though not clearly established, people from endangered language communities who find getting employment an uphill task are generally under the government scanner. Three million people of the Himalayas use Bhoti as their language. However, the Bhoti language is not recognized as a scheduled language "which is a fountain-head of alienation, violence, social discord, intellectual dependency and cultural degradation." (Dawa, Stanzin. 'Why Bhoti language should be included in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.'[3] Not giving teeth to a language that loses ground to a mainstream language that has manifest government support is not only lingocide but genocide. Without a voice, a race dies only to find a name in the archives. In *Cultural Genocide and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, Edward C. Luck examines and defines the various parameters of attacks on cultural heritage, and proposes a sixth parameter – cultural genocide. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1976) recognized the importance of language, particularly of ethnic minorities. The urgent need of the hour is to ensure that globalization does not create retrograde spaces for those who do not speak English or are not in sync with the digital revolution. English language is dynamic and accommodating since it progressively includes and adopts words from other languages. However, it cannot reproduce the local ethos and sensibility. Loss of languages is tantamount to loss of self-worth, dislocation and gradual erosion of the home habitat. We need to debate over a sustainable solution where languages are given support that can be assessed and scrutinized. Accordingly, visible and quantifiable benchmarks need to be generated.

A country's government is bound by people's mandate to support and run programmes that help communities grow and remain integrated into the nation. Telecast in the concerned language through audio-visual media, recordings and transmission of its oral and scripted manuscripts, and using it as a medium of instruction in schools can go a long way in promoting social justice. In 2016, ALM (Adivasi Lives Matter), a social media based platform for Adivasis was launched. It has given a voice and a common platform to the Adivasi community which has generally been under represented.[4] "According to research at Swathmore and the Living Tongue Institute for Endangered Languages, roughly 80% of the world's entire population… speaks just one of the 83 'major' world languages." The "largest group of languages – approximately 3586 – are spoken by a measly 0.2%" people globally.[5] In 2020, 66% content of the top 250 *YouTube* channels was in English, while 25.9% of internet users surf using English.[6] Lame government policies borrow from hegemonic languages and neglect generating a parallel resource pool in the local/ regional languages. As a result, any person who desires to upward mobility or acquire the latest technical know-how has to perforce learn the dominant source language. Nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in South Asia where we are witnessing an increasing phenomenon of second generation native speakers acutely uncomfortable with their accents and with speaking their mother tongue; the third and the fourth generation speakers either have a passing passive understanding of their mother tongue or are completely ignorant of it. One of the glaring examples are Biharis who are ridiculed for speaking their regional languages and so increasingly distance themselves from their states of origin. It cannot be overstressed that it is the locals who understand their local problems – social, cultural and environmental – and they are the ones who can spearhead the best solutions. During the Tsunami in 2004, not a single Jarwa died in the Andoman and Nicobar islands thanks to their community based knowledge.[7] This makes it all the more desirable to retain the local language and to discover all possible means to make it

attractive and respectable. There are some regional language groups that are proud of their language and culture. Still, the insiders say that to get fat pay packages, English language learning is mandated.

As per National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS) 2009, newspaper readership in English is just 1.2% in rural India and 4.1% in urban India, i.e. 2.5% in the aggregate. Strangely, in the 2001 census, English was ranked as the second language of the Union despite being declared as a native language by merely 2.26 lakh people.[8] As a nation, we Indians blame colonial hangover for our privileging English. But is that really true? The onus for demoting the regional languages on the language index lies with the education policy framers and the government which increasingly projects India as a resource market that the West can tap. In a recent newspaper interview in TOI (Times of India), an American engineer, Ross Bassett makes a telling statement: "The American-oriented IIT system has given India… people who are able to successfully work in an American environment… A form of engineering education that was not so American-oriented could have led to different results."[9] English language comes with an elitist baggage that instils a condescending attitude towards non-English speakers. Today better working conditions are misunderstood as environments created for and by an English speaking community with enormous monetary clout. These work cultures are largely out of sync with immediate local ground realities. Academics at school level too subtly inculcates in students an unnatural aspiration to learn English. In many English medium schools students are penalized for speaking their mother tongue which creates a negative language hierarchy and actively contributes to "linguicism" i.e. "ideologies and structures that… legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power… on the basis of language."[10] English in mainstream academics is justified on account of India's lingual pluralism where it acts as a link language. However, with the passage of time it has ossified into an immutable presence which if not supplanted from its aggressively panoptic position will have catastrophic consequences. Konkani, the local language of Goa, can show us the way to revitalizing local languages. It continues to thrive despite having once been banned by the Portuguese in 1684. Konkani has a very dynamic diaspora: the language is written in 5 scripts including the Roman and the Kannad. Languages where speakers do not use the script anymore can accordingly be encouraged to adopt an alternative script.

What makes English so very coveted will unravel the proverbial guerdon knot. The foremost reason why local languages lag is the inadequacy of technical know-how in these languages. In India, there is a conspicuous absence of a top-to-down filtering because we lack trained man force to tackle the demanding task of translating the knowledge spool into various local languages. Sadly, we do not possess an advanced computer software to auto-translate the latest medical and technical jargon into the local languages. NTM (National Translation Mission) has done commendable pioneering work towards translation. Still, much remains largely unaddressed. It is a matter of serious concern that the IITs and the medical institutes across India mandate English as one of the requisite subjects. The Institute of Chartered Accountancy gives provision for Hindi, but English is *a priori* taken to be your language if you do not mention a language. Much water has flown under the bridge and all of us need to make concerted collective effort. Language hegemony has to be resisted. Languages bring with them a cultural slant which should be incorporated but not allowed to take over. To be progressive and liberal is to be socially mobile, not linguistically regressive. Out "of 87 countries surveyed in

1992, as many as 63 countries import movies from the United States which inevitably results in a global 'ideological control' ".[11] An elitist lingual space selectively eliminates and disempowers: silencing the other. The situation needs urgently redressal. We have to create an eco-language model towards restoring justice in lingual polity. An ecology of language gives various languages the right to survive and to be treated at par with elitist and mainstream languages. The "Ecology of Language Paradigm" advocates the following:

1. The Right to Language
2. Equality in Communication
3. Multilingualism and Multiculturalism

This paradigmatic shift is difficult but not impossible.. By merely declaring languages as endangered we do them disservice because we occlude their inclusion in the mainstream socio-politics. In 2001, according to TOI, English speakers in India were around 125 million, constituting only 10% of its population.[12] A BBC article condescendingly says, "Most of the hostility to English these days comes from regional or language chauvinists who condemn it as a Trojan horse of globalisation."[13] To create a cult of exclusivity for an English speaking minority goes against the grain of social justice. Capital crimes are not merely cold blooded murders but also calculated lingual stratagems to keep the local out of the power loop. In 2013, a survey by the Bhasha Research & Publication Centre under Ganesh Devy concludes that 220 Indian languages have disappeared in the last 50 years, and that another 150 could vanish in the next half century.[14] Devy tells us that in every state about four or five languages are critically close to extinction: Mehali in Maharashtra, Sidi in Gujarat, Majhi in Sikkim (four people in one valley), Dimasa in Assam.[15] His invaluable suggestion is that the death of languages can be stalled by creating local job opportunities. Also, schools should be encouraged to adopt the Multilingual Education (MLE) model where the medium of school education for the first eight years is the mother tongue after which a second or a foreign language is introduced. Studying English in formative years translates into poor cognition skills and academic stress. One continues to be sceptic of *linguistic democracy* that champions English language as a tool of social empowerment because it does not account for the *linguistic paradox* which underscores the invert ratio of empowerment through dominant languages versus the gradual extinction of the first language. As a by note we need to try and understand how English has managed to grow so powerful, and though there are no specific answers, one reason for its phenomenal sweep is its adaptability and porousness which cues us to how we can help local languages survive. To borrow from the hegemonic discourse tools for strengthening the non-hegemonic is the need of the hour. Revitalizing local languages and acquisition of the English tongue can be mutually inclusive. We need to create an implosion of local languages[16] which will not be destructive or corrosive but will implode like a brilliant supernova to harness and consolidate indigenous cultural resonances.

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