

National Language and Ideas of Mahatma Gandhi : A Critique of Gandhian Shift from Hindi to Hindustani

Mousumi Mondal

Flat No.D, Mukherjee Apartment, Sanghata Para, Rampurhat (Birbhum) W.B.

Dr. Dinesh Narayan Verma

Director, Study and Research Centre, Uttarpalli, Rampurhat, Birbhum, (W. B.)

ABSTRACT

The importance of National Language is evident as it signifies cultural unity of a nation. It keeps intact together the people of different religions and cultures. It is also impossible to express national feeling without a common language of the people of different regions and thoughts. It paves the way for one and all come together and stand together culturally as well as nationally. All the great Indian leaders and thinkers, therefore, expressed the views about Hindi as National Language for India and Indians. As the idea emerged during colonial hegemony, Hindi came to be regarded as National Language for National Integration of India. Mahatma Gandhi also expressed his thoughts in favour of Hindi and promptly advised (1918) to declare and adopt Hindi as National Language of the country. He also favoured the growth and progress of local languages keeping in view their national importance. Gandhi said if local language unite the people locally that of national language nationally. But later on Gandhi advocated Hindustani an amalgam of Hindi and Urdu to avoid controversy in respect of language and script. During the days of Freedom Movement, Hindu-Muslim unity was a necessity to form a common national front against foreigners. When Gandhi felt it, he strongly expressed his idea in favour of Hindustani as national language and gave arguments in favour of it. In 1925 the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gave the national language the name of Hindustani—Hindi plus Urdu was recognized as the national language. This proposed study presents an analysis of contemporary relevance of ideas of Gandhi about Hindi and his advocacy for Hindustani as National Language of India in Modern Times.

Keywords: Nationality, Integration, Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani

Introduction

Admittedly a national language is a great necessity for national and cultural integration of a nation. It is generally said that a nation is dumb without national language. It reveals the significance of national language. It connects the people together irrespective of their caste and religion. So on a number of occasions Gandhi advocated Hindi as a national language and pointed out that Hindi is spoken by most of Indians. He said it is easy to learn and speak Hindi and deserves to be national language of India. But with the spread of National Struggle, Gandhi felt the necessity of Hindu-Muslim unity to fight against British Colonialism and strongly advocated Hindustani, an amalgamation of Hindu and Urdu for the purpose of

National Struggle against British. In sphere of National language, shift in Gandhi's ideas from Hindi to Hindustani was historical as it was urgently needed under contemporary national politics and also for Hindu-Muslim unity.

Methodology:

This paper is mainly based on primary sources i.e. the ideas and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi expressed by him on different National Occasions, Conferences, Meetings, in his books and letters etc. The interpretation of noted scholars published in books and journals is discussed and analysed available in archives and libraries in India. The views and thinking of Mahatma Gandhi on Hindi and Hindustani a blend

of Hindi and Urdu as a national language are observed, cited and analysed in the discussion.

Literature Review:

There is no dearth of books and articles published in Newspapers on Gandhi and his ideas and thoughts. But the ideas of Gandhi about Hindi and Hindustani are not properly discussed and naturally its importance is overlooked. In his most of letters and addresses presiding various conferences, meetings etc. Gandhi avowedly spoke on significance of national language and expressed his ideas about it. But Gandhi's ideas about national language are not properly discussed and assessed by Dharendra Mohan Datta(1953), Krishna Kriplani(1968), Sriman Narayan (1969), E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1976), Charles F. Andrews(2005) Rajmohan Gandhi(2006), J.R. Kokandakar(2008) Dada Dharmadhikari (2010) and others. It is to be noted that Gandhi broadly spoke on national language and its importance, and in the study his ideas are traced, summarized, discussed and assessed.

Historical Perspective

Most of the nations across the world have a national language and have also felt its national significance. During colonial regime in India, national leaders, freedom fighters and nationalist Indians have all realized the significance of a national language. They expressed their views about a national language and favoured Hindi as a national language. During national movement, Gandhi advised Indians to adopt Hindi as a national language and told them its urgent necessity for national integration. Later on in view of Hindu - Muslim unity needed to strengthen then going on national struggle against British colonialism in India, Gandhi advocated Hindustani a combination of Hindi and Urdu and gave arguments in its favour.

Hindi as a Language of Common Man in India and its Significance

National language strengthens national unity. Its importance, therefore, is evident. It signifies cultural unity of a nation. It keeps intact together the people of different religions and cultures. It is also impossible to express national feeling without a common language

of the people of different religions and thoughts. It paves the way for one and all come together and stand together culturally as well as nationally. All the great Indian leaders and thinkers, therefore, rightly expressed their views about Hindi as National Language for India and Indians. As the idea emerged during colonial hegemony, Hindi came to be regarded as National Language for National Integration of India. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi was very prominent in expressing his thoughts in favour of Hindi and promptly advised in 1918 on the occasion of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan to declare and adopt Hindi as National Language of the country. Therefore, Gandhian concept of National Language is significant in India where people of different religions and castes live together. In fact, a national language is needed to counter diversified and provincial feelings of local languages. This attitude is against the concept of Nation, Nationality and National Integration of one and united India. But Gandhi was not against rather favoured the growth and progress of local languages. We can not overlook the importance of local languages and can say if local language unite the people locally that of national language nationally. Gandhi rightly pointed out "A nation is dumb without national language." He said only Hindi is capable of becoming the language of the Indian masses as it is being spoken, written and understood every nook and corner of India. Many of its words have been adopted by other and local languages and spoken by most of Indians. It creates a kind of brotherhood among Indians of different sections of society and cement the bond of brotherhood on national level. Gandhi, therefore, strongly advocated Hindi as a national language and gave suggestions to promote Hindi across India. (Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Indore, 1918)

Mahatma Gandhi : Hindi and Hindustani Hindi

Mahatma Gandhi's views on Hindi as a national language reflect his personal opinion but it is not widely accepted. It is important to recall what happened in the Constituent Assembly when the language issue was put to vote. The members of the Constituent Assembly were equally divided, there was

no clear mandate to make Hindi even the official language of the Union of India and then stepped in Rajendra Prasad (Hindiwala) and he cast his tie-breaker vote to make his mother tongue(Hindi) an official language of the Union of India.

Gandhi wanted Hindi simply because it has a huge vocabulary and can be easily understood by those who speak languages like Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, Bangla, Odiya, Assamese and Punjabi, only if they make a little bit of effort. Hindi is an ever evolving language because Hindi easily accepts words from other languages and happily welcomes them into its dictionary also. In a conference, therefore, Gandhi called for Hindi to be made the national language of India, his sentiments then echoed even at far-off places in this multi-lingual country. On March 19, 1918, Mahatam Gandhi had chaired the eighth Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Indore. During the time, at a public address, he had for the first time called for Hindi to be given status of the country's national language. It was the time when the country was undergoing a struggle to free itself from the shackles of British bondage. Gandhi's poignant appeal had touched the hearts of the people and their feeling of freedom for the motherland had gained strength. During the Sammelan, Gandhi had sent five "Hindi Ambassadors" to those states in the country where the language was not much in vogue. Gandhi's youngest son Devdas Gandhi was one of the ambassadors. In fact this was a part of unique and historic campaign to promote the language, then 'Hindi ambassadors' were first sent to the erstwhile Madras state. In the said Sammelan Gandhi further said, "Like the way Britishers speak in English and use the same in practice, in the same way, I pray to all of you to provide Hindi the dignity of a national language. By making it as a national language we should fulfill our duty." He pointed out that "Hindi is that language which both Hindu and Muslim speak and is written in Nagri and Persian script. This Hindi is not completely Sanskritised, nor is it loaded with Persian vocabulary." He strongly advocated the use of Hindi not only in speaking, but also in the functioning of courts in India. Gandhi concluded, "My humble, but a firm opinion is that

unless we do not provide Hindi the national language status and other regional languages their adequate importance, till then all talks of a 'swarajya' are meaningless" and noted that "So long as public business is not conducted in Hindi, the country cannot make progress. So long as the Congress does not use Hindi for all its work, swaraj is not possible." In provincial matters Gandhi preferred provincial languages but stressed that national questions ought to be deliberated in the national language only. Gandhi knew that English can never be our national language and spoke, "I do not object to your learning English for the sake of acquiring knowledge or for the sake of earning your livelihood but I object to your giving so much importance to English and giving a low place to your national language, Hindi. Have love for your own language." Gandhi wrote, "Although all people theoretically admit that Hindi alone can be the national language, yet the requisite love for the Hindi language is not apparent among young men of the provinces where the mother tongue is Hindi. Whatever literature is being published in Hindi is mostly translation. If, however, some original piece does come out it is found to be insignificant. It might be argued that Rabindranath is not born everyday and Tulsidas is one among millions. Nevertheless, all of us can at least create a climate for the advent of poets like Tulsidas and Rabindranath."

Hindustani

According to Gandhi Hindi is an indisputable language. The largest number of people know and understand it. The others can also easily pick it up. It is spoken and understood by both Hindus and Muslims of India. But the Congress, after its famous resolution passed at the Kanpur session in 1925, stressed and called it Hindustani, a blend of Hindi and Urdu. It is significant to note that Gandhi had so far been advocating Hindi as national language but later on Gandhi started advocating Hindustani. Gandhi in fact, wanted to avoid all kinds of controversy in respect of language and script. During the days of Freedom Struggle, Hindu-Muslim unity was a necessity to form a common national front against foreigners. When Gandhi felt it, he strongly expressed

his idea in favour of Hindustani as national language and gave arguments in favour of it. In 1925 the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gave the national language the name of Hindustani. Hindi plus Urdu was recognized as national language. Gandhi said, "Hindustani is the natural national language, for it is already understood by 21 crore Indians. The remainder of the population can also easily understand it. If India is a nation, it must have a national language. English will appropriately remain the international language with the Roman script. But the latter can never be the script of the national language."

Gandhi pointed out, "Hindi and Urdu have always been inseparable to me. I have also quite freely used the word Hindustani. I am saying the same thing today that I did in the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Session at Indore in 1918. Hindustani is not Urdu but a happy amalgam of Hindi and Urdu which people of Northern India may easily understand and which may be written either in the Nagri or Urdu script. That alone is the perfect national language; all others are imperfect. For the present those who desire to learn the national language fully and not partially must learn both the scripts and know both the forms. It is a duty demand of us by our love for the nation. Those who learn it will gain, those who do not will lose." Gandhi clarified, "it is our duty to learn both the scripts. Then alone can be honestly serve the country in a humble way. According to me one who does not have a liking for the Urdu script has no liking for swaraj also. The masses do not understand pure Hindi or pure Urdu, so Hindustani should be evolved in such a way that even the illiterate masses can understand it."

Critique of Gandhian Ideas

Thus change in the ideas of Gandhi about national language from Hindi to Hindustani was in fact historical as it was according to the political situation of contemporary British India. Gandhi, therefore, wrote, "I have no doubt in my mind that Hindustani, a correct mixture of Hindi and Urdu, is the national language." So Gandhi endeavoured to make Hindustani the national language of India because Gandhi felt that Hindustani was the language

that the common people could easily understand, It was popular among a large section of the people. Moreover, it was composite language enriched by the interaction of diverse culture. Over the years words and terms from many different sources had been incorporated into this language making it easily understood by people from various regions. It would be the ideal language of communication between diverse communities. it would help to unify Hindus and Muslims and the people from the north and south. From the end of the 19th century onwards language became associated with the politics of religious identities. Hindustani also began to change but Mahatma Gandhi retained his faith in the composite character of Hindustani. Thus we find a big change in attitude of Mahatma Gandhi about Hindi and since then (1925) Gandhi and Congress strongly advocated Hindustani to be the national language of the country, the only possible common medium. (Harijan, 1937) Gandhi wrote, "I insist so much on language because it is a powerful means of achieving national unity, and the more firmly it is established, the broader based will be our unity" (Harijan 1937). He proclaimed that "if living Hindustani is ever to be born, it will only when Hindi and Urdu voluntarily come together and merge in each other to form one whole." (Harijansevak, 9 August, 1942). But with the rise of communal politics of Muslim League (Sharma 1951:555-558, 562-563) and stubbornness of Muhammad Ali Jinnah for separate nation (Singh 2008:5-15, 33-51) for Muslims of India (Sen 2017:380-382, 419-420, 433-434; Banerjee-Dube 2015:307-314, 423-430; Chand 1972:424), Gandhi's ideas of Hindu-Muslim unity and Hindustani as a national language could not be materialized. Seth Govind Das (1896-1974) an activist and former M.P. from Jabalpur reported the dislike of "Hindustani" and its meaning by the citizens of India because blend of many Arabic and Persian words in it. Sri Das made it clear that acceptance of Hindustani meant that the country was already divided into different communities. It was an attempt to satisfy a particular sect causing communal separatism. So Sri Das opposed the imposition of Hindustani and suggested to replace it with the word

“Bharati”. and pointed out that Hindi was being supported not on communal ground instead of its basic qualities. (Hindustan 27 February,2024:8)

Conclusion:

However, in spite of partition of India and making of Pakistan, the historical importance of Gandhi's ideas of Hindustani as national language can not be overlooked as it was highly required in contemporary political situation in India. Then it strengthened National Struggle for freedom as it provided Indians an emotional base to be unitedly struggle for freedom. It is also to be noted that since independence Hindi as a national language has spread far and wide in India. According to Census 2011, there are total 528,347,193 Hindi speaking people in India, who declared it as their mother tongue, it is 43.63 per cent of total population of the Country. The next highest is Bengali, mother tongue for 9.7 crores (8 percent) — less than one-fifth of Hindi's count. In terms of the number of people who know Hindi, the count crosses more than half the country. Nearly 13.9 crore (over 11%) reported Hindi as their second language, which makes it either the mother tongue or second language for nearly 55 per cent of the population. It appears that Hindi has gained the status of most favoured language of Indians across India.

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