

LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

The first draft of the National Education Policy gathered controversy. This is no disqualification of course, as we should expect some disagreement on how to structure education in so large and diverse a country. Anyhow, the original draft had proposed that schoolchildren learn three languages, namely their mother tongue, English and Hindi when Hindi is not their mother tongue and Hindi, English and a 'modern Indian language' in case their mother tongue is Hindi. This met with opposition from south India's politicians who see in mandatory Hindi a discrimination vis-à-vis the southern States. They are entirely right to protest.

There is no credible basis on which to insist that south Indians learn to speak Hindi while north Indians are exempted from learning a language spoken in the south. The original draft policy had stated that Hindi speakers could study any modern Indian language as their third language, and not necessarily one spoken in south India. It is not difficult to see that this is discriminatory. But to see why it is not credible either we would need to travel further.

Hindi belongs to the family of Indo-European languages. It is only one of the several spoken in India even in this group. Indians also speak languages that belong to the Dravidian family. There are also groups, patronisingly termed 'tribal', which speak languages belonging to neither family, but they are so marginalised that they have little hope of having their voice heard. The contention is thus between those privileging Hindi through its imposition and promotion by the Indian state and speakers of Dravidian languages.

How incredible is this insistence on Hindi may be seen through the light of recent scientific advances. Population genetics combined with DNA evidence points to the role of migration in constituting the Indian stock. The findings from this exercise have been gathered by Tony Joseph in his recent book *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From*. In chronological order, these migrations may be termed Out of Africa, West Asian including Dravidian, East Asian, and Aryan. 'Aryan' is the self-description of speakers of Indo-European languages.

So, we are all immigrants here, with the Aryans being the most recent. It is incredible that India should even suggest a language policy that privileges the language of the most recent migrant. Unless we believe that majoritarianism would be kosher in a democracy, that is. Had he been alive, an ancestor who had cooled his heels in Vellore Jail during the Quit India Movement is sure to have murmured, "This is not what I had meant at all."

Pulapre Balakrishnan is Professor of Ashoka University, Sonipat and Senior Fellow of IIM Kozhikode

Please enter a valid email address.

It opens the window for India to take advantage of economic opportunities in the geopolitical space

Join our online subscriber community

Experience an advertisement-free site with article recommendations tailored for you

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

To know more about Ad free news reading experience and subscription [Click Here](#)

or Please whitelist our website on your Adblocker

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© Zuccess App by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com