

Linguistic harmony and identity: Rethinking India's language dynamics

By **Acharya Prashant** - March 23, 2025



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A language is not merely a tool of communication; it carries within it a worldview, a way of life, and an entire cultural and spiritual lineage. Its sounds are the history of a people and the thread that ties them to their roots. In India we speak hundreds of languages, and each one tells a unique story with a deep sense of belonging.

While proficiency in widely spoken languages such as Hindi and English offers practical benefits, preserving and learning one's native language is crucial for maintaining cultural, philosophical, and spiritual heritage. India's National Education Policy (NEP) in the year 2020 introduced the idea of a three-language policy. The stated aim was simple: students would learn three languages throughout their school years— their mother tongue (regional language), Hindi, and English. The goal was to prepare students for a globalized world and at the same time encourage multilingualism and national unity. However, this policy has sparked heated debates, particularly in the southern states.

The opposition to the three-language policy is rooted in a mixture of historical, cultural, and practical concerns. At the heart of the controversy is the mandatory inclusion of Hindi. For southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, the thought of forcing students to learn Hindi feels like an imposition. These regions speak Dravidian languages and they've long been resistant to the idea of Hindi being foisted on them. While Hindi is widely spoken in the North, making it compulsory in the South is seen as a threat to

regional languages and cultural identity. Besides the ideological resistance, there is a practical concern: the education system is already stretched thin. Adding a mandatory third language just adds more complexity and pressure on resources that could be better used to improve other aspects of education.

The debate around Hindi as a link language highlights a deeper issue: while many in the South already understand Hindi, the North has made little effort to reciprocate. Few North Indians have had the opportunity to learn even basic Kannada, Telugu, or Tamil. The discussion must not only be about the resistance to Hindi in the South, but also about fostering a more inclusive approach to linguistic diversity in the North.

As Indians, we take pride in our heritage, yet there is sometimes hesitation in embracing our own linguistic traditions. If one suggests that a child learn an Indian regional language, a common response might be: "What practical advantage does that offer? Wouldn't Mandarin, Spanish, or Japanese be more beneficial?" While this perspective is understandable in today's globalized world, it sometimes overlooks the profound cultural and spiritual value that comes with learning an Indian language.

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When Hindi is advocated as a national or link language, it raises concerns in the South, and understandably so, as reciprocity is seen lacking. The willingness to meet halfway is not very evident, and this looks like an expectation that one side should yield. If Hindi is to be embraced across India, then the North should also take steps to acknowledge and appreciate other Indian languages. Schools in the North could introduce the other Indian languages as optional subjects, fostering a more inclusive linguistic environment. Expecting Hindi alone to serve as the bridge language overlooks the diverse linguistic fabric that already connects different regions of the country.

Just as a Telugu speaker is expected to learn Hindi as a means of national integration, why shouldn't a Hindi speaker learn a little Telugu? Even a small effort like this can help bridge linguistic gaps more naturally than a policy that appears like an imposition. This simple step alone would make Hindi more acceptable in the South. A meaningful linguistic exchange flourishes through mutual effort and respect. A relationship built on mutual respect naturally fosters harmony. A few words spoken in another's tongue can create connections, reduce misunderstandings, and build trust. This is how linguistic harmony is achieved—not through authority, but through goodwill and effort.

Translation technology will aid communication, but it cannot replace the essence of human connection and cultural understanding. Unity grows when all languages are valued, rather than when one takes precedence over others. With mutual respect, effort, and the aid of translation tools, India's linguistic diversity can be one of its greatest strengths. The many

languages of India should not be viewed as barriers but as contributors to a shared, enriched cultural and spiritual discourse. The NEP will have to address the issue that the third language in the North is almost never a contemporary Indian language. It is either Sanskrit, or more recently, an international language like French or Mandarin. While we understand the cultural importance of Sanskrit and the contemporary relevance of Mandarin, how is it that Tamil or Bengali are not even available as optional subjects in schools in the North?

Let us move towards a future where languages are not competing for survival but coexisting as pathways to wisdom, and where linguistic diversity is not seen as a challenge but an opportunity for richer literature and deeper connections.

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