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Opinion | Rethinking Linguistic Harmony and Identity through Indias Language

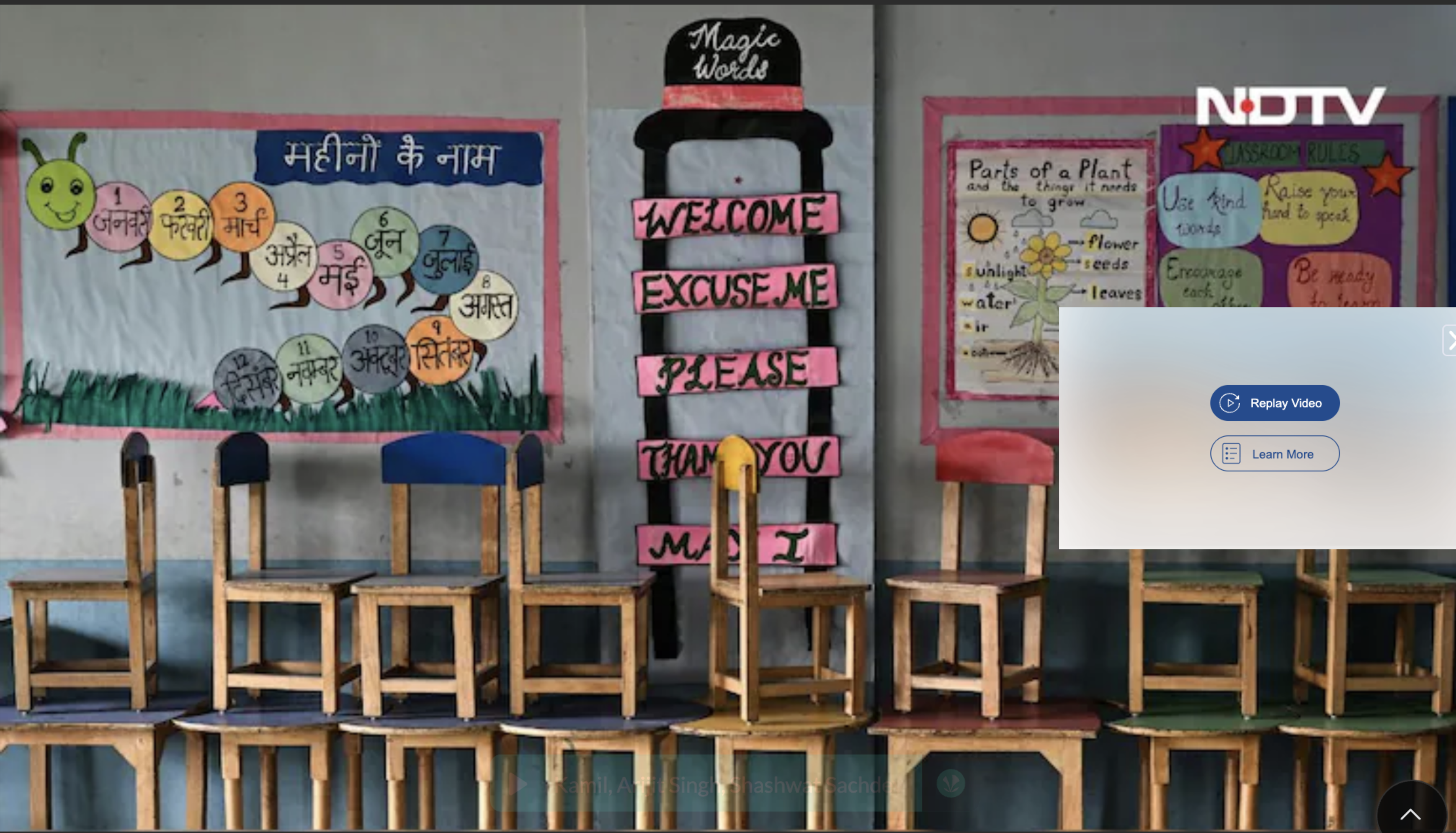


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Language is not merely a communication medium. It is tied to the history, values, and worldview of the people using it.

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In 2020, India's National Education Policy (NEP) introduced the three language policy, aiming to equip students with their native language, Hindi, and English. This method was designed to help students connect with their heritage, promote multilingualism, and prepare them for a globalised world. However, the implementation of this policy has sparked significant debate, particularly in the southern states.

The mandatory inclusion of Hindi is the main issue. States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, where Dravidian languages are spoken, view this move as an imposition. To them, making Hindi mandatory threatens their linguistic and cultural identity. While Hindi is commonly spoken in North India, enforcing it in the South is seen not only as unnecessary but also as unfair. Aside from matters of culture, practical challenges also persist. Challenges like shortage of teachers and inadequate facilities are already plaguing the current system of education. Adding a third language might tax resources at hand, which would defocus other, more pressing reforms of education. The lack of reciprocity is another crucial element that is often overlooked. Many people in the South understand and speak Hindi, but the same cannot be said for people in the North regarding southern languages like Kannada, Tamil, or Telugu. If the idea of national unity includes embracing a common language, then that effort must come from both sides. Just as a Telugu speaker is expected to learn Hindi, a Hindi speaker should also try to learn at least some Telugu. The concept of a common language would be less of a unilateral imposition and more of a collective aspiration because of this joint effort. The issue, therefore, is not learning Hindi per se, but with the perceived linguistic hegemony.

Language is closely tied to one's identity. It is unreasonable to expect a community to forsake its linguistic heritage without any reciprocal effect. If we truly are interested in promoting national integration through language, then the schools in the North should offer southern languages as electives. This would create a culture of respect and inclusiveness. It is natural for individuals to wonder if it is necessary to learn an Indian language when it seems more useful to learn a universal language like Mandarin or Spanish. While there are benefits to learning a foreign language in a globalised world, one must not overlook the profound cultural and spiritual value that comes from learning an Indian language.



The notion that the South resists Hindi is often exaggerated; in many regions, the language is

already in widespread use. But the broader concern remains: the North's unequal effort to interact with the linguistic legacy of the South. Introducing Tamil, Bengali, or Malayalam as language options in Northern schools would be a step towards true linguistic unity.

Enforcing a single language will not lead to linguistic harmony. It comes from mutual respect and voluntary efforts to understand each other. Speaking a few words in someone else's language can help build trust and understanding.

India's many languages are not barriers; rather, they are bridges. They enrich our spiritual and cultural lives. The NEP must address the issue that in the North, the third language is often Sanskrit or a foreign language. These choices have their value, but it is concerning that modern Indian languages are not included in the curriculum.

The future lies in approaching all languages with equal respect. We must rise above treating language diversity as a drawback. Instead, we should treat it as a challenge that calls for a deeper understanding and richer intercultural interaction. Unity of India will not be born out of uniformity, but out of our ability to celebrate and learn from our diversity.

(Acharya Prashant, a modern Vedanta exegete and philosopher, is a national bestselling author, columnist, and founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation. An IIT-IIM alumnus, he is a recipient of the OCND Award from the IIT Delhi Alumni Association for outstanding contribution to national development.)

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