

The 8<sup>th</sup> Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Lecture  
On  
**DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR AND  
LINGUISTIC STATES  
IN INDIA**

*Delivered by*  
**Prof. T.K. Oommen**



**14 MARCH 2007**

**Dr. Ambedkar Chair  
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS  
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## PREFACE

Being a true nationalist, Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar very significantly contributed towards making India-both its society and State, to emerge as a modern rational, scientific and democratic nation in the world, though he was grossly misunderstood by the dominant political leadership and its supporters of his time. Such crafted misunderstanding about him is now being irased by the growing army of his supporters and followers across the castes and religious communities throughout the length and breadth of the country. Even social scientists, who often pretend to be objective in their social analysis, have started realising the seminal importance of his thoughts and philosophy in their study of the contemporary social phenomena.

Since a social phenomenon is not static but dynamic, rather, ever-changing, so is the case with a thought or philosophy related to it as it is phenomenon-centric or it is based on time and space, though in many cases it has its ever-lasting significance. Most parts of Ambedkar's thoughts and philosophy have seminal importance in understanding and analysing social issues pertaining to the present day Indian society and State. One such issue or problem India faced soon after achieving her political independence in 1947 was reorganisation of the then existed provinces or states and creation of a few more states. Ambedkar had also played his vital role in resolving this problem. He had put forth his thesis, consisting of three basic principles or criteria, for both reorganising the then existed provinces or states and creating a few more states for their proper development and better governance. These happened to be: one, a sizeable population to be adequately managed; two, a sizeable area or geographical territory to be properly governed; and three, language as a basis but the same not as an official language, which would create problem in having its required link or communication with the Centre and other provinces or states in India.

The 8<sup>th</sup> *Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture*, organised under the auspices of Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology in the University, was delivered on 14 March, 2007 by Prof. T.K. Oommen, a distinguished sociologist, on the topic *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Linguistic States in India*. Prof. Oommen has been a former Professor of Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, President of the International Sociological Association, President of the Indian Sociological Society, and has remained associated with many prestigious committees and commissions in India and abroad. Visiting and endorsing Dr. Ambedkar's thesis on reorganisation of the then existed provinces or states and creation of a few more on the basis of linguistic groups, a little more than 50 years after its formulation, Prof. Oommen has pointed out, in this lecture, a few difficulties in Ambedkar's thesis especially in the light of the experiences during all these years. The first difficulty is about Ambedkar's usage of race and nationality or linguistic community interchangeably, which Oommen finds untenable in sociological analysis. The second difficulty he indicates is about homogenisation of population within a linguistic state due to diverse castes and religious groups living in it. And the third one is about the contemporary conceptual reformulation of cultural homogenisation, as every society even in a given state or province is multicultural and multilingual. But at the same time, Prof. Oommen is also sensitive about the quantitative and qualitative variations in the present day empirical reality and that existed half a century ago. Hence, he extends his intellectual appreciation for Dr. Ambedkar's thesis and situates it in the wider spectrum of the contemporary empirical realities found in various societies in different parts of the world. In doing this, Oommen is somewhat closer to Dr. Ambedkar's method of formulation of his thesis.

Anyway, the lecture is full of sociological insights and sound analysis for which Prof. Oommen is widely known in the sociological world. The printed version of this lecture, touching upon the not much publicised thesis of Dr. Ambedkar, is for the benefits of the wider readership, which I am sure would be greatly benefited.

14 April, 2007  
Jawaharlal Nehru University,  
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**Nandu Ram**  
Dr. Ambedkar Chair Professor  
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## Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Linguistic States in India

In classical British political philosophy, there were two polar positions regarding the formation of sovereign states. J.S. Mill upheld the view that a necessary condition for free institutions to be nurtured was that the boundaries of the state should coincide with those of the nationality, that is, a territorially anchored linguistic community. In contrast, Lord Acton maintained that if nationality was taken as the mould and measure of the state, it would lead to material and moral ruin. However, following the Treaty of Westphalia, which was concluded in 1648, the norm: 'for each nation, its own state', gained considerable currency in West Europe. In most parts of the world, cultural homogenization is relentlessly pursued by nation-states, causing the marginalization of all varieties of minorities, particularly religious and linguistic minorities. This has not only created enormous tensions and conflicts within nation-states, but it has also undermined the democratic process of people's self-determination-the foundational principle of nation-states. To cope with this problem, the idea

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of a multinational state was launched in the socialist states of East Europe, although many democratic polities were reluctant to explicitly endorse the notion of multinational state. The emergence of the New World gave birth to the idea of multicultural states. But the bases of reorganizing provincial states within sovereign states did not receive the required attention. It is here that the signal contribution of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stands out.

Independent India, after some initial hesitation, decided to re-constitute her politico-administrative units on linguistic basis. This was based on the recommendations of the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC), which submitted its report in 1956. This was indeed a giant leap forward in improving the governability of India. But the secessionist and separatist movements, which trigger off from time to time in the country, point to the inadequacies of SRC recommendations. At the time of the reorganization of states in the 1950s, two broad views were articulated. One view was that the unity of India must not be imposed but must be a fundamental unity, recognizing its social pluralities and cultural diversity; the strength of Indian Union must be the strength that it derives from its constituent units, an approximation of J.S. Mill's view and an implicit endorsement of the idea of a multi-national state. The other view was that as in the past India had not been an integrated political unit, so the effort should be to create a united India and the new concept of unity could not be based on the re-affirmation or re-enunciation of old values such as religion and language, which are divisive rather than cohesive. Therefore, the unity of India should transcend community (read religion) and language and recognize the nation as one integrated unit. This view reflects an acknowledgment of Lord Action's position and endorses the homogenization project of nation-states. However, Indian political praxis does not neatly fit either of these positions. Both empirical compulsions and political expediency called for a cautious approach.

## I

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's articulations regarding formation of linguistic states in India are available mainly in his three documents. One, a statement submitted by him to the Linguistic Provinces Commission in 1948, entitled 'Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province'; two, an article published by him in *The Times of India*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1953 with the title, 'Need for Checks and Balances'; and three, his book *Thoughts on Linguistic States*, published in 1955. I am re-visiting his views after half-a-century. In the mean time, the empirical reality has changed substantially and political compulsions prompted and prevented several decisions.

Dr. Ambedkar endorsed the argument in favour of linguistic provinces because they have all the elements of a distinct nationality and they should have the freedom to realize their fullest nationhood. An important advantage of linguistic provinces is that it produces social homogeneity, a prerequisite for efficient functioning of democracy. Given the fact that he was articulating his views at a time when nation-states were fast proliferating, his observation: 'History shows that democracy cannot work in a state where the population is not homogeneous' (Ambedkar 1979:103) is not surprising. Once one endorses this view, its logical corollary—namely that India is a multinational state becomes self-evident. But he is acutely aware of the difficulties. They are: one, the structure of Government of India will have to be cast in a dual form: a central government and a number of provincial governments. Two, consequent to the above, the difficulty in maintaining cordial administrative relations between the central and provincial governments would arise. Three, the use of multiplicity of languages will create enormous problems in communication between governments. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar was apprehensive that 'Linguistic Provinces will result in creating as many nations as there are groups with pride in their race, language and literature'. 'It may lead to a break-up of India....India may end in becoming Europe--faced with the prospect of chaos and disorder' (Ambedkar 1979:102).

There are several difficulties with Dr. Ambedkar's position. One is the sense in which he invokes the notion of 'race' here and elsewhere. He seems to be using interchangeably the terms race and nationality (i.e. linguistic community), which is not admissible in sociological analysis. Second, the assumption that linguistic states are homogeneous is not exactly correct. There cannot be any homogeneity, social or cultural, within a linguistic province in India. Social homogeneity is not possible because of the caste system and cultural homogeneity because (a) all linguistic provinces, having at least one major linguistic group, will have several minority linguistic groups, and (b) the people of the same linguistic groups belong to several religious communities. The third problem is the change in the empirical situation and the consequent conceptual reformulation. In the contemporary world almost all state-societies, invariably referred to as nation-states, are multinational and/or multicultural but often a combination of both. Consequently, the credo of cultural homogenization, closely associated with the institution of nation-state, has come to be rejected (see, Oommen 1997). In fact, the very notion of nation-state is abandoned in favour of national state, which not only tolerates but nurtures and celebrates cultural diversity within it (see, Oommen 2006).

To recognize these difficulties is not to ignore the seminal importance of Dr. Ambedkar's reflections on linguistic states; he wanted to avoid at any cost the 'break-up of India's unity', to recall his own phrase. The way out, according to him, is to delink the idea of linguistic province from the idea of official language because for maintaining the cultural unity of a linguistic province, an official language is not a pre-requisite. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar visualized a politically unitary but a culturally federal state of India. As he sees it, and rightly, one can learn a language other than one's mother tongue and yet retain one's cultural identity. He is fiercely opposed to creating linguistic provinces in which their languages become official. To quote: 'There is danger in creating linguistic provinces. Danger lies in creating linguistic provinces with the language of each province as its official language' (Ambedkar 1979: 205).



If languages of the provinces are given official status, they will strive 'to become independent nations', leading to the 'ruination of United India'. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar exhorted: 'Under no circumstances, we must allow the linguistic provinces to make their provincial languages their official languages' (Ambedkar 1979:105). Needless to say, Dr. Ambedkar's somewhat exaggerated fears was no indication of his not recognizing the importance of provincial languages, but his intense concern to avoid even the remote possibility of balkanization of India. However, to support the formation of linguistic states but deny official status to the language of the provinces seemed an odd proposition. But this predilection was shared by many tall leaders of India.

It is useful to remind ourselves here that the idea of linguistic states was accepted by the Indian National Congress as early as 1920. And the British did create a few linguistic states--Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, for example--but did not take the process to its logical end. Had it been done, the salience of religion would have diminished and the demand for religion-based 'nations' would not have become so acute, leading to the partition of the subcontinent. Even after India became independent, the ambivalence about the formation of linguistic states persisted. The Dhar Committee, appointed by the President of the Constituent Assembly, did not recommend the formation of linguistic states. Similarly, the three-men committee, consisting of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and Pattabhi Seetharamayya, too did not favour the formation of linguistic states. The demand for the formation of the Telugu state of Andhra Pradesh was finally conceded against the wishes of the then political establishment only because of the politically volatile situation created by the martyrdom of Potti Sriramulu. And the candid comment of Dr. Ambedkar, which he made on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1953, is worth recalling. 'Strange as it may appear, it became clear to me that the High Command (read Pandit Nehru) was totally opposed to the creation of linguistic provinces' (Ambedkar 1979:132). It is against this background that one should situate the splendid courage of Dr. Ambedkar to support the formation

of linguistic states, although he was against the provincial languages to be made official languages.

Dr. Ambedkar prescribed three principles to be followed in the formation of linguistic states. One, territorial, demographic and financial viability because for a state to be sustained, it needs an optimum size for its territory, population and resources. This is certainly a sound principle. Two, the social demography of states in terms of religious and caste composition should be appropriate. Otherwise, these states in reality will be Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh or Jat, Reddy, Maratha, and not linguistic states. However, one cannot in anyway change the social composition of a linguistic state. Three, the criterion of 'one-language, one-state' should not be followed because it creates a specific (read national) consciousness, which will not be a good omen for the future of India (Ambedkar 1979: 133-341). While the first of these principles or criteria is viable and can be put into practice, the second is a given and cannot be altered, and the third is a feared future possibility.

It is here that his eloquent criticism of the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) needs to be assigned great importance. Dr Ambedkar rightly castigates the SRC for following the pernicious principle of 'one-language, one-state'. As is well known, the size of speech communities varies vastly. Therefore, if the required economic and political balance is to be kept within a federal polity, the constituting units should have, more or less, the same size territorially and demographically and should have equitable resources. Ignoring this principle, the SRC recommended the formation of 16 states of varying sizes; the biggest of the state then had a population of 60 million and the smallest 10 million. This disparity between the states is a terrible error the SRC had committed and will cost India a great deal. Dr. Ambedkar lamented: 'The Union of India is far far away, from the United States of India. But this consolidation of the North and balkanization of the South is not the way to reach it' (Ambedkar 1979:143). The SRC recommended only three Hindi speaking states--Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh--all of which

were enormous in size in contrast to southern states, which were tiny. In a federal set up if any or a set of states are inordinately larger than the rest of the states, the power play is bound to be in favour of the bigger ones.

Dr. Ambedkar favoured the one state, one language formula, if the linguistic community is small; but if it is large, it should be broken into two or more states. Linguistically homogenous states are necessary and desirable for two reasons: 'To make easy the way to democracy and to remove racial and cultural tensions' (Ambedkar 1979:145). And 'Democracy cannot work without friction unless there is a fellow-feeling among those who constitute the state' (Ambedkar 1979:144). But today, most sovereign states are multinational and/or multicultural, and two reasons seem to have worked in favour of it. One is decoupling of citizenship and nationality. The socialist states were the first to do this explicitly. Two, the European dictum for 'each nation its own state' does not seem to be operative and there are many nations/nationalities, which would renounce sovereign states and happily co-exist with other nations, each having its own provincial state within a federal state and the Indian case is an exemplary of this (see, Oommen 2006).

Dr. Ambedkar did not conceive the possibility of state-renouncing nations because, 'The road between an independent nationality and an independent state is very narrow' (Ambedkar 1979:145). The way to avert this danger is '...to provide in the Constitution that regional language shall not be the official language of the state. The official language shall be Hindi and until India becomes fit for this purpose English....Since Indians wish to unite and develop a common culture it is the bounden duty of all Indians to own up Hindi as their language.' And he went to the extent of asserting: 'Any Indian who does not accept this proposal (i.e. Hindi as the sole official language) as part and parcel of a linguistic state has no right to be an Indian' (Ambedkar 1979:145).

I am afraid Dr. Ambedkar's assumptions are not tenable here. First, there is no evidence to suggest that Indians ever

wanted to develop a common culture. Quite the contrary, the ideas of unity in diversity and composite culture are eloquent proofs to India's commitment to celebrate cultural diversity. The possibility of Hindi being accepted as the only official language was/is very remote. As the Radhakrishnan Commission wrote:

Hindi does not enjoy in India such natural ascendancy over provincial languages as to incline the inhabitants to accept a secondary position for their own language. Hindi is the language of the minority, although large minority. Unfortunately it does not possess any advantage, literary or historical, over other modern languages (1950:317).

There was no consensus about Hindi being accepted as the link and/or official language of India even in the Congress Party. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar had access to the party enclosure and he testifies:

There was no article which proved more controversial than Article 115 which deals with the question (that is, the question of Hindi). No article produced more opposition. No article, more heat. After a prolonged discussion when the question was put, the vote was 78 against 78. The tie could not be resolved. After a long time when the question was put to the party meeting the result was 77 against 78 for Hindi. Hindi won its place as a national language by one vote (Ambedkar 1979:148).

It is against this background that one should situate Dr. Ambedkar's courage of conviction to support Hindi as the national language. Admittedly, one can see in Article 351 of the Indian Constitution the distinct Ambedkarian flavour. It reads:

It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.



The conditions for transforming Hindi into the 'national' language is linked to the assimilation by Hindi of the forms, styles and expressions used in Hindustani and other languages specified in the Eighth Schedule. But not only are there numerous languages belonging to the four different linguistic families (Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Chinese) which are spoken in India, even the Hindi spoken in the different regions within the Hindi-belt varies substantially. For instance, according to linguists Khari Boli, Western Hindi and Eastern Hindi are different speech forms and are not mutually intelligible. It is significant to note that Article 351 insists on relying primarily on Sanskrit but also on Hindustani (which is not listed in the Eighth Schedule!) for the development of Hindi. However, Persian may be as much, if not more, relevant as Sanskrit for this purpose. Admittedly, we encounter a distinction between Sanskrit, a 'native' language, and Persian, an 'alien' language.

To complicate matters, the literary languages in India (and this is true not only of Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages but also of Dravidian languages) have never really been vernaculars; there is a considerable gap between the two. The lexicons of modern Indian languages catalogue a lot of expressions, which are rarely found in ordinary speech forms, while the largely unrecorded dialectal words still remain mere objects of research for linguists. An authentic enrichment of the literary languages would involve a process of two-way borrowing: from a super structure (as from Sanskrit or Persian) and from a sub-stratum (as from dialects). While the former gets ready recognition because of its elite linkage, the latter rarely gets recognition as it is associated and identified with the folk. The Official Language Commission wrote:

The variety of Indian linguistic media is not a national skeleton to be ashamed of and to be somehow hidden away. It is a wealth of inheritance in keeping with the continental size, ancient history and distinctive tradition of assimilating and harmonizing diverse cultural and racial elements, of which this country can be justly proud.

Instead of following this sane advice, India seems to be following a policy of *culturocide*, that is, systematic annihilation of cultures. In pursuing the policy of promoting Hindi as the national language, the process of exclusivism and expansionism are at work. In the processes, these are manufacturing outsiders and insiders in the socio-cultural context, the effort being to create a cultural mainstream constituted by the Hindi-speaking populace. To be sure, the twin processes of expansionism and exclusivism are at work in the case of other dominant languages also (see, Oommen 2005).

To get back to the SRC, one may note that the imbalance between the northern and southern states was articulated by none other than Dr.K.M. Pannikar, the Chairperson of SRC in his dissenting note. C Rajagopalchari advised the government of India, through an article published in the *Times of India* of 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1955 that the Centre should govern India as a unitary state. But this would have resulted in the break-up of India, according to Dr. Ambedkar. Holding firmly on to his idea of reorganizing Indian states based on language, he advocated the break-up of huge states: U.P. into three, Bihar and M.P into two each. The fact that these large states are now divided into smaller ones although not on the same pattern as envisaged by Dr. Ambedkar, unfolds the robustness of his vision and advice. But it cannot be said that he was entirely consistent in this context. Thus, he argued for the division of Maharashtra into four states. While the division of the then Maharashtra into two linguistic states--Marathi and Gujarati speaking--was in tune with the principle of linguistic states, the division of Marathi-speaking Maharashtra into three appeared to be untenable. It may be important to note here that till this day, the popular mobilization has been only for one more state within the Marathi speaking region, namely for Vidarbha.

While the SRC latched on to the ill-advised principle- 'one language, one state', Dr. Ambedkar insisted on the maxim- 'one state, one language'. While SRC was aware of the difficulties in realizing political and fiscal federalism in following its formula, it did not boldly confront them, and

made appropriate recommendations. Dr. Ambedkar squarely recognized the crucial significance of political and fiscal federalism and made far-reaching suggestions to achieve them. But neither the SRC nor Dr. Ambedkar took culture into account seriously in forming politico-administrative units. While language is crucial dimension of culture, it does not exhaust it. In fact, the very definition of language they followed the SRC and Dr. Ambedkar seems to be ambiguous. There is no evidence to suggest that they had taken the advice of linguists and/or sociologists. Therefore, it needs to be demonstrated that the formulations by the SRC and its criticism by Dr. Ambedkar fall short of grappling with the empirical reality on the ground.

## II

There are four important bases of socio-cultural identity in India--religion, caste, tribe and language. Of these, the first two are not viable for the formation of politico-administrative units. While religious communities are invariably territorially dispersed, politico-administrative units are necessarily territorially anchored. This makes religion a singularly unsuitable basis for constituting politico-administrative units. Further, recent historical experience in the Indian sub-continent does not favour invoking religion for this purpose.

All the states and union territories in India are multi-religious. While most of them are predominantly populated by Hindus (60% or more), three are populated largely by Christians, two by Muslims and one by Sikhs. While a few are characterized by substantial religious diversity, none of the religious communities in India, except the Sikhs, have a common language. On the other hand, Punjabi is the common language of Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus and Christians. This is to say that the lack of congruity between religion and language and the territorial dispersion of religion makes it unsuitable for the formation of politico-administrative units.

India's caste system necessitated the co-existence of numerous castes, specializing in different occupations in the



same village/region, with all of them speaking the same mother tongue, although dialectal variations exist. That is, the numerous castes in a specific region share common territory and none can claim exclusive rights on a given territory. Thus, neither religion nor caste can be the basis for forming politico-administrative units. But language and tribe are invariably territorially anchored and could be the basis of forming administrative units. However, several factors complicate the situation in India in this context. First, the border areas of linguistic regions are invariably bi-lingual or even tri-lingual, which adversely affects the co-terminality between territory and language. Second, members of the same tribal community may have several mother tongues. Third, the processes of industrialization, urbanization and modernization prompt migration, which invariably creates multi-lingual habitats, particularly in urban settlements. Fourth, the misconstrued tendency to associate language and religion (some examples of this in India are: Sanskrit with Aryan Hinduism, Tamil with Dravidian Hinduism, Pali with Buddhism, Urdu with Islam, Punjabi with Sikhism and English with Christianity) reduces the salience of language as an identity marker.

In spite of the above limitations, both language and tribe have been accepted as legitimate bases for constituting states and union territories in India. However, of the six states with a predominantly tribal population only, three—Manipur, Mizoram and Sikkim—have a common mother tongue with 60 per cent of the state's population speaking it. Not only that but the states, inhabited predominantly by tribes, are smaller both in terms of territory and population as compared with states formed on the basis of language. Further, tribal states are utterly multi-lingual; three of them with eight mother tongues each, two of them with 12 each and one with 18, spoken in them. Admittedly, the linguistic principle is at a low premium in the formation of states populated by tribes. There are two states wherein language provides only a weak basis. These are Goa with only 27 per cent of the population, speaking the major language of the state, and J&K. It is important to recall here that of these eight states, the SRC had



recommended the formation of only Jammu and Kashmir. The other seven states emerged subsequently (see, Table 1 given below).

TABLE 1  
Some Features of Provincial States in India (1991)

<i>States</i>	<i>Area in Sq.Km</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>No. of Mother Tongues</i>	<i>Population Speaking the Major Language Spoken in the State (in%)</i>
Andhra Pradesh	275,068	66,508008	4	85
Arunchal Pradesh	83,743	864558	12	22
Assam	78,438	22,414322	9	60
Bihar	173,877	86,374465	4	79
Delhi	1,483	9,420644	N.A.	81
Goa	3,702	1,169793	4	27
Gujarat	196,024	41,309582	6	91
Haryana	44,212	16,463648	3	90
Himachal Pradesh	55,673	5,170877	4	89
Jammu and Kashmir	222,236	7,718700	5	52
Karnataka	191,791	44,977201	9	65
Kerala	38,863	29,098518	2	96
Madhya Pradesh	443,446	66,181170	6	84
Maharashtra	307,713	78,937187	8	72
Manipur	22,327	1,837149	12	61
Meghalaya	22,429	1,774778	8	47
Mizoram	21,081	689756	8	74
Nagaland	16,579	1,209546	18	14
Orissa	155,707	31,659736	7	82
Punjab	50,362	20,281969	2	84
Rajasthan	342,239	44,005990	4	88
Sikkim	7,096	406,457	8	61
Tamil Nadu	130,058	55,858946	5	85
Tripura	10,491	2,757205	3	69
Uttar Pradesh	294,411	239,112287	2	90
West Bengal	88,752	68,077965	5	85

Some very interesting features of the 26 states and one Union Territory (Delhi) emerge from the facts presented in Table 1. In terms of the size of the territory, the disparity is more than ten times. Three of the smallest units have less than 10,000 sq. km each and the biggest 11 states have 100,000 sq. km or more each, with 13 states falling in between with 10,000 to 99,000 sq. km. each. Understandably, the natural resources available to them too would vary vastly. The variation in population size is even more staggering; while there are seven states with 50 million or more population; three of them have a population less than one million each. There are five states with a population of 25 to 50 million each, six states with a population of 5 to 25 million each and another five states have a population of one million each. Admittedly, the human resource available to the states also varies vastly. Needless to say, Dr. Ambedkar's vision of the Union of Indian States, making the federation, having rough parity between them in terms size of territory, population and resources, lay in shambles.

While parity between the above mentioned physical features could have been achieved through a judicious division of territory and population, it is impossible with regard to cultural factors. It is very clear from Table 1 that even the untenable principle followed by the SRC namely, 'one language, one state', is far from achieved. Thus, there is not a single state in which only one mother tongue is spoken. There are 13 states in which the number of mother tongues spoken is up to 5 and in 10 of them they are between 6 and 10. In three states, 11 or more mother tongues are spoken. It is important to note here that these states are Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur with 12 mother tongues each, and Nagaland with 18 mother tongues. But these are also small states in terms of population; Nagaland and Manipur have a population of little over one million each and Arunachal Pradesh has less than one million people. Such unviable states are the result of yielding to political pressure, ignoring all norms in the formation of provincial states.

On the other hand, the flawed conceptualization of

language has led to the creation of huge states. In the cases of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the several dialects of Hindi, which are actually mother tongues, are ignored and encapsulated under one artificial linguistic entity, namely Hindi. Consequently, we have a monster state in size in Uttar Pradesh with 239 million people and even the smallest of these four states namely Rajasthan has a population of 44 million. In fact, there are only five non-Hindi states—Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and West Bengal—with a population size bigger than Rajasthan, the smallest of the Hindi states. Among these, in three there are strong demands for bifurcation—for creation of Telengana in Andhra Pradesh, Coorg in Karnataka and Vidarbha in Maharashtra. Further, even after the bifurcation of the three big states—Bihar, M.P. and UP in 2001, both the mother states and the bifurcated ones are bigger in their size than most states in India.

How about the principle of linguistic homogeneity of provincial states, which Dr. Ambedkar was very keen to establish so that democracy could function effectively? As noted above, all states are multilingual but if a state has one dominant language, which is spoken by say 95 per cent or more of its inhabitants, it could be designated as linguistically homogeneous. Viewed thus only Kerala qualifies for the appellation of linguistically homogeneous state. Viewed from the opposite angle, in four states the population speaking the major language of the state is less than 50 per cent. Of these, three are inhabited by tribes: Arunachal Pradesh (22%), Nagaland (14%), Meghalaya (47%) from Northeast. Admittedly, language, that is, mother tongue is not a viable basis of establishing provincial states for tribes, particularly in Northeast. The fourth state, with less than 50 per cent of its population speaking its major language, is Goa. But this is the resultant of a definitional monstrosity; Konkani, the major language of Goa, was not recognized as a mother tongue till 1991.

Three conclusions emerge from the analysis. First, the factors which Dr. Ambedkar prescribed for the creation of



provincial states are ignored, resulting in the present predicament of having both huge as well as tiny states eroding the balance within Indian federal polity. Second, the manner in which language is defined so as to project Hindi as the national language has played havoc with the linguistic reorganization of India. Third, it is clear that language cannot be the criterion to create viable provincial states for the tribal people, who have numerous tiny mother tongues. The present predicament is clearly the resultant of ad hoc responses to political pressures as and when they crystallize, ignoring all norms for creating politico-administrative units.

The rationale, behind promoting Hindi as the national language, emanates from the West European maxim that each nation-state should have only one official language. However, this proposition is utterly inapplicable to India, a country now inhabited by more than a billion people, that is, one-sixth of humanity, in which there are more than a dozen languages—each of which has more than 10 million or more speakers. 'One nation, one language', is certainly not a *swadeshi* (indigenous) but a *videshi* (foreign) idea. It is true that 337 million people in India spoke Hindi, as officially constructed, in 1991. And yet, Hindi speakers constituted only 38 per cent of the population. But Hindi encapsulates 50 dialects of which 18 have one million or more speakers and four—Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Chhattisgarhi and Rajasthani—have 10 million or more speakers. Of these, the first two speech communities do not have their states, but the other two do. There is no logical basis for this discrimination.

In the process of elevating Hindi as the national language, several cultural atrocities have been committed. First, Hindi is a Persian word, but today it stands mentally antagonistic to its source. Second, Hindi was *khari boli*, a speech variety, a dialect. And, Braj was a *bhasa*, a full-fledged language with a long literary history. Now, their status stands reversed. Third, if one subtracts those whose mother tongues are dialects of Hindi, only 233 million out of the 377 million remain in the Hindi speech community. This makes for only 23 per cent of India's population. Four, some of the languages included in



Hindi are not even dialects of Hindi. The classic case is that of Maithili. Both Grierson, the author of the monumental *Linguistic Survey of India* (17 Volumes 19) and S.K. Chatterji, the eminent Indian linguist, unambiguously certified that Maithili is an independent language.

Paradoxically, the worst victims of Hindi expansionism are the people of the Hindi belt. It is necessary to carve out at least five more linguistically homogeneous and efficiently governable states in the Hindi region. These are: 1. Bundelkhand, now divided between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh; 2. Brij Pradesh divided between UP and Rajasthan; 3. Bhojpur, vivisected between UP and Bihar; 4. Avadh Pradesh in UP and, 5. Maithili Pradesh in Bihar. I must hasten to add here that language need not, and perhaps cannot, be the sole criterion for the formation of provincial states. Thus, in the recently established Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand), there are two major mother tongues—Garhwali (seven districts) and Kumaoni (six districts). And yet, Uttarakhand's ecological and cultural specificity provides a unity, transcending linguistic differences. Further, some of the proposed states in the Hindi belt will remain bigger than several other Indian states. To continue with the example of Uttarakhand, it is bigger than nine states in terms of population and 11 states in terms of area. That is, the smaller states to be created in the Hindi belt will be bigger than several other Indian states. This is in accord with Dr. Ambedkar's idea of keeping the requisite balance between the constituent provincial states of the Indian Union.

At the time of the linguistic re-organisation of India in 1956, no state was formed on the basis of tribes. However, several states, which were predominantly populated by the tribes were formed in the North-East India subsequently. One can assert without the fear of being contradicted that the geopolitical advantages of these tribes, being communities which occupy the geographical space on an inter-state border with the tendency to launch secessionist movements, prompted the formation of these states. The political striking power of the tribes of this region led to the formation of some of the

smallest (both in terms of population and territory) states in India, which are not also financially viable (see Oommen 2005, especially pp.142-152 and 181-195).

It is disturbing to contrast the predicament of encysted tribes of central India with those in the North-East. Not only are no administrative units conceded to the encysted tribes, they are also mindlessly vivisected and marginalized. I shall cite three cases—Bhils, Oraons and Santals—to pursue my argument. The Bhils, whose mother tongue is Bhilodi/Bhilli, are divided between four states—Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The Oraons, that is the Kurux speech community, are vivisected between Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa. Similarly, the Santals are distributed between Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. This leads to the marginalization of these communities and the gradual disappearance of their languages. On the other hand, each segment of the tribal community is compelled to learn the dominant language of the state to which it is assigned. The constitutional promise that every child will be provided with the facility of education, through its mother tongue, till the age of 14 too is violated in this process. This is indeed also a violation of human rights. Thus, the cultural identity of the smaller tribes in the North-East, who have a geo-political bargaining power, is preserved through the formation of their own states, but the cultural specificity of the much bigger encysted tribes of central India is ignored. This cuts at the very root of equity between tribes.

Given the haphazard way in which the states have been reorganized in India, it is no surprise that demands for new administrative units are not confined to the Hindi belt but are an all-India phenomenon. These demands are not necessarily based on linguistic/cultural specificity, but also on underdevelopment and growing intra-regional disparity within linguistic states. A review of the facts, presented in Table 2, shows that most of the secessionist movements in independent India have a religious dimension in addition to linguistic and/or tribal identity. Even in the case of the Kashmir valley, wherein secessionism is predominantly motivated by a

religious identity, the linguistic factor is invoked because Urdu, an alien language to the state, was made the official language of Jammu and Kashmir. The fact that Urdu is linked with Muslims reinforces the secessionist thrust. In this process, the native languages of the state have got marginalized.

TABLE 2  
Secessionist and Separatist Demands in Independent India

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**A. Secessionist Demands**

1. Tamil Nadu demanded an independent sovereign state of a Tamil homeland, based on Tamil language and Dravidian Hinduism (1960s).
2. Sikhistan and Khalistan, based on Sikh religion and Punjabi language (1950s and 1980s).
3. Kashmir valley (Islam the main basis), either Azad Kashmir or integration with Pakistan.
4. Demand for Mizo state (predominantly Christian), based on tribal and linguistic specificity.
5. Demand for Sovereign Nagaland (predominantly Christian), based on tribal identity and consolidation of the common homeland.

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**B. Demand for Separate States and Union Territories: Already conceded**

1. Bifurcation of Bombay State into Maharashtra and Gujarat (1960)
  2. Creation of Pondicherry (1962)
  3. Creation of Nagaland (1963)
  4. Bifurcation of Punjab into Punjabi Suba, Haryana and Chandigarh (1966)
  5. Creation of Meghalaya (1971)
  6. Creation of Himachal Pradesh (1971)
  7. Creation of Tripura (1972)
  8. Creation of Manipur (1972)
  9. Incorporation of Sikkim (1975)
  10. Creation of Mizoram (1986)
  11. Creation of Arunachal Pradesh (1987)
  12. Creation of Goa (1987)
  13. Creation of Jharkhand through bifurcation of Bihar (2001)
  14. Creation of Chattisgarh through bifurcation of Madhya Pradesh (2001)
  15. Creation of Uttaranchal through bifurcation of Uttar Pradesh (2001)
  16. Creation of Bodoland with regional autonomy
  17. Creation of Gorkhaland with regional autonomy
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Some of the demands for separate states within the Indian Union too have been met, but this has not always been based on any principle. For example, the movement for the formation of a separate Jharkhand state, uniting the districts of the tribal communities distributed into four states, had been in existence for several decades but the Jharkhand state that was formed on 1 January 2001 is simply carved out of Bihar, leaving the objective of the movement unfulfilled. Demands for the consolidation of the territories of Bhils, Oraons and similar other communities, now bifurcated into different states, are not yet clearly articulated. However, statesmanship calls for anticipating problems and solving them rather than waiting indefinitely for the problems to exacerbate.

Several ongoing movements, demanding separate states, are anchored to a sense of deprivation based on regional disparity and under-development within relatively homogeneous linguistic states (see Table 3). It may be recalled here that Article 371 of the Indian Constitution provides for combating regional imbalances in some of the states. This provision can be applied to other states also. However, one should make a distinction between the genuine articulations of people's aspirations and artificially propped up agitations by institutional entrepreneurs and disgruntled politicians. Further, in conceding the demands for new states, factors such as viable size (population and territory), financial sustainability and regional-cultural specificity should also be taken into account. In this context, not only the fission of the existing units but also their fusion may be thought of.

Finally, the maxim: 'for each linguistic community, its own state' should be re-casted as there are far too many administratively unviable speech communities in India. On the other hand, the Indian state should have a layered system of administration. In fact, the Indian state is already a five-tier system consisting of the Union, the provincial state, the autonomous region, the zilla parishad and the panchayat samiti. The tendency on the part of every tiny tribe or speech community to demand a separate state does not augur well, both for financial viability and good governance. As noted



TABLE 3  
Reasons for Ongoing Demands for Separate  
State/Union Territories

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1. Vidarbha State (Maharashtra): regional disparity and under-development.
  2. Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh): common mother tongue and under-development.
  3. Bhojpur State (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar): cultural similarity and common mother tongue.
  4. Harit Pradesh (Western Uttar Pradesh): for better governance and accelerated development.
  5. Vishal Haryana: for cultural consolidation and better governance.
  6. Telengana (Andhra Pradesh started during the 1970s), now revived: regional disparity and under-development.
  7. Coorg State (Karnataka): based on shared cultural tradition, under-development and common language.
  8. The Dangs and the Bublas (Gujarat): tribal identity and accelerated development.
  9. Saurashtra (Gujarat): regional disparity and cultural specificity.
  10. Kosala State (Orissa): regional disparity and cultural specificity.
  11. Ladakh (Union Territory), (Jammu and Kashmir): regional disparity and cultural specificity, common language.
  12. Bodoland (Assam): cultural specificity and under-development.
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above, a combination of factors should co-exist for a viable state to emerge and flourish.

However, this does not mean that the smaller speech communities and tribes should be denied a level of autonomy appropriate to them. Autonomous regions, zilla parishads and panchayat samitis can, and should, meet their aspirations. But for this, administrative units and levels be made attractive through considerable de-centralisation of relevant authority. The five-tier state system should have a list, which assigns tasks and finances appropriate to all the layers. Such a system will accelerate the process of development and improve the governability of a vast and diverse country such as India. The tendency on the part of the Indian state to view citizens as its

subjects and the persisting age-old inclination on the part of the people to look at the government as *mai-baap* (master) should be replaced by a system of self-governance in which the state becomes responsive and the citizens responsible. For this, the administrative units ought to be culturally rooted, financially viable and of an appropriate size at different levels. This is the route to participatory development and good governance, which can help grapple with several contentious issues in contemporary India.

### III

The language policy of multinational states is essentially of three kind (see, Oommen 2004: 84-104):

- First, liquidation of all languages, other than the language of the dominant linguistic collectivity, leading to the assimilation of linguistic minorities into the dominant group.
- Second, disallowing the languages of the minority groups for formal purposes such as education and administration, leading to their marginalization.
- Third, legally recognizing and developing all those languages with a critical minimum number of speakers whether or not they constitute a territorial community, thereby promoting linguistic pluralism, that is, their dignified coexistence.

Although India follows the third strand listed above, its language policy created a hierarchical structure of legitimacy of languages. At the apex of this hierarchy is Hindi, which is the link, official and the national language. The intermediate layer of the hierarchy is constituted by the regional languages, the languages of those speech communities which wield political clout and those languages which are perceived to be part of India's ancient heritage. But numerous other languages, with millions of speakers, are dismissed as dialects. Examples are Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Braj Bhasa, Rajasthani, Santali, Bhili, Gondi, Kurux—to list some

prominent ones. Not only are these languages not given any official recognition, but are stigmatized. Even as the non-Hindi speech communities complain of Hindi imperialism, they too indulge in their brand of linguistic imperialism against the languages of subaltern groups. In this process, weaker groups and their languages get liquidated; their cultural identity gets imperiled. The whole ethos is that of perpetuating cultural hegemony of the dominant linguistic groups at different levels. Linguistic pluralism is the only insurance against this ongoing process of *culturocide*, that is, systematic liquidation of subaltern cultural identity.

The linguistic reorganization of Indian states in the 1950s was a leap forward in protecting the linguistic rights of the majority of its citizens. However, two linguistic categories did not benefit from this:

- First, the subaltern communities (tribes and peasants), in spite of the fact that most of them have identifiable homelands. The lacuna is being gradually attended to, although not in a systematic manner, by carving out new states from the old ones. The formation of several states in the North-East carved out of Assam, and Haryana carved out of the Punjab are earlier examples. The formation of Uttaranchal out of Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh and Jarkhand out of Bihar are recent examples. Hopefully, this process will continue wherever necessary and applicable, and the language of these new states will also be scheduled. But this exercise should be based on certain norms.
- Second, the linguistic communities, which were dispersed from their homelands consequent to migration occasioned by partition (major examples being speakers of Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi), or because have become minorities in their homelands as their co-nationals migrated (most prominently Urdu speakers).
- Third, the ongoing process of industrialization and urbanization are prompting more and more Indian



citizens to leave their linguistic-cultural homelands and live outside.

Although there are a few stateless societies even today, an overwhelming majority of human beings are organized into state-societies, often erroneously referred to as nation-states. While different bases are invoked to constitute state-societies, the most common are language, religion, race and region/territory. Of these, only two are essential—language and territory for constituting nations. Indeed, one can conceive of societies, consisting of irreligious and secular persons, atheists or agnostics. Similarly, a society may consist of one or several racial groups/physical types, that is, neither religious beliefs nor racial types constitute an integral element in the functioning of a society. In contrast, a state-society ought to have a territorial basis and a communication medium. To be sure, a state-society can be unilingual, bilingual or multilingual, but it ought to develop a link language through which a 'communicative community' is created and sustained within the state-society. Several facts and assumptions inform the proposition that language and territory are essential ingredients of a state-society and even politico-administrative units within them (Oommen 1997).

First, experience the world over clearly demonstrates that effective communication is a pre-requisite in order to bring about participatory development. Second, adequate and appropriate communication is very effective through the languages of the people, their mother tongues (see, Fals-Borda 1987:329-47). Third, administrative units, to be viable and effective, ought to be coterminous with communication units, that is, linguistic areas. Fourth, language is, generally speaking, directly linked to a specific territory and these together provide the basis for common lifestyle and communication pattern. Fifth, most languages, irrespective of their graphemical status, are capable of effective communication in the context of everyday life. Sixth, while it may not be possible, nor even desirable to establish separate administrative units for all the linguistic units; wherever it is viable and feasible (based on population size, financial viability, territorial spread), it is



desirable to establish separate administrative units (panchayats, districts, provincial states) for all the linguistic entities. Finally, the constitutional prescription of imparting universal, compulsory primary education in the mother tongue of the child can be faithfully implemented, if politico-administrative units are constituted on the basis of language. The quicker India formulates a rational language policy and implements it, the better it is for India's federal polity, economic development and, above all, its professed cultural pluralism.

Note: Dialects of Hindi are not treated as distinct mother tongues and, hence, Hindi-speaking states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) are shown as having less mother tongues. But as noted earlier, there are as many as 50 dialects for Hindi.

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