
UNIT 12 LINGUISTIC ETHNICITY IN INDIA

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read and studied this unit on linguistic ethnicity in India you should be able to:

- Outline the main aspects of history of language in India;
- Describe the reorganization of states on the basis of linguistic ethnicity;
- Discuss the DMK movement;
- Outline the Punjabi Suba Movement and other linguistic movements; and
- Describe tribal linguistic movements in India.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

It was in 1953, that the 'word' ethnicity found its accorded use, to describe the character or quality of an ethnic group. Ethnic Group in turn is derived from the Greek word *Ethnos* that refers to a category of people, who can be distinguished on the basis of their culture, religion, race, or language. Any group using one or more of these characteristics for identifying its-self need not be using these identification markers for discrimination. Individuals participating in these categories may assert these criteria for accentuating in-

group solidarity. Language remains one of the most significant medium of establishing this cohesiveness, and it is this feeling of intra group solidarity experienced by a group of people speaking the same dialect or using the same language that we define as *Linguistic Ethnicity*. In India, over the years more than 1500 mother tongues have been identified. Hindi as you are aware is identified as the National language, followed by fourteen regional languages identified by the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. All other languages are not accorded any official status. 1000 or more individuals each speak approximately 105 languages. Historically, there is little concurrence among the linguistic experts about the total number of languages spoken in India. In the Linguistic Survey of India conducted by George Grierson; 544 dialects and 179 major languages were recorded. The first linguistic census survey conducted in the nineteenth century recorded that 'language changes' every 20 miles in India'. The 1961 census recorded 1652 spoken languages, of which 1549 were indigenous of India. It was further assumed that out of 1549 indigenous languages, about 572 covered nearly 99 percent of India's entire population. The 15 languages initially recognized by the constitution, accounted for 387 spoken dialects, and it was claimed that they cover 95 percent of India's total population, India's multi lingual nature was acknowledged by the State Reorganisation Commission at the time of independence. Restructuring of states on the basis of linguistic and cultural homogeneity was an endorsement of the polyglot nature of the India democratic nation state. Eight major language groups, Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Telugu and Tamil were given independent Status by 1956. Gujarati and Marathi were given independent Status by 1966 and in 1966 Punjabi acquired specific state recognition. Along with five Hindi Speaking State by 1966 all the fifteen recognized languages except Sanskrit, Urdu and Sindhi, had a State status. Deliberately or inadvertently language became a legitimate mode of re-organisation of States in Independent India.

12.2 HISTORY OF LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Anthropologists studying India Tribals concur that most of the indigenous inhabitants are of Austro-Asiatic origin belonging of sub family Munda. Their languages were in affinity with the Mon-Khmer language, particularly Vietnamese that stretch from Chota Nagpur, eastward to Indo-China. Aryans speaking Indo-European languages arrived in 1500 BC from the northwest. By Vedic period (approx. 1500-500 BC) Sanskrit was spoken all over large parts of Northern India. Sanskrit secured as Lingua franca of India prior to Muslim invasion in its various spoken form. The oldest form of Middle Indo-Aryan language varieties known as Prakrits developed in this period. Linguists suggest those Indo-Aryan languages, Sanskrit and its Prakrits were spoken from north India to Deccan, and Dravidian languages were spoken in South India to lower reaches of Deccan plateau. Language historians have often talked about great divide between an Indo-Aryan North India and Dravidian South India (refer to map in Appendix). India's rich linguistic tradition enriched itself as a sequel to its extensive cultural heritage. Recorded evidence suggest that literary excellence in the Tamil, dates to second century B.C., Kanada to the fourth century A.D., Malayalam to tenth century A.D. and the Telugu dates from the seventh century A.D. It is interesting to note here that the written records in English and German date from the fifth century A.D. Caryapada the old Buddhist hymn were composed in Bengali/Assamese/Oriya between A.D. 1000 and 1200. Sanskrit along with other regional languages served as the language of administration till Persian in Islamic India, particularly in northern India replaced its. Even though politically marginalized, India's rich language diversity continued to thrive as an instrument of emotional and individual expression.

Box 12.01

Those aspiring for higher positions in administration equipped themselves with Persian and its later version Urdu, nationalist in conformance with their nationalistic and patriotic needs produced rich literature in regional dialects and languages. Oral tradition became the most significant tool for protecting rich cultural and linguistic heritage of each ethnic group. Orientalists admit that the literature available in native India languages is far richer than the produce of English Language, which rules the roost in the world today. English made inroads into Indian cultural fabric as a vector for modernization and political empowerment. In the post independence period, it came to be projected as the language for the powerful and rich, it also acquired natural acceptance in the early period of language riots.

12.3 LINGUISTIC ETHNICITY: RE-ORGANIZATION OF STATES

Robert D. King, an eminent linguist and expert of Asian studies, is of the opinion that the idea of nations of states corresponding of language boundaries is a recent phenomenon in geo politics and dates back to 19th century. Being a monoglot certainly has advantages as communication becomes easier, but that polyglot societies are essentially fissiparous, is not true. Assumption that isomorphic, homogeneous societies have greater political viability and sustainability has been consistently undermined by India's ability to thrive as a democratic political union. However, it has had its teething problems. Linguistic ethnicity and reorganization of states on this principle was one of them. Prior to India's independence, state boundaries were arbitrary. Except the states of Punjab, Bengal and Sind, no other State conformed to the norms of historical organicity based on ethnography, culture, language, and use, religion or any other ingredient of shared ethnicity. Take for example, Madras Presidency - it ranged from Cape. Camorin on the South Eastern decline to Jagannathpuri Temple and touched Bay of Bengal in the east and the Arabian Sea along the Malabar Coast in the West. The major languages spoken in this constituency were Oriya, Malayalam, Telgu, Tamil and Kannada. It is interesting to record here that in 1931, 6.03% of the population of Madras residency spoke a language other than Tamil. Similarly 57.2 percent people residing in Bombay Presidency spoke a language other than Marathi, namely, Gujrati, Sindhi and Kannada. The presidency of Bengal comprised of 70,000,000 people and included present day states of Bihar and Orissa, extending upto river Sutlej in the north-west. Lord Curzen decided to split the Bengal Presidency in two halves, creating a province of eastern Bengal and Assam with a approximate population of 31,000,000. Two important languages spoken in the region were Bengali and Assamese. The other province consisted of Western Bengal, Orissa and Bihar with three languages namely Bengali, Bihari, Hindi and Oriya. Historians have argued that though the reasons for this partition were apparently administrative, they actually aimed at creating a Muslim dominated eastern Bengal and a largely Hindu dominated Western Bengal. In this reorganization religious ethnicity was overplayed and linguistic constituents were underscored. Herbert Risely acclaimed Anthropologist did suggest that this would solve the question of Oriya Language over and for all". The report of the State Reorganization Commission (1955) says.

"The linguistic principle was, however, pressed into service on these occasions only as an measure of administrative convenience and to the extent it fitted into a general pattern which was determined by political exigencies. In actual effect, the partition of Bengal involved a flagrant violation of linguistic affinities. The settlement of 1912 also showed little respect for the linguistic principle, in that it drew clear distinction between the Bengal Muslims and the Bengali Hindus. Both these partitions thus ran counter to the assumption that different linguistic groups constituted distinct units of social feeling with common political and economic interest". (SRC report PP. 10-11).

12.3.1 Linguistic Ethnicity and the State

British administrators never saw linguistic ethnicity of political organization of a state. Most of the states in the Pre British period and also during British administration were by and large historical accidents. Inadvertently, reorganization of Bengal was instrumental in promoting the policy of State restructure by India National Congress on the basis of vernacular. It was in the Montagu Chemsford report 1918, that first evidence of vernacular movement in India were recorded. Despite this paradigm shift, the Government of India Act 1919 made no significant move to promote regional languages. In 1920, Mahatma Gandhi favoured formation of linguistic provinces, even though he was apprehensive that favouring formation of linguistic provinces may interfere with his plans to promote Hindustani, as a national language. However, Gandhi's tactical nod and Nehru's grudging approval led to the reorganization of Indian National Congress on linguistic provincial basis. Twenty-one provincial congress committee were created. By 1927, Congress passed a resolution asking for creating of linguistic provinces for Andhra, Utkal (Orissa), Sind and Karnatka.

Box 12.02

Ten years later (1937) Nehru accepted the idea of linguistic states. Prior to that in the report of all party conference, language was recognized as corresponding to a special variety of culture, literature, and tradition. It was also suggested that in a linguistic area these factors will, promote general progress of the province. These endorsements mark the beginning of rise of linguistic ethnicity as a social movement in the pre-independence and the early post independence history of India. It was in 1930 that the British started taking note of linguistic stirring and its political implications. Formation of the province of Orissa that had the approval of Joint Parliamentary Committee (Session 1932-33) is often hailed as the success of the first linguistic movement in India. Many historians believe that creation of Orissa was not on linguistic consideration but was created to appease Hindu sentiments, while Sind was carved not for sindhi speaking people but to appease majority Muslim sentiment.

However, congress continued to pursue its policy of linguistic province and demanded two more provinces of Andhra and Karnataka. Kerala followed suit in 1938 demanding an autonomous linguistic province for Malayalam speaking people. Second World War provided a brief interlude to growing demand for linguistic provinces. In 1945-46, once again, in its election manifesto, congress retreated its view that administrative units should be constituted as far as possible on a linguistic and cultural basis. Some British historians in their postcolonial interpretations have talked about hidden and ulterior motives in these demands. According to Robert D. King: "the drive for linguistic states or provinces lay aspirations grounded not so much in language as in caste and communal rivalries, in grappling for privilege": (1997:70).

12.3.2 Language and Modernization

India, as a nation state in its nascent phase struggled resolving the paradox of having a common language for administration, without minimizing the importance of individual languages. Hindi was designated as the official language of India by the Constitution of India in 1950. Nevertheless, English remained the working language of the officials, academics and business. In the constitution English was given a lease of fifteen years to co exist along side Hindi as the language for the union for official purposes. English is popularly accepted as a tool for modernization and global participation. This is the primary reason that even the diehard linguistic ethnocentric have accepted the popularity and prevalence of English without prejudice to the linguistic ethnicity. The Dravidian Indian especially Tamil heartland was opposed to Hindi. Indian nation states attempt to define Hindi as a icon of India nationality and patriotism resulted in rebellion. In the Southern states R.N. Srivastva argued that the Dravida Kazhagon (DK) and later the Dravida Munnetra Kazragam (DMK) were merely the extension of intensification of militant and dynamic anti-religious feelings. "Self respect movement of 1925" D.K. Naicker a DK leader promoted DK to organized a Ravan Leela on December 25, 1974 in which effigies of Ram Sita and Laxman were burnt. Anti Brahmanical feelings manifested itself in anti Hindi movement. Prior to this, in 1956 the academy of Telugu convened a language convention in Madras. This convention vehemently protested against the imposition of Hindi on the South. In 1958 again an all India Language Conference was held under the leadership of Rajagopalachari. In this conference, Frank Anthony stated: "The new Hindi today is a symbol of communalism it is a symbol of religion, it is a symbol of language Chauvanism and worst of all, it is a symbol of oppression of the minority languages". Rajagopalachari at this convention declares: " Hindi is as much a foreign language to the non-Hindi speaking people as English to the protagonists of Hindi". Spearheading this movement, DMK organized the Madras State anti-Hindi conference on January 17, 1965. This conference declared January 26, 1965 as a day of mourning. A violent agitation followed. Number of students participated in the protest movement. They later formed a Tamil Nadu students Anti Hindu Agitation Council. More than fifty thousand students of the Madras College took out a procession. These demonstrations took place all over South. Two students immolated themselves. In the prolonged agitation 70 people died. Following this, an official language Amendment Act of 1967 was promulgated. This act encourages bilingualism. States were given the choice to use Hindi or English in official matters. e.g. (a) resolutions, general order rules, notification etc. (b) administrative and other reports and (c) contracts, agreements, licenses, tender form etc. Translations of material supplied in Hindi to English were also made possible under the amendment.

Activity 1

Why does the language issue create so much passion? Talk to students and friends who have a different mother tongue and note down your findings in your notebook.

12.4 DMK MOVEMENT

The north-south divide on the language issue dates back to the days of early western scholars like Roberto di Mobili (1577-1656) Constantius Beschi (1680-1743, Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819-1891). Caldwell was originally responsible for developing the theory that Sanskrit was brought to South India by Aryan Brahman colonists. They also developed a peculiar type of Hinduism, that encouraged idol worship. Tamil was cultivated by the native inhabitants who were addressed as Sudras by the Brahmans. Inherent in this were traces of brahmanical dominance, because the original inhabitants were in fact Chieftains, Soldiers, Cultivators etc. Brahman immigrants failed to conquer these 'Tamilians'. According to the locality, should be substituted. (cf. Eugene Jrschick 1969: 276). Thus, it becomes obvious that the linguistic ethnicity in the South is rooted in caste politics.

Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, Governor of Madras in 1886, in his address to the graduates of the university of Madras said: "It was these Sanskrit speakers, not Europeans, who lumped up the Southern races as Rakshusas demons. It was they who deliberately grounded all social distinctions on varna, colour". Inferring from these details Barnett concludes, 'The ideological category "non Brahminian"' therefore, was preceded by the development of a sense of a Dravidian cultural history separate, distinct, and perhaps superior to that of the South Indian Brahmins'. It was this cultural history that led to the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) in 1916, started as a reactionary movement challenging supremacy of Brahmans in elite occupations, its political discourse remained in English and not in Tamil. From this one may interpret that post-independence linguistic movements were anti-Hindi and pro-English but not necessarily pro-Tamilian.

Box 12.03

The endorsement of Dravidian identity was central to the movement launched by the Justice party through its English language publication 'Justice'; and Tamil weekly 'Dravidian'. Initial attacks were on Varnasharma Dharma and Gandhi Ji's early endorsement of Varnasharma came under scathing criticism. Pre-ponderance of Brahmans in elite social and political institutions widened the gulf between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in the South.

Earliest reference to importance of Tamil language is found in an article published in *Dravidian* dated September 29, 1920 that expressed satisfaction in the proposal of setting a Tamil university. The decision was taken at the Trichanapoly non-Brahmin conference. The article argued; "Tamil is not properly encouraged in the present universities, and that many *foreign Aryans*, who wielded an influence in the university, brought the language to its present low condition. The article further stressed that the Tamilians will attain progress and acquire political influence only when the Tamil language is approved. (cf. Barnett: 1976, 27).

These anti-Brahmanical sentiments were further strengthened by the formation of Self-Respect League in 1924 by E. V. Ramasami. The movement was an attempt to develop viable cultural alternatives. It did radicalize social and political consciousness among non Brahmans. The importance of self-respect movement declined with the rise of pragmatic congress politics. The non brahmanical wing of the congress party became active in the 1930's and 1940's with the growing realization that congress will be the ruling party in independent India. The leading non-Brahmin Communities of *Kammas* and *Kapooos* was pro-congress. In 1936, Congress won the elections in Madras presidency, under the Government of India act 1935. C. Rajagopalacharia became the premier of Congress government. It is at this point in history that the Dravidian independence movement was born. The agitation was the result of introduction of Hindustani in certain schools as a compulsory subject. *Kudi Arsu Revolt* and *Justice* were opposing Hindi and Hindustani as northern Aryan languages since early 1920's. The language issue thus became a convenient rallying point for the non-congress political parties. The intensive agitation

followed. Political parties in opposition picketed outside 'Premier's' residence. Demonstrations were held outside certain high schools. This was followed by number of meetings and processions. The most provocative slogan used in these demonstrations was, "Down with the Brahmin Raj". A report prepared by the home department in 1939, recorded that 536 persons were arrested during this agitation. The agitation which was pronounced in 1938, dimmed comparatively in 1939. Two significant events of this period were the rise of C.N. Annadurai as a skilled agitationist and the conferment of the title of Periyar to E. V. Ramasami at the Tamil Nadu Women's Conference held in November 1939. Tamil speaking districts of Madras Presidency namely North Arcot, Salem, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Madurai and Rannad. The demand Dravida Nadu separation day was proclaimed on July 1, 1939. E. V. Ramasami articulated the connection between the need for separation and the language issue. The slogan 'Dravida Nadu for Dravidians' was earned as a response to Brahminical political dominance and penetration of Aryan ideas into Tamilian culture. The anti-Hindustani agitation was interrupted due to second world war. The Congress organized 'Quit India' movement and did not support British war efforts. On the other hand E. V. Ramasami openly came in support of the British and also met Cripps commission and persisted with his demand for a separate Dravida Nadu. He also met Jinnah and Ambedkar with his proposal. Despite vigorous efforts made by Ramasami between 1939-1944; till the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam, he received very little support from the people. Barnett's summation of this period is most emphatic.

Activity 2

Do you feel that a separate state on the basis of a separate language is justified? Talk to fellow students and friends and note down your findings.

Radicalization of the Dravidian ideology occurred mainly in the 1930s, but had its roots in activities of E. V. Ramasami, reaching as far back as the 1924 founding of Kudi Arasu. During the 1930s, despite increasing congress popularity as manifested in the 1936 electoral victory and the cleavage between radicals and moderates in the Dravidian movement, "Dravidian" political identity remained salient.

12.4.1 Birth of DMK Movement

The Dravida Kazhagam (DK) was founded at Party's salem conference in 1944. Though Ramasami was elected as the president of the Justice party in 1938, after the anti-Hindustani agitation, while he was in Jail, his ability to generate support was insignificant. When the party re-named itself as DK, Annadurai's influence on the political agenda of the party became distinct, Annadurai realized that old Justice party lacked mass base, as it was perceived to be a party of the rich. He made consistent efforts to promote populist schemes for the uplift of now-growing anti-British feelings among the common people. However, Party President Ramasami and C. Annadurai publicly disagreed on Party's political stand on the day of India's independence, the August 15, 1947 formal split occurred in DK. The DMK emerged as the new party and nearly 75,000 of DK members switched party loyalties. Though the agenda of both the parties remained similar, DMK gained immense political mileage with the publication of Aryan illusion by C. Annadurai, which was banned in 1952 for being inflammatory.

12.4.2 Role of Universal Primary Education

In July 1952, C. Rajagopalachari, Congress government's chief-Minister promoted a programme of universal primary education. According to this programme: children were suppose to spend half-day in school and the other half of the day at their traditional occupations. This was labeled as 'caste based education' by DMK and a massive agitation was launched. Also at the same time, DMK started demanding change in the name of the town *Dalmiapuram* to *Kallakudi* in Trichy district. This was demanded because Dalmia was a north-Indian cement magnate. These were the first post-independence period developments in which the dominance of the north in the Southern states was challenged. The protests were significantly violent. Hundreds of people were injured and at least nine demonstrators died.

Box 12.04

This period also recorded the rise of Kamraj faction within the Congress itself. In 1954, Kamraj on the advise of E.V. Ramasami of DK became the chief-Minister of the state. Ramasami called Kamraj "Pukka Tamizhan" (Pure Tamilian) as he came from a backward caste community, had little formal education and did not converse in fluent english like the other well-entrenched leaders. Kamraj ruled the state from 1954 to 1963. It was during this period that DMK built its mass base.

They included many Tamil scholars in their rank and file. Tamil literature and linguistics witnessed a renaissance with the publication of *Mursoli*, *Mam Nadu*, *Dravida Nadu* and *Manram* as party papers and magazines. Drama and other folk medium was used extensively to promote Tamil awareness. Poverty and alienation of Tamils was highlighted through plays like *Parasakti* which was written by Karunanidhi in 1952 and in which Shivajee Ganeshan started. The mass appeal and the mass communication media carried DMK ideology to every household in Madras. It was under these influences that the Tamil language issue assumed violent proportions in 1965.

12.4.3 The Language Issue

By now, the language issue became very complex. It no longer restricted itself to DMK's concern for Tamil language and the opposition of Tamil to Hindi, Tamil to Sanskrit, Hindi to English or Tamil to English. But in it were incorporated elements to student politics. (Barnett, 1976: 129). Regional identities assumed proportions of subnationalism. DMK pointed out that 'Hindi speaking' areas constituted only one region of the country. Dominance of a regional language and its compulsory knowledge for recruitment to government jobs created immense insecurity among the student community of the southern states. On January 26, 1969, when protest march was organised, a DMK supporter self-immolated, calling his actions a protest against the imposition of Hindi at the altar of Tamil. Between January 26th and February 12th four more DMK supporters committed suicide. These self-immolations became highly patriotic events among the students in the state. Even though DMK leader C. Annadurai condemned these politically motivated self-immolation bids, the anti-Hindi 'Martyrs' provided student leadership legitimacy for wider and open political participation. This encouraged the Tamil Nadu students Anti-Hindi Agitation council to take an independent stand with or without DMK support. For the first time Dravid cultural movement found support outside DMK. Both Kamraj of the congress and Annadurai of DMK evoked the central congress leadership to reassure the students in the state, that the assurance given by Pt. Nehru in 1963, about the associate status of English will not be revoked. During this period about 900 arrests were made in Madras city and nearly 200 people arrested in Madurai. In Madras, a ban was imposed on Public meeting till February 15th.

Schools and colleges were re-opened on February 8th. But students refrained from attending classes on a call given by Tamil Nadu student Anti-Hindi agitation. They demanded a constitutional amendment for retaining English as the language for official communication. Lawyers joined their cause on February 9th and refrained from attending courts. Violence followed. A bus was burnt in Trichy. Two post-offices attacked and the appeals made by Annadurai went unheard. From February 10 through 12, what followed was mayhem. Public buildings, Police Stations, Trains, Buses, Post-offices, factories were looted and burnt. According to official estimates 70 people died. This included three children who were killed by Police firing. Ten thousand people were arrested. Property worth ten million rupees was destroyed. The lumpen elements from the slums and streets joined the mob-violence. Two constables in Madurai were beaten to death by the police. DMK's role in these events was not hidden. Though openly they condemned the violence. The violence of 1965 ensured DMK popularity. It also opened vistas for DMK's debacle. DMK now realised that they could no longer sustain a radical agenda which was based on separatist leanings. Hence, they moderated their stance on issues of political autonomy. Also, at the same time necessity of keeping language issue alive, by protecting Tamil interests was not lost sight of; and for this; law abiding citizens like lawyers were roped in for a movement of sustained protest.

It was in the wake of these events, that Lal Bahadur Shastri, then Prime-Minister of India, in a nationwide broadcast on February 11th 1963; reaffirmed Nehru's assurance to the student community and made the following statements.

Shastri's assurances were lauded by the anti-Hindi agitationists and they withdrew their protest on February 22nd. This was also followed by numerous regret speeches stating that a peaceful demonstration was taken over by anti-social elements. However, this paved way for DMK to gain political supremacy and in 1967, DMK emerged as the ruling party in the state, it was during DMK regime that on November, 27th 1967, an amendment Bill to the official languages act of 1963, section 3 was introduced in the the Lok Sabha. This Bill stipulated that English be used for certain purposes between the central government and the state governments of non-Hindi speaking states. This Bill also enabled Hindi speaking states to dispense states. This Bill also enabled Hindi speaking states to dispense with English altogether, if they so desired. DMK though disturbed decided to support the Bill if it was passed undiluted. That is if it granted statutory sanction for continued use of the English.

12.5 PUNJABI SUBA MOVEMENT

The most significant linguistic movement in the north dates back to 1919. Central Sikh League was set up in December, 1919. This was followed by the formation of Shiromani Akali Dal in 1920. Started as an organization for the protection of religious shrine, it soon became a religio - political organization, fighting for the interests of the Sikh community. By the end of 1946, communal pattern of politics was distinctively visible. On August 18th, 1947, Punjab was divided on communal lines according to Radcliffe Award. Hindus who constituted only 30% in the united Punjab became a majority recording 70% of the total population. 15% of Sikh population of un-partition Punjab now registered 30% and became the only significant minority in post-partition Punjab. Muslims were reduced to insignificant members. Migrations from newly formed Pakistan resulted in the concentration of Hindus in the south Eastern Districts and Sikhs in the Central District. This resulted in general refugee tension acquiring a communal shade, rural urban cleavages emerged among the Sikh settled and migrant populations. Local Hindu population of region felt that the more advanced people of erstwhile Punjab exploited them.

Migrant Sikhs and majority of local Sikhs were rooted in the soil. They were peasant proprietors whose love for land is legendary. The refugee Sikhs population was the worst victim of partition. Because of easy identification, they suffered heavy losses. Large number of their sacred shrines and cultural centres were left in Punjab. The Hindu population, both refugees and original inhabitants were by and large traders. They were, with some efforts able to re-establish themselves. Their cultural roots were intact. There was a Pan Hindu Culture and they could easily mesh into it. The politics of early partition days was turbulent. The landed peasantry and urban sikhs aligned themselves with Congress. Efforts of the Akali Dal to force a political unity among Sikhs proved futile on 18th March, 1948 all the elected MLA's joined the Congress. However, Akali leadership outside the legislature continued a vocal struggle for the protection of Sikh identity. While the constitution of India was taking its shape, Akali Dal demanded constitutional safeguards, and recognition of Punjabi language in Gurmukhi Script.

Box 12.05

On 15th November, 1948 at the behest of Master Tara Singh, Twenty three Akali legislators asserted that if five statutory safeguards in their demands were not accepted, they should be allowed to form a separate province comprising of seven Districts of Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur. Punjabi Suba was given as an alternative slogan. But in April, 1949, Sikh convention declared Punjabi Suba as its sole objective. The demands for separate electorate and reservation of seats for Sikhs in the legislature were out rightly rejected by the then constituent assembly. For adoption of Punjabi language, Bhim Singh Sacchar, then Chief Minister of Punjab evolved a formula. According to this formula, the province was divided into two zones - the Hindi Zone and the Punjabi Zone.

Punjabi written in Gurmukhi Script was to become the language of the Punjab Zone, and Hindi written in Devnagri Script was to become to language of the Hindi Zone, not to retain the bilingual character of the State, it was imperative that people learnt both languages. This formula ran in trouble. The Arya Samaj Schools refused to subscribe to it. Soon enough, Sacchar lost support. Akali disenchantment with the state widened. As a follow-up of this chain of events; on 10th October, 1949, Master Tara Singh stated.

The Sikhs have a culture different from the Hindu language of the Sikhs is different their traditions and histories were different, their heroes were different, their social order was different, their there has no reason, why they should not claim the right of self determination for themselves. (Akali Patrika, 11th October, 1949).

12.5.1 A Separate Linguistic State

Master Tara Singh, by July, 1950 started demanding a separate linguistic state for people speaking Punjabi and writing in Gurumukhi Script. He also wanted internal autonomy for the province as was granted to Kashmir. Historical evidence as recorded by Harcharan Singh Bajwa, a member of the Akali Dal Working Committee from 1931 to 1960 record that demand for a linguistic state was an outcome of Dr. Ambedkar's advise. Following suggestions are attributed to Dr. Ambedkar by certain Akali leaders:

If you had cast lots with Pakistan, you would have been a minority there. In joint Punjab, you were a minority except in two Tehsils, which too were not contagious. In Eastern Punjab too, you are a minority. If you clamour for a Sikh State, it will be a cry in the wilderness. Why don't you ask for a Punjabi speaking state? Congress is committed to linguistic basis for reorganization of the states. They can defer satisfaction of this demand but they cannot oppose it for long. You can have a Sikh State in the name of "Punjabi Suba".

Bajwa says this suggestion opened the path to have a de-facto Sikh State. The movement further acquired momentum because of opposition from Hindus. This resulted in the 1951 census debacle. Majority of the Punjabi speaking Hindus reported Hindi as their mother tongue. The urban Punjabi Hindu put forward their demand for a Maha Punjab comprising of territories of Punjab, PEPSU, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and some Districts of Uttar Pradesh, in opposition to demand for "Punjabi Suba". However, Hindus in the South Eastern part of Punjab, now known as Haryana, were not receptive to the idea. They wanted their own separate state.



Anti-Hindi Demonstration in Chennai

Courtesy : Sundaram

The Akali Dal submitted an eighteen page memorandum to the state reorganization commission for the demarcation of Punjabi Suba. They also mobilized support of rural Sikhs. The Sikh religion was evoked as commandment for political participation. The state re-organisaion commission rejected demands of Akali Dal. Instead, a formula was proposed for the integration of Punjab, the PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh into one administrative unit. However, on the personal intervention of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, February, 1956, the following regional formula was proposed:

- i) Himachal Pradesh to be kept out of Punjab (contrary to the SRC's recommendation) and PEPSU to be merged with the Punjab.
- ii) The new State of the Punjab was to be demarcated from the Punjabi and Hindi speaking regions. Both Punjabi and Hindi were to be declared the regional languages of the State.
- iii) The Punjab was to remain a bilingual State and Punjabi (in Gurmukhi Script) and Hindi (in Devnagri Script) were to be the official languages of the State.
- iv) for administrative and development purposes, the two regions would have two regional committees consisting of the elected members of the Assembly (including the ministers from each region). The final decision, however, in each case was to be taken by the State Cabinet. In case of difference in the views of the Regional Committees, the Governor was to take the final decision.

12.5.2 The Nehru-Master Pact

This arrangement was followed by Nehru- Master Pact. In accordance with this pact the Akali Dal merged with the Congress, on 30th September, 1956, the Working Committee of Akali Dal declared; " Dal would concentrate on the protection and promotion of educational religious, cultural and economic interest of the Panthi". But this arrangement was not satisfactory for Urban Punjabi Hindus. They felt their power was eroded. The Punjabi-Hindus resisted teaching of Punjabi in Gurmukhi Script to Punjabi Hindus. Though 'Save Hindi Agitation' died by December, 1957, Pratap Singh Kairon then Chief Minister of Punjab realised its consequences. Thus he never implemented the Regional formula. On 15th September, 1958, Master Tara Singh re-opened the demand for Punjabi Suba. The demand received legitimacy because of bifurcation for Bombay into States of Mahatrashtira and Gujarat.

Activity 3

Why was the Nehru-Master Pact not satisfactory? Talk to fellow students and discuss the text above with them. Note down your findings in your notebook.

This left Punjab as the only bilingual state. Encashing this fresh support, the Akali Dal contested Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhanadhak Committee (SGPC) election on the issue of 'Punjabi Suba'. They won 132 out of 139 total seats contested. On 22nd May, 1960 a Punjabi Suba convention was held at Amritsar. The demand for a separate Punjabi Speaking State in this convention was also supported by leaders of Swantatra Party, Samykat Socialist Party (SSP), Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and freedom fighters like Saifudin Kitchloo and Pandit Sunder Lal. A formal agitation for a separate Punjabi State was launched in May 1960. After the arrest of Master Tara Singh, Fateh Singh, Vice President of Akali Dal at that time, took over the leadership. He firmly asserted that they wanted only a Punjabi Linguistic State. Whether Hindus constituted a majority of Sikhs was not their priority. Subsequently political realignments took place. Communists now supported Akalis in their demand. Congress strengthened its mass base among the rural Sikhs. Jansangh became popular with urban Hindus and a small section of urban Sikhs.

Box 12.06

Political scientists like Paul Brass have suggested that it was the process of the elite formation that gave momentum to Punjab Struggle. This period also witnessed a split in Akali Dal. Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh's stand on creating a linguistic state within the territorial boundaries of India nation state was vindicated. Sant Fateh Singh temporarily suspended the movement at the time of Chinese aggression in 1962. The movement resurrected itself after the death of Kairon and Pt. Nehru in 1964. Lal Bahadur Shastri's regime also continued to resist the demand for 'Punjabi Suba'. After the failure of talks with Shastri Government, Sant Fateh Singh announced from Akal Takht on 16th August, 1965 that if his demands were not met, he would fast unto death from 10th September, 1965. He further emotionalised his demand saying that if he survived the fast for fifteen days, he would immolate himself on the fifteenth day. On 5th September, 1965, Indo-Pak War started. During War, Sikhs proved their valour once again.

The centre set-up a three member committee comprising of Y.B. Chawan, Indira Gandhi and Mahavir Tyagi; two days after the cease -fire to look into the demands for a 'Punjabi Suba'. This three member committee was assisted by 22 members parliamentary committee under the Chairmanship of Lok Sabha Speaker Sardar Hukam Singh. After the death of Shastri in January, 1966, Mrs. Gandhi convened a meeting of congress party's working committee on 9th March, 1966. This committee passed the resolution requesting the Government to create a Punjabi speaking state. This was followed by parliamentary committee's resolution on the same lines on 18th March 1966. A Punjab State's re-organization bill and appointment of Punjab boundary commission under the Chairmanship of Justice J.C. Shah followed these developments, the other two members of the commission were Subinal Datt and M.M. Philip. It was on 1st November 1966 that the state was finally divided into Punjab and Haryana. The state of Punjab now comprised of 41% area and 55% of the total population of erstwhile Punjab. Majority of its population was now that of the Sikhs. The central Government kept its control over Chandigarh and Bhakhra and Beas Dam Project. However, most of the objections of Akali leadership were met. The Sikhs constituted a majority in eight of the eleven districts.

Re-organization of Punjab using linguistic ethnicity as its plank has not been without trouble. Many Punjabi speaking areas were left out in the process. Chandigarh sharing of river water that led to post 1980's problems continues to daunt the region. One may state here that linguistic ethnicity in Indian context has been used as a complement to religious, caste and other ethnies. It has never operated as an exclusive principle of re-organization.

12.6 OTHER LINGUISTIC ETHNICITY MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Surendra Gopal argues that by the tenth century, the basic nationalities in India had been formed. He lists these nationalities as the Assamese, Oriyas, Andhras, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Marathas, Bengalis, Kannadigs, Tamils, Malayales, etc. and also asserts the fact that these nationalities settled around the fertile Yamuna Ganga Doab region and its southern neighbour in the territory of central India. These nationalities emerged as strong ethno linguistic groups largely conforming to regional territories. Brij, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithalli, and Chattisgiri developed in the Yamuna Doab region, commonly known as Aryavarth, Aryuratha, politically remained most significant. But it never acquired strong ethno linguistic identity. The language movement remained dormant, as the local languages were denied imperial patronage. It was sufi saint tradition perpetuated by Kabir, Malik Mohammad Jyasi, Vidyapati Tulsi and Surdas that kept the local languages vibrant. Ethno linguistic nationalities perpetuated under the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Akbar directed his empire into the provinces of Ajmer, Lahore, Gujarat, Bihar Bengal etc. the Rajput and jat ethno - linguistic groups asserted themselves in this period. The Maratha identity under Shiva jee was in response to Mughals march to Penninsular India. The Kanada and Telugu identities surfaced at the time of annexation of Bijapur and Golkunda Kingdoms. Powerful ethno-linguistic nationalities crystalized in the Punjab, the Bengal and the Mysore by the end of the 18th century. It was primarily for this reason that two most important ethno-linguistic movements in British India surfaced in Bengal and Punjab. Both these movements were linked to regional aspirations, they acquired obvious national or 'Swadeshi' over tones to gather larger acceptance and legitimacy. The slogan "Pagri Sambalo Jata" (beckoning Punjabi jats, to fight the Britishers) was symbolic of linguistic solidarity. This linguistic ethnic solidarity absorbed within its fold Hindu, Muslim and Sikh individualities. Punjabi nationality also contributed to the formation of powerful Gaddar Party in America. Demands for a separate Punjabi nation state were also rife during this period for some time. It was at this time that unionist party with the support of British Government captured power in Punjab. The Sikh ethnicity asserted itself under the leadership of Akali Dal Muslim ethnicity was also nurtured by using Urdu as the link language for establishing religious and national identity.

12.6.1 Reorganization of States

The organization of states of independent India on the principle of linguistic affinity, witnessed dismemberment of large regional entities. Madras and Central Provinces provide one example. On a similar pattern small states were integrated. Madhya Bharat, Patiala and East Punjab were integrated. The same process also resulted in linguistic

strife's in different parts of the nascent democracy. Demand for linguistic nationality resulted in the splitting of Bombay into Maharashtra and Gujarat. Maha Punjab was divided into states of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.

Regional and linguistic solidarity has also been responsible for the emergence of regional political parties. The rise of DMK, AIADMK, Telgu desam, Akali Das, Assam Gana Parishad, Maharashtrawadi Gomanatak Dal National Liberation Front, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha etc. are all expressions of political ambitions of provincial ethno-linguistic nationalities. International aspects of linguistic nationality issue constantly assert that India has successfully dealt with its linguistic diversity issues. A detailed examination in a historical perspective suggests that, if these were violent linguistic movements in the past, there are strong under currents in certain pockets even now.

12.7 TRIBAL LINGUISTIC MOVEMENTS

Out of 1965 mother tongues recorded by the 1961 census, approximately 500 were reported from tribal regions. The Santhali, Gondi and Khasi are major linguistic groups, Tribal linguistic groups in the India are classified as (i) Dravidian (ii) Austric (iii) Tibeto Chinese. The diversity of tribal languages were crushed in the process of re-organization of state structure. A case study of language scenario from Orissa makes it explicit. In the 1961 census state of Orissa recorded only 15 million Oriya Speakers. In 1981 this figure dramatically doubled to 30 million, while the number of Kharia and Bhumiji speaking people declined from 1.4 lac and 91,000 (1961, 1971 census) to 49,000 and 28,208 respectively in the 1981 census. It is surprising that none of the tribal languages are recognised by the eighth schedule of the constitution, even though they are spoken by a large segment of Indian population. Santhali is spoken by 36 lakh, Bhili by 12.5 lakh, Lammi by 12 lacs, yet they find no official recognition. Inadvertent hierarchy of languages created by the eighth schedule of the constitution, and state patronage granted to the official state language under the three language formula has further alienated the original inhabitants of our motherland. With the rising levels of literacy among the tribals, the awareness of their ethnic attributes is also heightened. This has led to some significant linguistic ethnicity movements among them. I am referring to only three of them here placed in the eighth schedule of the constitution.

12.7.1 The Santhali Language Movement

Santhali identity assertion movements are recorded since the beginning of the 19th century with the Kherwar movement. Essentially a social mobility movement, Santhals wanted to register their presence as an important segment of larger Hindu population. They acquired Sanskrit traits and started wearing the sacred thread. The Janeodhari Santhals distinguished them from non Janeadhari and did not intermarry. But by 1938, Adabasi movement started consolidation itself in the Santhal Paragona region. They started demanding a separate province for the original tribes of Chota Nagpur area, sought representation in the Bihar assembly and demanded introduction of Santhali and other aboriginal languages as medium of instruction in schools. The **Sarna Dhorma Samlet** started by Ragnath Murmu was started as part of the Jharkhand Movement to express tribal solidarity. This organization is perpetuating santhali original scripts and scriptures. An icon called **Guru Gomke** is created. Guru is the original creator the **Kherwar Bir**, which is an equivalent of Mahabharata. The santhals who constitute a larger linguistic group than the Sindhis and Kashmiris assert their identity. However there are division with the movement. One segment supports Roman script comprising of converted Christians, another group supporting **Al Chiki Santhali**. The leaders of the Jharkhand movement have tried to minimise this difference in order to consolidate their demand for a separate state. Santhali is now introduced as a medium of instruction at primary school level but has failed to acquire a place in the eighth schedule of the constitution.

12.7.2 The Language Movement of the Mishings

The Mishings or Miri, original inhabitants of Siang and Subandshree districts of Arunachal Pradesh are the second largest scheduled tribe of Assam. They number approximately three lakhs. The Mishings have vehemently defended their traditional boundaries and original dialect. In 1968, a group of enlightened Miris formed the "Mishing Agam Kebang" that in Mishing implies language Association and adopted

Roman Script for Mishng language. The Government of Assam initially resisted native Mishings attempts for recognition of Mishi language; but has now given in; under increasing pressure. Efforts are still on to introduce Mishi at primary school level. Government of Assam, has in principle agreed to appoint Mishi language teachers in predominantly Mishi Schools.

12.7.3 Ethno Linguistic Aspirations of the Jayantia

Started in 1975, Jayantia language and literary association become active after Khasi (language used by Khasi Tribals) gained recognition as a medium of instruction in schools. Written in Romanscript Jayantia language may remain confined only to a small section of the Jayantia speaking populace. Thus a conscious effort was made to assert their linguistic identity. The Jayantia language and literary association regularly holds literary conferences, encourages debate and essay writing competitions. It also publishes literary work in Jayantia language.

Independent India has witnessed number of tribal resurgence movements. Adibasi interests remained unregistered because tribals did not constitute a pressure group. One may argue that both development and deprivation are equally responsible for giving impetus to ethno-linguistic movements. Literacy, mobility, political participation are some of the factors that have made people aware of their distinct identity. Regional autonomy aspirations are directly related to levels of political awareness. Issues that have emerged in the demand for a separate Gorkaland, Bodoland, Jharkhand are significant pointers in this direction. These agitations are essentially asking for greater autonomy and regional power within the existing federal structure of Indian nation state. Emergence of Mizo Union (1946), Goa National Council (1946), Eastern Tribal Council (1952), APHLC (1960) are interpreted as middle class uprisings. Mizo Freedom Organization (1940), MNF (1961) were politically more vocal in their demands.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What do we refer to as the Punjabi Suba movement? Write briefly on it in about 5-10 lines.

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- 2) Clarify with an example the tribal linguistic movements. Write your answer in about 5-10 lines.

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12.7.4 Language and Culture

In order to achieve their political ambitions, leadership invariably combined the issue of language and culture. Often, these resulted in fostering of group identity. This group identity and solidarity thus authenticated demand for a separate regional entity. The fusion of Gorkhali, Kurmali and Santali languages as workhold and Jharkhand movement is an interesting example of this foundation. Similarly, formation of Khaskura, now recognized as Garkhali language by the G.N.L.F. is a blending of various dialects of Nepali origin. Kurmali and Kuruli that were initially only oral languages acquired script and unite historically under the Jharkhand movement. It is important to note there that regional movements are often portrayed as negative and divisive. The fact that many of these regional linguistic movements have consolidated rich heritage available in the oral tradition remains understood.

12.8 CAUSES OF LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

Every ethno-linguistic community evolves a security net around itself. It takes upon itself the task of protecting its dwindling heritage. If threatened it resolves to organise it and launch protest movements. Regional language movements as an expression of ethnicity emerge, when they are threatened by:

- i) On adoption of Hindi as an official language, small linguistic communities were apprehensive that this move would restrict Government Jobs for their community members, subsequently their voice in the affairs of the government would become inaudible.
- ii) Middle class power elite was propagating continuation of English for official use. This bilingualism further reduced opportunities for those not conversant with either Hindi or English.
- iii) Consequently a north south divide occurred, since post independence leadership largely identified itself with northern India, primarily due to disproportionate size of the individual state, its affinity with Hindi was overplayed. Anti Hindi Movement that originated in the South interprets a Hindi domination as symbolic of Aryans and Brahmnical cultural domination.
- iv) Despite tall claims and protection given to linguistic minorities and languages under Articles 350, 29.1, 344 (I), 345, 346 and 347, language claim of the minorities are often ignored Article 350(a) of the constitution provides that every state authority should facilitate primary education in the mother tongue. But the common perception at the level of district administration and education empowerment is that such efforts would disintegrated the Indian nation state. They would encourage individuals ethno-linguistic aspirations, and thus isolate him. There is also apprehension that education in local dialects would deprive people from attaining higher and quality education. The inherent ambiguity in the constitution between 350 and 351, the former providing individual languages and the later supporting official use of Hindi, has promoted linguistic conflicts in India.

12.9 LET US SUM UP

For the past three decades, Indian State has not confronted any serious linguistic conflict. From this one may infer that India's linguistic conflicts have successfully been neutralized. They are no longer a threat to Indian Nation Integration. Post independence era, particularly between 1947 - 1967 witnessed numerous linguistic conflicts. A sizeable chunk of our political energy was spent in resolving these crises. Stray incidences of

violence are still recorded. **Badauan** in Uttar Pradesh was a scene of communal rioting on 28th September, 1989, after the decision of Uttar Pradesh Government to introduce Urdu as the second official language of the state. Language and ethnicity have close affinity. Language is perceived as the symbol of ethnic unity. Even though forces of modernization and exigencies of competitive society have reduced the functional importance of individual mother tongues, as community attributes, they are very important. State interference in language issues is now minimal. Policy of accommodation has paid rich dividends. But there is a caution at the end of all this and is summarily stated by Robert D. King – Language problems are almost never what they appear to be; they are very often camouflage to hide agendas that are linked only tenuously to language and linguistics”. It has already been shown that language movements in south were reactions to caste domination and exploitation. Similarly Punjabi Suba movement had its roots in Sikh identity. Tribal linguistic movements are also located in ethnicity, identity and survival debate. Though linguistic ethnicity poses little threat to Indian Nation, its active status for ethnic formation should always be remembered.

12.10 KEY WORDS

Ethnicity	:	Refers to a category of people who can be distinguished on the basis of the culture, religion, race or language.
Linguistic	:	Concerns the language of a category of people which in turn has ramifications for culture of the area.
Modernization	:	The process by which a culture or society becomes socially and technologically more advanced and a better livelihood is assured for vast sections of society.

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12.12 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The idea of nation-states corresponding to linguistic boundaries began in the 19th century. In India this principle was not immediately accepted. Prior to India's Independence, state boundaries did not follow a linguistic principle. After Independence the language issue and the reorganization of states was seriously considered. However it must be pointed out that linguistic reorganization of states also involved aspirations for caste and communities, to better their lot. The debate regarding language and the reorganization of states continues to this day and language is a very sensitive issue. However today India has many states that have been organized on the basis of language and use their own language for transacting business within the state itself. Linguistic ethnicity between the North and the South in India is several centuries old, and is rooted in caste politics according to Jrschick. The DMK emerged out of the DK when differences emerged among the leaders over the day of Independence. In due course of time DMK helped align Tamil literatures and published books, party papers, and magazines in Tamil to promote Tamil awareness. DMK ideology was spread all over Madras. By 1965 student politics came

into the language issue Regional identity became very important and self-immolations by students became politically motivated. These were condemned by DMK leaders but student violence on the language issue in 1965. All this led to the formulation of a policy on language and its use in the Centre and the States.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The Pubjabi Suba refers to the establishment of a Pubjabi speaking state. The antecedents for such a demand date back to 1919 and continued beyond Independence in 1947. The advise for a Punjabi speaking state rather than a Sikh state was given by Ambedkar. Who advised that through a language (Pubjabi) a Sikh State called Pubjabi Suba could be obtained. In 1966 the Punjab State was divided into Pubjab and Haryana.
- 2) As literacy rose among the tribals their awareness of their ethnic attributes also increased. For example the Jayantias asserted their identity since 1975 holding literary conferences and publishing literary work. Literary, mobility and political participation were ways in which a distinct ethnic identity was asserted.

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