To change it
People's Struggles Among Majoritarian Oppression
The Story of India's Language Policy
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In the lectures of this course we have explored the various 'cardinal principles' that the Indian state claims to be tied to like democracy, secularism and nationalism. In each of these we studied what principles lay behind each of these ideals and the various positions the Indian state's 'guardianship' of these ideals has been threatened or questioned. When studying nationalism, we looked at how questions to indian imperialism and alternative understandings of nation rose in Punjab and Kashmir. The study of democracy pointed to the period of Emergency as the one stain on Indian democracy. The chapter on secularism intended to likewise pose the militant movement baying for the destruction of the Babri Masjid as a failure of Indian secularism. Unlike these this essay seeks to discuss how the Indian State predominantly in the hands of the Congress Party deals with cultural majoritarianism, primarily looking at its position with regard to language policies. In contrast to the above described opinions the problem of majoritarianism is not one that was fought by the Indian state when posed by other forces such as separatists or religious fundamentalists, but majoritarianism is a problem present in the actions and the very being of the Indian state itself. I shall illustrate this by looking at the Congress party's position on language, the debates that occurred in the constituent assembly and the vibrant language movements that occurred after 1963 and grew after 1965 in oppressed regions across the country.

During both my schooling and my college study of the colonial period we were taught more or less to believe that the Congress represented the Indian people as a whole. Apart from rare mentions of Ambedkar or extremists, dissent to Congress views was seen only through the lens of internal Congress disagreements, clashes between Nehru and Gandhi, or the pro-changers and the no-changers. Mentions of other prominent electoral forces like the Justice party or the Akalis in Punjab are painfully ignored because they pose a threat to our current understanding of India. Another step outside shows us how little electoral victories themselves meant when the vast majority of India had no right to vote. This is critical to the Congress's position on a multitude of issues including language. The landed elite, the largest group with voting rights, in many parts of the country almost entirely upper-caste where deeply influenced by organisations like the Arya Samaj and other fundamentalist outfits which were deeply vested in Hindi purist movements. (Austin) This was in part also a targeted move to maintain opposition to the country's

reorganisation and more equitable growth across the sub-continent there are still constant attempts made at majoritarian imposition evidencing a lack of understanding of language as a human right in the Indian state. The fight is still viewed paradoxically as one for unity even though language imposition has often been one of the largest causes for separatist movements. The real cause of this could be either the need for the majority to secure employment, the need for nationalist parties to grow into enclaves where they cannot or simply out of some desire for ethno-linguistic purism like the German state under Nazi rule. This understanding is best captured in one of Arijnar C N Annadurai's speeches where he noted 'Is it merely unity that you want? You want uniformity that you are going to aim at, you are not going to achieve it come what may. This country consists, as the late Prime Minister has stated in this very august House, of different ethnic elements, different cultural elements and different linguistic groups. It is only unity within this diversity that we should arrive at, and not by destroying the fine niceties of this diversity, mistaking uniformity for unity. May I ask Members of this House and the Prime Minister whether language alone is the cementing force needed for the unity of this country? Is it language alone that stands as a handicap to that unity? Certainly not. There are regional imbalances, there are regional leanings, there are linguistic leanings. All these things have got to be bridged if you want to have a sort of unity without uniformity for this country.' (Trust, 2016)

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Muslims who became the bogey on which all Indian ills were blamed. The coming of orientalist writing and the effect this had on caste and racial understanding meant that many caste-elites especially Brahmins from non-Hindi speaking regions began to learn Hindi and give it importance to rise in the new colonial native-elite milieu. This can be seen in both the Tamil Brahmin and the Tripuri Brahmin appreciation of Hindi and support for Hindi imposition and their derision of the native tongues of their region. (Pandian, 2006) Alongside this the regional spread of the Congressite movement too is important. While the urban centers of Bombay and Kolkota were important Congress centers it was only late in the mid-20th century that the Congressite movement spread to the rural hinterland. Even this spread was restricted mostly to Northern, Central and Western India. Major regions like the Presidency provinces of the North-East, the Hyderabad and Kerala Princely regions and the bulk of Madras presidency were deeply influenced by other, often rival, movements. (Pandian, 2006) In the last elections of British India, the Muslim league swept all but three of the seats reserved for Muslims uncovering the falsity in the Congress claim that they represented the non-hindi speaking Muslim population of India. In Madras presidency even among the voting elite the Congressite movement began in the common understanding to be one of Hindi-imposition, Brahmin-supremacy and Caste-oppression because of the specific leaders and actions of the Madras Congress Committee. Non-Brahmins were side-lined and the few non-brahmins like K. Kamaraj who came to power were bitterly opposed by powerful cliques within the Congress. (Kandaswamy, 2001) This led to the non-Brahmin Justice party to lead a string of electoral victories underlining the Congress's unpopularity. When looking at the non-voting masses there is even smaller amounts of evidence to support Congress popularity here replaced by the growing self-respect movement. Even those Congress Brahmins who assumed power in Madras who weren't Hindi supremacists faced an uphill battle as the Congress was largely seen as a North Indian party, a truth accepted even by Congress supremos like Nehru during the election of Pattabi Sittaramayya. (Austin) Ofcourse the often visibly hindi-supremacist, hindu-nationalist, islamophobic positions and opinions taken by the Congress are also because the Congress worked as an umbrella organisation with no particular ideology of its own meaning religious fundamentalists and language supremacists from other

organisations like the blatantly communal Hindu Mahasabha could fill out the Congress's ranks and enforce their majoritarian ideologies.

This being the social landscape of the Congress their position on the linguistic policy that post-transfer of power India was to follow is unsurprising. Ever since the 1923 Coconada Congress the proceedings of national Congress meetings were to occur in Hindustani making it clear that populations from other regions would not have their voices heard except if they gave way to majoritarian domination. (Austin) The Nehru report in which the Congress attempted to frame a Constitution for India, Hindustani was with little discussion made the 'common language' of India. Leaders like Gandhi were obstinate on their position 'that unless we give Hindi it's national status ... all talk of Swaraj is useless'. In the eyes of a growing clique of North Indian leaders this symbolic destruction of colonial rule in search of an idealised but unclear term 'Swaraj' became far more important than alienating more the half the country's non-Hindi speaking population. The humour lay in the fact that this silent majority on whom the Congress electoral victories did not depend on may not have understood terms like Swaraj which were as foreign as the language of the colonizer. Gandhi with his unquestioning acceptance of Hindi was still only a moderate in this position. The Congress boasted extreme hindi nationalists who went so far as to say that all proceedings of the new government of India must be in Hindi and that even the numerals that must be used across the country must be archaic devanagari numerals which are presently unused even in hindi regions. This opinion was shared by powerful players within the Congress like Purushotam Das Tandon, Dhulekar and even Vallabhai Patel. The hindi that these purists intended to use was one 'purified' of Urdu and local influences and one that borrowed extensively from the Brahmin language Sanskrit. This meant that the restrictive definition of Hindi they wanted to impose on the country would be one spoken by far less speakers than English speakers within the country, bellying any claim that this was done for majoritarian consensus and not for linguistic imperialism. Other attempts at imagining Indian organisation too boiled eventually down to hindi imposition as seen in the INA's declaration that Hindi would be sole official language of India.

The differences between majoritarian leaders within the Congress and the country they were ruling, one which had countless languages, cultural differences and one which in 1947 had very few trappings of national unity

the selective use and failure of the three-language policy which stipulates that every state must teach English, Hindi and a local language. This has been used to make compulsory in states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka the teaching of Hindi while in Northern States local languages like Maithili, Bhojpuri or Urdu are pointedly ignored by powerful upper-caste Hindi supremacists. Alongside this with increasing funding and power being given to centre-governed educational institutions like the Kendriya Vidyalayas which even in Tamil Nadu teach Hindi. Another major realm in which language movements is in the creation of states. While the government in principle agreed to the division of provinces on the basis of language, the government in a fear of giving power to states has been highly selective in naming states. With no clear determinate of language large language groups like Maithili speakers have been denied a state for no particular reason. However, the creation of linguistic states has led in fact to the reduction of large linguistic movements like in Andhra and in Maharashtra. Other movements like those in Punjab and those in several states in North East like Nagaland have continued even after state formation and have grown into fully fledged national movements on linguistic and ethnic grounds. A concern that must be explored here is the linguistic rights of minorities within linguistic states. Almost every state in the country has 10 or more percent of the population that does not speak the primary language of the state and the treatment these minorities are given differ from state to state. Though constitutionally states are supposed to ensure that their linguistic minorities are able to access education in their mother tongue this is rarely practiced. An example of this kind of irresponsible behaviour is seen in the state of Bihar constant lack of data on their linguistic minorities who could potentially begin asking for their own state. The largest casualty here is Urdu which is the single large stand most widespread minority language in the country. Again the Northern Indian region especially Uttar Pradesh stands out as the most linguistic imperialistic region with very low amounts of aid given to Urdu institutions even though Uttar Pradesh has a larger percentage of the nation's Muslims and Urdu speakers. (Austin) This is a continuation of the majoritarian Congressite islamophobia and it's linguistic ramification. India throughout it's 70-year long history has seen constant attempts at Hindi imperialism which have been stopped through large social movements from the many linguistic minorities of the country. While legally the use of mother-tongues has become safer than before due to state-

The volcano erupted in 1965 when on the Republic Day Hindi was to become sole official language. Madras was washed in black flags and black shirted protesters. The Congress regime sensing the threat began arresting the leaders of the movement with over 10,000 arrests in the coming days. Several students across the state immolated themselves as the last form of protests against the oppressive regime, a total of seven students were martyred during this movement. Police of other states and paramilitary protests were called across the state and emergency was imposed and protests were attacked by these forces and by trade-union goons of the ruling regime. The streets of Madras state turned very quickly into a violent battle zone and police shootings occurred indiscriminately concretising the notion that Madras was not a part of the Indian state but some unaccepted frontier region under occupation. (Nalankilli, 2001) After two years of students struggles the ruling regime finally conceded to indefinitely continue English as co-official language. Before this extreme emotions and moves were visible in Madras state like the incident in Coimbatore in 1965 where a march of the Coimbatore Students Anti-Hindi Agitation Committee ended in VOC park with the hoisting of the Independent Thamizh Nadu National Flag. (Nalankilli, 2001) This strain of separatist movements fueled by Hindi imposition continues with organisations like the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army and the Tamil Nadu Retrieval Troops (TNVP) who still continue a violent struggle for independence against the Indian state. The movement saw indiscriminate police violence and Professor Alfred Stepan notes over a 100 deaths of students in these months at the hand of police. (Nalankilli, 2001) However, the movement has framed the politics of language in the country and the politics of language ever since with the Congress facing a titanic loss to Dravidian parties in 1967 from which they have never recovered. Next year in Tamil Nadu is to be celebrated as 50 years of no-Congress rule. However, the movement was not restricted to Madras with large amounts of protests in Orissa, Mysore, Kerala and Bengal all of which at different points have resisted Hindi imposition.

However, questioned of Hindi imposition and failed language policies still continue plague. Renewed attempts to impose Hindi occur recurring after 1967, most recently in the NDA's decision that all government servants will get bonuses if they send out social media messages in Hindi in 2015. This too raised protests across non-Hindi speaking regions. Apart from this a constant thorn in the side of linguistic movements has been

or common ethos boiled out in the very first meeting of the Constituent Assembly. The first day of attempting to bring a semblance of unity to a nation that claimed people from vast cultural differences and tie them together with a common constitution began with R V Dhulekar saying "People who do not know Hindustani have no right to stay in India. People who are present in this House to fashion a Constitution for India and do not know Hindustani are not worthy to be members of this Assembly. They had better leave." (Guha, 2004) The Constituent assembly on the topic of language basically arrayed itself into three groups, one calling for the national language of India to be 'Hindustani' a perceived bridge between Urdu and Hindi, which could replace English in a matter of ten or fifteen years. This position held by ideologues like Nehru had very little support after the Hindu-Congressite antagonism towards anything seen as 'Muslim-appeasing' after the two state solution was accepted by the British. The second position was one to use a pure Hindi devoid of Urdu and Persian influences which would replace English over a decade or two. The last position was an extreme version of the second which called for the immediate codification of sanskritised-Hindi as the sole language and numeral of India which was to be used in all governmental proceedings and taught compulsorily across the country. An important aspect of their argument was also the enforcement of Urdu in Pakistan which allowed them to create a Muslim-Hindu, Urdu-Hindi and India-Pakistan dichotomy that is still used regularly by central forces like the Congress and BJP to attack any form of dissent. The proponents of this were all aggressively Hindu nationalist whose names read like an enumeration of upper-castes, a statement which would hold true for the Constituent Assembly at large. After much debate in which the fanaticism of the Hindi imperialists alienated many of the moderates a resolution was made to create a panel that would look into it with one hindi supremacist and one 'madrasi'. KM Munshi and Gopalswamy Iyengar were chosen to represent the two linguistic communities of India the Hindi and the non-Hindi. (Austin) This now seems absurd to us but it was because of a nascent understanding within the Congress that Hindi had some natural superiority, an unwritten understanding that even the Brahmin leaders of Madras joyfully followed. Gopalswamy Iyengar for example was working in the Congress and the administration under Rajagopalachari's famous 1937 attempted at imposing Hindi on Madras presidency. This period had marked the first real revolutionary wave in Madras with large groups

of students, self-respecters and women's organisations picketing schools and raising black flags. The support of Madras Muslims too was clear in the fight against Hindi imperialism. (Nalankilli, 2001) But the Congress-monopolised Constituent Assembly could not have selected a candidate from within the Assembly who could represent the concerns of the people of the state of Madras because of how singularly undemocratic it was. The Constituent Assembly was a hurried assemblage primarily made of the winners of the 1946 Legislative Council as the Congress knew that their large opponents in the provinces like the Justice Party, now the Dravidar Kazhagam had boycotted elections. A true desire to represent the people of Madras should have entailed a re-election with an invitation to the Dravidar Kazhagam to participate. This lack of representation is clear in the Brahmin T T Krishnamachari's quote on linguistic imposition 'I would, Sir, convey a warning on behalf of people of the South for the reason that there are already elements in South India who want separation..., and my honourable friends in U.P. do not help us in any way by flogging their idea of "Hindi Imperialism" to the maximum extent possible. So, it is up to my friends in Uttar Pradesh to have a whole India; it is up to them to have a Hindi-India. The choice is theirs.' (Austin) Expressing the view of the growing Dravidar Kazhagam but out of fear not need to represent. Furthermore, this last election was one based on highly limited franchise which gave the vote only to the predominantly upper-caste land owners and urban elite. The second largest party in the Constituent Assembly was the Muslim League who swept all but three seats were dismissed from the Constituent Assembly after the State of Pakistan was created. This included those members of the Muslim League who did not migrate to East or West Pakistan thus pointedly eliminating Muslims from the Assembly. From the Princely states the Congress handpicked members to join the Assembly, who would have all been like-minded people or Congress Princely state members and not members of other political outfits already existing in the states like the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen. The Constituent Assembly also ignored entire regions like the North-East frontier tribal areas which had not one elected member. The result of this was that the constitution of India was made by a small elite a vast majority representing a single political party ignoring diverse other political forces, meaning the Constitution might as well have been made in a Congress office or by the well represented Hindu Mahasabha which had very similar ideas on linguistic imposition. Even the North

Indian Left was led by upper caste Hindi supremacists who later called for 'Banish English'. Unsurprisingly the two-person committee agreed to make Hindi official language alongside English which will progressively be side-lined and removed from administration until Hindi is taught in all states and Hindi has evolved to be able to handle the complex needs of modern state-building. This judgement sees a complete lack of clarity of the demographic number of non-Hindi speakers, the fact that the language is a human rights issue as clearly noted by the International Charter of Human Rights and more recently the Girona manifesto and finally fails to recognise the discriminatory economic and political effect this would have on a country attempting to stand up after centuries of colonial exploitation. Southern Indians from a region which faced a much longer colonial period would have to write exams to enter the limited employment of government agencies in a state-run economy in a foreign language which would lead to a clear regional imbalance in economic growth and power. Furthermore, normal citizens would have to petition courts, access government institutions and enter the electoral process in a language as alien to them as English meaning this would be a firmly undemocratic system. This also ignores concerns that this would lead to cultural genocide akin to what occurred when Hindi itself cannibalistically erased away the many other distinct languages of the Gangetic plain and Northern India. (Austin)

The struggle against this half-hearted acceptance of Hindi imperialism began immediately after the transfer of power from the British to the Congress regime which in Madras took the form of the Anti-Hindi Conference in 1948 and the flying of black flags opposing the unilateral unrepresentative transfer of power. The unyieldingly imperialistic position the Congress took on language is the main issue that pushed the struggle for Dravida Nadu which had gained wide support in Madras presidency. The fears of the large minorities from across the country were summed up by Arinjar C N Annadurai 'Making a language (Hindi) that is the mother tongue of a region of India the official language for all the people of India is tyranny. We believe that it will give benefits and superiority to one region (the Hindi-speaking region) ... If Hindi were to become the official language of India, Hindi-speaking people will govern us. We will be treated like third rate citizens'. The 1960 Anti-Hindi Agitation Committee created by the new Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam attracted wide support with more than a lakh people attending. (Nalankilli, 2001)