

**INDIA**  
**National and Language**  
**Problem**

**Boris I Kluyev**



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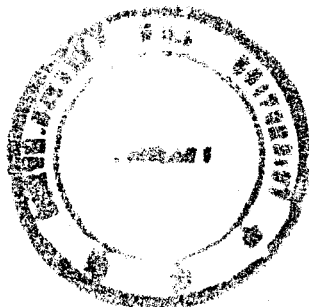
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**FOR REVIEW**



# INDIA

## National and Language Problem



BORIS. I. KLUYEV



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## Introduction

National and language problems in India have for a long time attracted the attention of Indian and foreign scholars. National and language conflicts which have repeatedly erupted in various regions have been accompanied by extraordinary outbursts of passion. They often led to violence and resulted in a considerable loss of life. National and language problems are an object of broad discussion in India—they are examined at conferences, seminars and symposia, in books and pamphlets, and in numerous articles in the press. National and language questions have ceased to be an exclusive prerogative of scholars. They are given a great deal of attention in the programmes of political parties, in election manifestoes, and in the speeches of statesmen and political figures. They are even discussed in the Supreme Court of India.

The feelings of the masses linked with national and language issues have been exploited by political parties and public figures to promote autonomist views and to raise demands for the reorganization of States. These feelings aggravate inter-State relations, provoke stormy debates in legislative bodies and result in crises of government in various States.

National and language conflicts are regarded in India as a dangerous phenomenon which threatens the country's unity. Indian political figures and scholars speak of a "language war" and "linguistic chauvinism", and of the danger of the "Balkanisation" or "Babylonisation" of India. The historian and right-wing politician, K. M. Munshi, well-known in Indian academic circles, introduced the term "linguism" which became widespread. According to K.M. Munshi, linguism is "a group sentiment based on the affinity of language, seeking expression in terms of power-politics. It identifies language with culture and equates cultural with political frontiers of a region... The political ambition of a linguistic group can only

be satisfied by the exclusion and discrimination of other linguistic groups within the area." "The psychology of unity in this country," continues Munshi, "is being destroyed by linguism. This aggressive group sentiment has tended to give undue importance to one's regional language against the paramount importance of a national [i.e. state—B.K.] medium, without which national consciousness would wither away. . . Linguistic chauvinism carries within it the seed of complete disintegration" (K.M. Munshi, R.R. Diwakar, *Disintegration—How to Avert It*. A Symposium. Bombay, 1965, pp. 44-45, 40.) It should be said that linguism in the above pronouncement and other terms similar to it means nationalism, or the national, or in this case nationalist sentiments of groups of the population stemming from the affinity of language and its opposition to another language or languages.

It is necessary here to make a few observations regarding terminology, since its correct application is of major importance. The terms "nation" and "national" have two meanings in English and other West European languages: "nation" and "national"; "state" and "of the state". K.M. Munshi, for example, defines a state language as a "national language" which is often different from regional languages.

Political and scientific publications in India and the West identify, as applied to India, the concepts of "nation" and "state". At the same time, they accept the existence of numerous languages, religious communities and castes. The nations and the peoples living in India are defined as *linguistic groups*, and much more rarely as *nationalities* or *subnationalities*, while the national States are referred to as *linguistic States*.<sup>1</sup>

Further, before 1947, that is, before India attained independence, the term "Indian nationalism" was applied, as a rule, to the ideology of the national-liberation struggle of the Indian people against the British colonialists, while later the term began to express the concept of patriotism, statehood and civic awareness, as opposed to "regionalism", "linguism", "casteism" etc.

1. The latter is also widely used in Indian studies in the Soviet Union.

In this work each of the terms—"nation", "national", "nationalism" and "nationalist"—is used in the only sense accepted in Marxist literature. When quoting sources where these concepts are interpreted differently, appropriate explanations are made.

Solution of the language problem plays an extremely important role in modern India. The choice of a language has an impact on the functioning of the state mechanism and on the system of selecting and training personnel. Successes and failures in the implementation of economic and social programmes, the spread of literacy among the adult population, the improvement and expansion of the system of secondary and higher education and, finally, the development of mass media all depend on it to a certain extent.

For years India has been implementing a community development programme aimed at introducing modern techniques in agriculture and improving the living conditions for the rural population. "In essence, community development is a programme of communication. In this field noticeable success has been achieved in a few areas, but on the whole the efforts have lacked vitality and imagination. The idiom of the village people has rarely been employed with full advantage in communicating the development programme to them" (N.V. Baidya [edited] *Contemporary India*, Bombay, 1964, p. 226). The language factor, that is, the selection of a reliable medium of communication for the implementation of this programme, which is socio-economic in nature, has proved to be a determining one in many ways. "Language barriers are certainly barriers to economic progress," writes R.B. Le Page, "as any one who has had experience of rural development work in underdeveloped countries will agree" (R.B. Le Page, *The National Language Question, Linguistic Problems of Newly Independent States*, London, 1964, p. 2).

The language factor is important also for social processes which are in any way linked with mass communication or the spread of information: for the restructuring of surviving national characteristics, for engineering a change in the attitude of smaller peoples and tribes towards the surrounding population, as well as in the relations between clans within the tribe,

and for the settlement of immigrants in Indian cities and towns.

The importance of the above problems is obvious. But it would be incorrect to stop merely at recognition of the fact that the language factor is linked in many ways to other problems. It is necessary to find the core of the whole range of problems and to uncover the fundamental laws underlying it. As has been shown by works which started only "from the language", there may develop a tendency to over-estimate the significance of separatist actions brought about by language conflicts, or of attempts to create a literature in a certain dialect. Other works show a trend to under-estimate the language factor in politics and ideology, in the development of the education system or in the alteration of administrative borders.

"Developing capitalism," wrote V.I. Lenin, "knows two historical tendencies in the national question. The first is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of national states. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the breakdown of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science etc.

"Both tendencies are a universal law of capitalism. The former predominates in the beginning of its development, the latter characterises a mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society" (V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, English edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Vol. 20, p. 27).

This law is of fundamental importance for analysing in India after independence the national and linguistic process which are noted for their complex and contradictory nature. It enables us to understand their true character and their role in the development of Indian society and to examine them not as a chance accumulation of facts, but as a system (structure), in other words, to rule out an arbitrary description.

This work concentrates on the facts and phenomena in India which can be explained primarily by the action of the first tendency—the awakening and development of national life and

national movements. The second tendency is examined only when it is necessary to cite facts about national movements, to highlight their contradictions and to evaluate their possible future and their influence on the state, political and economic unity of the country.

This choice of the object of examination seems to be quite justified. First of all, from 1947 till the early 1970's there was a great expansion of national movements which had been prepared by the historical development of the nationalities and peoples living in India, which had for a long time been contained by foreign domination and which had naturally been moved to the background during the national-liberation struggle of the Indian people. After independence India had to go through a series of national movements and conflicts. At that time there arose the pressing question concerning a democratic solution of the national question by creating linguistic States. It is quite understandable why the rapid expansion of the social functions of Indian languages, a process halted in the colonial period when English was predominant in the major spheres of communication, is still continuing today.

The second tendency, described in Indian political and scientific publications as a process of "national (that is, state) integration", is undoubtedly developing in independent India. An analysis of this second tendency, however, can hardly be fruitful without a detailed examination of national movements and national and language conflicts and the ways of their solution. Quite justly India has often been referred to as a "unity in diversity". Without discovering the character and depth of this diversity, it is impossible to see the possible ways of achieving the country's unity. In other words, the first step towards the examination of the national question in India should be a detailed study of the action of the first tendency.

The awakening of the population to national life and the development of national movements means, in effect, the formation and consolidation of the Indian nations and peoples, and the shaping between them of certain relations within the framework of the united state. In other words, it is the development and interaction of the basic attributes which characterise a

nation as an ethno-social and historical category of a certain era.

An attempt has been made in this work to examine the mechanism of interaction of the language factor with three of the four basic attributes of a nation : territorial unity, economic affinity and the mental make-up.

During the primary processing of the available material the author clearly felt that the most productive method would be a systems analysis. The isolation of any one aspect—linguistic, territorial, economic or psychological—would, of course, have allowed a more detailed and probably deeper analysis. But, as experience has shown, with such an approach there is a real risk of over-rating the significance of the selected aspect while under-estimating the others. It is for this reason that an analysis of the interaction and interdependence of the basic factors which determine national development has been selected as the method of examination.

Studies by Indian and Western scholars dealing with national problems in India often attach exaggerated importance to the specific conditions found in India alone. Such an approach usually leads to an uncritical reception of traditional views and hampers the use of the achievements of modern science and the discovery of the objective laws governing the development of Indian society. In the ideological and political struggle, reactionary communal parties and organisations take the particular conditions present in India to an extreme with a view to propagandise India's exclusiveness and to constructing theories of "Indianisation" and "Hindu" chauvinism, which complicates and aggravates national relations, adding to them an undertone of communal discord.

Studies by Soviet Indologists, and, primarily, the works of A.M. Dyakov, have convincingly shown that, despite the peculiarities of the national and language problems in India, the principles of Marxist-Leninist theory on the nation are fully applicable. In their turn, Indian statesmen, administrators and scholars are paying increasing attention to a study of the Soviet Union's experience in solving the national question, as well as of the theoretical aspects of the Leninist national policy.

The Soviet experience was highly valued by Jawaharlal Nehru (*Nehru's Speeches*, 1949-1953. Vol. 2. Delhi, 1957, p.46). The late Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, said after his visit to the Soviet Union that, although the USSR had many languages, there was no language problem. He felt that all Indians who visited the Soviet Union should specially examine this question and thus promote its solution in India. A similar view was expressed by R.K. Nehru, Vice-Chancellor of the Allahabad University; by J.D. Sharma, Director of the Department of Education, as well as by R.K. Yadav, author of several books on the national and language problems in India (R.K. Yadav, *The Indian Language Problem*, Delhi, 1967, pp. 156-164).

S.G. Sardesai, a veteran member of the Communist Party of India, believes that in accordance with the new conditions of modern life it is necessary to give the ancient ideal of unity in diversity a new meaning. Mechanical duplication of other countries' experience will not help one to reach this goal. One must find one's own road. There is no doubt, however, that the successes of the Soviet Union in creating a happy family of diverse nationalities and cultures will show the way and will help minimise the trials and hardships along that road (S.G. Sardesai, *India and the Russian Revolution*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 106).

This monograph does not claim to be an exhaustive study of the national and language problems of India. Moreover some problems are no more than indicated. They require further study and discussion. An integrated examination of these problems, which it is now high time to do, can be done only by group of Indologists who are experts in different fields.

This book is an attempt to generalise the material and observations the author has collected for over a decade.



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# I

## THE CONCEPT OF LINGUISTIC UNITY

Languages are made not by learned people, but by people, and not only reasoning ones, but by all sorts of people.

A.P. Sumarokov

### A Common Language as a Socially Conditioned Phenomenon

Language is a most important means of human communication. This general definition presupposes several different approaches to the study of language. One of them regards language as an instrument of communication. In this case language is examined as a historically formed and socially conditioned mechanism which is a system made up of certain units and the rules of their application, ensuring the mutual understanding of the members of society, that is, communication. Under this approach, all aspects of the study of language are the object of linguistics proper. Another approach presumes an examination of the correlation of language with the participants in communication. The latter relates to socio-linguistics which examines language and society as correlated system and analyses causal relationships between the two.

At first glance the correlation between language and society seems simple and unambiguous. Such an impression was probably engendered by the formula "a common language for every nation", which is the most abstract definition of a basic characteristic of a nation. But a closer examination of the "language-society" correlation will reveal its complex and contradictory nature.

## 2

# TERRITORIAL UNITY AND LANGUAGE

The language should always match the country. It should show its face, its beauty and its character as a path does winding away into the mist shrouding a river at dusk, a sight so dear to the heart that the pulse quickens.

K. Paustovsky : "A Story  
About Life"

### **Territorial Unity as an Attribute of a Nation**

The role of territory in the life of a nation can be viewed from different points. Territory is, above all, a geographic area of settlement of the given ethnic community with definite boundaries, relief and climate. Natural conditions are an important factor which determine certain features of the community, since the type of dress, housing etc. depend on climate. Many generations living in a given territory are influenced by the natural conditions typical for the area. Uniformity of living conditions for members of one ethno-national community facilitates national consolidation, while diversity hampers it. Cases have been known of lowland dwellers being opposed to highlanders, or of the population of a coastal belt opposing the population of the interior, although both of them spoke the same language, or dialects of the same language.

There is also certain dependence between the territory of settlement and the ethnic group's economic life. Availability or scarcity of fertile land, sources of irrigation, mineral and power

# 3

## A COMMON ECONOMIC LIFE AND LANGUAGE

How would it be possible for scattered peoples to gather into communities, to build cities, to construct temples and ships, to stand against the enemy, and to do other necessary things which demand unified effort, if they had not the means to convey their thoughts to each other ?

*M.V. Lomonosov*

### **A Common Economic Life as a National Characteristic**

A stable unity of economic life as a characteristic of a nation is a complex concept. It can be viewed in different ways, for example, from an economic and geographical point, that is, from that of the natural conditions of the given ethno-national community's area, which in large measure determine its economic profile. Thus the farming techniques in the arid regions of Rajasthan and in the rice-growing areas of the Krishna-Godavari delta in Andhra Pradesh differ substantially, although the forms of landowning and land use may be similar in both regions. The peculiarities of the economic profile of national areas are most clearly reflected in local handicrafts. Here the specificity of the people's cultural background, everyday life and their artistic and professional skills find their expression. Differences are seen even when craftsmen use the same or similar materials. This aspect of common economic life, though very important, is not within the scope of this study, as it reflects

## 4

# THE SPIRITUAL MAKE-UP OF THE NATION AND A COMMON LANGUAGE

A language is something infinitely greater than grammar and philology. It is the poetic testament of the genius of a race and a culture, and the living embodiment of the thoughts and fancies that have moulded them.

Jawaharlal Nehru

### The Concept of "Spiritual Make-up of a Nation"

The discussion of the concept of "nation" in the Soviet magazine *Voprosy istorii* (Problems of History) and the works on the theory of nation published afterwards (A.T. Basiyev and M.I. Isayev, *Yazyk i natsiya*, Moscow, 1973; S.T. Kaltakhchyan, *Leninizm o sushchnosti natsiyi i puti obrazovaniya internatsionalnoy obshchnosti lyudey*, Moscow, 1976; P.M. Rogachev and M.A. Sverdlin, *Natsiyi-narod-chelovechestvo*, Moscow, 1957; *Sovremennoye revolyutsionnoye dvizheniye i natsionalizm*, Moskva, 1973) show that the socio-psychological aspects of a nation's life remain controversial and little examined. In this connection it is relevant to recall the words of F. Engels that "the further the particular sphere which we are investigating is removed from the economic sphere and approaches that of pure abstract ideology, the more shall we find it exhibiting accidents in its development, the more will its curve run zigzag" (K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 503).

In our view, the starting point in discussing the spiritual

## CONCLUSION

The first twenty-five years of India's independent existence were characterised by important developments. Those were the years of the state's consolidation, the determination of the major trends of internal and external policies, and the adoption and implementation of important decisions. Some Western scholars referred to those years as the "most dangerous" ones, enumerating the great many difficulties India had to face after its liberation, which to many seemed insurmountable. There is no doubt that free India received a harsh heritage from colonial times, above all, socio-economic backwardness. Not all questions have been answered even now, although India has achieved impressive successes in different fields. Its independent and active external policy based on non-alignment, anti-imperialism, the development of friendly relations with the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist community and with developing states, and on the support of liberation movements, has enabled India to win great prestige in the international arena. Economically, India has turned from an appendage supplying raw materials and a vast market for the parent state into an independent agrarian and industrial state. In a quarter of a century, the volume of its industrial production has more than trebled. Agricultural output has also grown considerably, which makes it possible to set the goal of becoming self-sufficient in food and to eliminate the problem of famine.

Advances have also occurred over these years in the field of social relations. To evaluate their significance accurately, it is necessary to keep in mind that this period of India's development was marked by the continuous struggle between democratic and national-patriotic forces on the one hand and the forces of reaction and conservatism on the other. This is fully applicable to national relations.

In the first years after independence, national life developed rapidly in different regions of India. National and language conflicts were at times in the centre of the political life and political struggle. That was quite natural. In the colonial period the process of consolidation of Indian nations was deliberately hampered by the British colonial authorities. Besides, the growth of the Indian national-liberation movement pushed the problems of individual nations into the background, subordinating them to the chief goal of independence. Thus there was an accumulation of numerous unsolved national problems, and national attitudes and feelings ran high and sought an outlet. It is quite natural, therefore, that in the first years of independence, the problems of national relations had great importance in domestic politics.

One more circumstance is worth noting which greatly influenced the national climate in India and the attitude towards the national question adopted by different political forces. The partition of India and the emergence of the Kashmir question are known to have intensified the activity of separatist elements in some areas of the country. It is for this reason that the Indian leaders had to take care in working out decisions on the national question and to take into account the need to refrain from any steps which might endanger the country's unity.

Lastly, unsolved national problems and the consequent discontent of the population of the national regions were used mainly by the rightist forces to foment nationalist conflicts and to provoke language clashes which hampered the taking of radical steps towards national and linguistic delimitation and made it impossible to ensure optimal conditions for the development of nations.

The 1956 reform of the administrative and political division of India, the formation of linguistic States and the subsequent reorganisations signified, on the whole, a democratic solution to the national question. The linguistic States, which have considerable natural and economic resources as well as quite a wide range of powers granted by the Constitution, have become a form of national statehood. Their formation accelerated the processes of national consolidation and the development of national life in general, although it led to the emergence of new

centres of tension in national relations, which still remain. Due to comparatively slow rate of social development and the continued influence for this reason of traditional structures in Indian society, surviving regional sentiments and caste and communal outlooks continue to manifest themselves and hamper the normal course of the development of the nations and peoples living in India. It should also be added that there exists a still unbridged gap in the levels of the development of some regions, both within the linguistic States and throughout the country as a whole, which often serves as a source of tension and conflict.

Reactionary forces still continue their attempts to nullify the achievements of the democratic solution to the national question in India. Demands are made to proceed to a unitary form of state organization, to eliminate the linguistic States and to replace them by economic zones, or "small" States, which would not take into account national and language boundaries. The struggle concerning national, linguistic and cultural development continues although, since the beginning of the 'seventies, the general national climate in India has been gradually changing. Problems of state, or as it is called in India, of national integration, are beginning to come to the fore.

Independent India is characterised by the coincidence in time of two trends in the national question, that is, national movements and the development of national life on the one hand, and the breaking down of national barriers and the internationalisation of social intercourse, of labour and capital on the other. During the first twenty-five years of independent existence the first trend was predominant. Since the early 'seventies, there has been a shift towards the second. As early as 1967-1969, for example, the political struggle was concentrated in States where regional political parties were gaining in strength and advancing nationalist programmes, each acting in its own State. By the middle of the 'seventies the situation changed. The struggle between the democratic and reactionary forces is waged around questions which concern the vital interests of the whole country. Slogans and programmes addressed not to a representative of a particular nationality, region or community, but to an Indian, a citizen of India, have political

impact. Regional parties are tending not to act independently, but are increasingly often joining up with political groups or alliances on an all-India basis. State integration is influenced more and more by economic factors : government planning, the expansion of the public sector, the internationalisation of private capital, the functioning of the all-India market, the growing territorial mobility of the population, and so on.

The time has apparently come for a detailed study of the various aspects of the operation in India of the second trend in national development under capitalism. The present work has attempted to analyse nationality and language relations in the first twenty-five years of India's independence, when it was precisely these relations which were determining the national atmosphere in the country.

The examination of the complicated problems of relations concerning nationality and language in such a multinational state as India has great theoretical importance. It should be admitted that in works and discussions on the general theory of nation so far, the materials chiefly used are about the Soviet Union, European countries, the United States and Canada. National processes in developing countries have remained an object of special studies relating to individual countries. Apparently time is required to carry out specific studies like this one with a view to proceeding to generalisations on a continental scale and to make these generalisations supplement the Marxist theory of nation.

Specific studies of national processes in developing countries, in particular in India, are also necessary to avoid a possibly unproductive approach to these processes, considering them to be exclusive phenomena with unique specificity inherent only in certain regions of the world, or to be some sort of transitional conditions whose nature and trend of development have not been revealed with sufficient certainty, and, therefore, regarding them as peripheral phenomena in the general theory of nation. The analysis of national relations in India which we can see unfolding and developing shows that, typologically, they are quite comparable with many similar phenomena, in, for example, Europe in the era of national movements and the establishment of national states, in the era of transition from feudalism to capitalism.

It should be noted that national relations in contemporary India are formed and developed in differing conditions, that is, in conditions when the essence of the epoch is the transition from capitalism to socialism, the transition to a form of society which, for the first time in history has opened up the way to the most consistent solution of the national question in the interests of the majority of the people and to the eradication of national oppression and national conflicts from the life of society. That is why there is such great interest in India in the experience of the Soviet Union in national, linguistic and cultural development.



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