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LANGUAGE MEDIUM FOR SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION IN INDIA

PROGRESSIVES in India have long been cogitating over the language medium of Education in this country. It is generally admitted on all sides that primary and popular education is most effectively and rapidly spread through one's mother-tongue, and it is a welcome sign that the provincial and State governments have commenced to implement this sound policy. As a consequence we can confidently expect the literacy and cultural level to rise with the utmost speed.

Some sentimental patriots, however, have raised a loud cry that education, both elementary and higher, must be conducted only in the provincial language. A few of the universities have, in what seems to us an undue hurry, already launched schemes of "provincialising" all branches of education. To extend this atavistic policy to all levels and all subjects of education would, we strongly feel, be extending it too far, and the move is fraught with the grave danger of putting backward the clock of Indian Science by a few generations. We have tried

here to draw the attention of our scientists and statesmen to the more salient and important reasons for the indefensibility of adopting the provincial language for advanced education in science, research and allied subjects.

The linguistic survey of India enumerates 179 languages of which there are 15 major literary languages. All these have had a long history and an ancient origin. But it must be recognised that modern science has far outgrown the limited knowledge and variety of phraseology of our ancient language. In specialised branches of ever-growing scientific knowledge it would be almost impossible to find in Indian languages the right words for explaining natural phenomena. And even if we did coin them, the new terminology would be no less foreign than those to which we are now accustomed in English.

It is frequently argued that the inherent disadvantage of studying science in the vernacular could be overcome by translating the scientific books and papers. The expe-

rience of those who have tried it has shown that it is far from easy and practicable. We cite from a recent communication to the press on the subject by Sir Hari Singh Gour, Vice-Chancellor of the Saugor University.

"Thirty years ago, in 1918, the Nizam's Government established the Osmania University making Urdu the medium of instruction. When the University was started, they had no books in Urdu to help the University and, therefore, they appointed a Translation Committee which, after thirty years, has been able to translate into Urdu about 400 books through which education is imparted in the University. These books, according to this official report, contain 64,000 new words coined for the purpose; the result being that the language they have created in the name of Urdu is a different language consisting of coined words, which have to be studied in the class-rooms and which are as unintelligible to the public, as is, say, Chinese. The students who read in that University have to memorise these words for passing their examinations, but as these words are not in popular use, they have become a new language to be studied for examination purposes."

We might add that the Osmania University has succeeded in translating into 'Urdu' hardly 400 books in a period during which more than 40,000 volumes and countless number of papers have been published on advances in scientific subjects. Further, if every province had a different language medium in the field of higher scientific education and research, it would be clearly impossible to keep track of current activity in India and abroad, to exchange notes with workers in the field, to avoid duplication or to improve upon the work of others.

The Reference Committee on Scientific Terminology, appointed by the Government of India, seem to feel that a compromise is possible. The Committee has recommended that "well-known scientific terms already in use in the Indian languages with specific and unambiguous meanings and forming an integral part of the language should continue to be used, whereas for other scientific words, the international terminology should be incorporated. Such scientific terminology should deal not only with the names of objects met with in the field of science, but should also cover scientific processes. This will simplify the problem for the future when new scientific words are bound to be coined in the different parts of the world, including India". "This", the Committee feels, "does not place our students and scientists at a greater disadvantage than those in other countries in the matter of making world scientific literature easily

available to them and also in making the work of the Indian scientists available to scientists abroad."

In their recommendations the Reference Committee have, no doubt, eliminated the unnecessary task of coining new scientific terms in the provincial languages; but other disadvantages persist. A graduate of one province cannot go to another Indian University for higher studies unless he masters the language of science of the new University. The difficulty does not end here. A graduate of one province cannot hope to get employment in another province or State merely on account of the language difficulty. The foregoing reasons amply prove that it will be a retrograde policy to introduce the medium of provincial language in teaching higher classes in science.

The introduction of Hindi as the medium of instruction in all the Indian Universities would be a remedy for many of the evils pointed above. But it is not the ideal. For, a student of the B.Sc. or B.Sc. (Hons.) will be expected to specialise in a large number of advanced scientific subjects for which he has to consult a good number of up-to-date scientific books and journals. As pointed out already it would be an impossible task and an utter waste of intellectual labour to try to translate every book or journal of scientific interest. It will be needless to emphasise that one would be in the dark if one has to depend upon translations into Hindi for one's research work.

The study of the advanced scientific subjects in an international language would be the ideal, and English is such a language to-day. It is the most widely spoken single language in the world. It has all the advantages necessary for an international language which the advocates of Hindi or Hindustani cannot deny. And in a world that is fast growing smaller the need for the International Language in India is at least as imperative as for a National language.

It is often pointed out by the advocates of vernacularisation that most of the advanced countries where English is not the spoken language are having their mother-tongue for the medium of instruction in advanced scientific studies, and that India could follow their example. But these enthusiasts forget the important fact that English has already become the *lingua franca* of the educated classes in India, and it is less troublesome to continue with English as