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English Elitism, Trust Deficit, and the Evolution of the Hindi-Speaking Intelligentsia in 1950s India

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In the context of global multilingualism, India presents an odd mosaic of linguistic diversity. As with several multilingual political projects of the 20th century, Indian lawmakers, intellectuals, and activists brought a linguistically heterogeneous region together under a common project without threatening the survival of any linguistic group. Yet, at the same time, there were sufficiently loud voices within the country that wanted to impose Hindi as the sole national language under the one language, religion, and nation model. While some vast multilingual projects disintegrated (the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) and others successfully imposed one national language (Indonesia), India continues to survive with a tensed multilingual model where there is no national language, four language families, 22 scheduled languages, 99 non-scheduled languages, around 270 “mother tongue groups” and 1.4 billion people.

In this essay, I study the Hindi-speaking socialist intellectuals in 1950s postcolonial India who began a social and cultural movement named *Angrezi Hatao* (Banish English). This movement aimed to remove English as the culturally hegemonic language from India. Furthermore, the Indian Socialists' conception of multilingualism was one where Hindi, the

largest of Indian languages, could not replace English as the culturally hegemonic language. In this essay, I ask, if the Banish English movement was aimed to create a more democratic model of multilingualism, why did it fail? I argue that one possible reason is that there was distrust from some of the non-Hindi-speaking states in India towards this movement. This distrust results from three different conceptions of Hindi by three actors: the Socialist Party central leadership, the Socialist Party workers, and the non-socialist local actors. In this essay, I shall take the case study of Punjab state between 1955 and 1957. Finally, by examining trust conceptually, I hope to shed light on the psychological processes that shaped the Hindi Socialists during the very early decades of the Indian nation-building project.

This essay will be divided into five sections. The first section will briefly explain the Banish English movement, its origins, and its evolution. I will explain this in the context of language politics in India during the 1950s and 60s. The second section will focus on the central leadership of the Socialist Party. The third section will focus on the Socialist Party Workers in Punjab. The fourth section will look at the responses from Punjab towards the works of the Central Party leadership and the Socialist Party workers. In the last section, I will bring together the three conceptions of Hindi by these three actors and try to connect this to the experience of distrust that leaders in the central party may have experienced. My division is based on examining two letters to the editor and one correspondence, where both discuss the development of the Banish English movement in Punjab in the late 1950s. Therefore, as I read more documents related to the Banish English movement and the Socialist Parties in India, these categories may get more complex. However, the purpose of this division is to show that different actors involved with the Banish English movement had different conceptions of Hindi, which are not complementary to

each other. More importantly, my larger aim is also to understand what trust conceptually is and the consequences of distrust, especially during the formative years of independent India's political and cultural project.

Section I: History of the *Angrezi Hatao* (Banish English) Movement

The Banish English Movement was a social and political movement led by the Praja Samajwadi (People's Socialist) Party. While the earliest reference to this movement is in 1955, it is unclear when it ended. However, one can safely assume that the movement continued in various forms until the late 1960s. The movement was defined negatively—the aim was to remove English as the elite colonial language from economic, cultural, and political domains in India. While the agenda was pan-Indian, this movement gained greater traction in the Hindi-speaking belt in Northern India and, to a lesser degree, in the Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra and the Gujarati-speaking state of Gujarat. While the two Socialist parties were active in Southern and Eastern India, preliminary data suggests that the movement was less effective in these regions.

Banish English is primarily associated with the leading political activist, intellectual, and Member of Parliament, Ram Manohar Lohia. However, while Lohia was the *de facto* leader, other leaders at various levels were associated with Banish English. More importantly, this movement extended into grassroots-level politics, with meetings and agitations occurring at district and state levels. The demand of these leaders through this movement was primarily to remove English. However, as I shall explain in the subsequent sections, a closer examination of

the structure and organization of languages in India created significant obstacles for the Socialist parties to move ahead with their demands.

SECTION II: Central Party Leadership

While the Socialist Party in India has its origins in the Indian National Congress during British colonialism, the party's evolution in the subsequent decades meant that the Socialist leaders broadly saw themselves as making Socialism relevant to the Indian context by integrating the Socialist ideals of a classless society with Gandhian principle of Civil Disobedience. This allowed the Socialists to be critical of both Nehru's Indian National Congress and the Communist Parties. For example, in correspondence with Prem Bhasin, Ram Manohar Lohia refers to the Indian Communists as "extra-territorial"¹. Similarly, in 1953, J.B. Kripalani, who was the Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party, accused the Indian Communists of advancing the interests of the Soviet Union and World Communism without addressing the limitations of the Soviet model of Communism. Additionally, Kripalani accuses the Communists of being disruptive without considering the consequences of these disruptions. For example, Kripalani accuses the Communists of forming alliances with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party in the state of Tamil Nadu and the Akali Dal in the state of Punjab, and he considers both parties as separatists that have an ethnic-nationalist conception of their respective linguistic identities. Therefore, the Communists are implicitly supporting claims of ethnic nationalism,

¹ Letter from Ram Manohar Lohia to Prem Bhasin, Lucknow, 14 July 1964. *Prem Bhasin Papers*, Section IV, Serial No. 21, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

which is contradictory to the principle of both the Communists and Socialists in India².

Similarly, Acharya Narendra Dev, the PSP president, gave a speech in 1955 on the uniqueness of Indian multilingualism while simultaneously criticizing the Indian Communists. For Narendra Dev, India was a “multilingual nation” and not a “multi-national state” like Switzerland. Additionally, the Indian multilingual model should not be compared to the Soviet Union since Russian people are labeled as “elder brothers.” In contrast, Narendra Dev argues that Indian multilingualism must be based on equality where no linguistic group can be paternalistic irrespective of the size in numbers.³

SECTION III: Socialist Party Workers

While Lohia, Kripalani, and Dev seem to address a healthy flourishing of regional languages by developing an Indian model of multilingualism, the Socialist party workers did not necessarily believe these ideas during their agitations to remove English. Here, I take a small example of the Banish English movement in Punjab in the late 1950s. Sitaram Rai was the regional leader of the Socialist Party in Khagariya, in modern-day Bihar. In December 1957, Rai wrote a letter to the Central Socialist Party office in Hyderabad enquiring about the central leadership’s view on Hindi vis-a-vis Punjab and Punjabi. The *Angrezi Hatao* agitations began in Punjab around 1955, and this correspondence comes after two years of agitations. Here, Rai asks

² Speech by JB Kripalani, Betel, 14 August 1953. *Prem Bhasin Papers*, Section IV, Serial No. 19, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³ Deva, Acharya Narendra. “Socialism: A Cultural Movement,” In *Towards Socialist Society*, ed. Brahmanand (New Delhi: Centre of Applied Politics, 1979), 412.

the Central leadership of the Socialist Party to clearly and unambiguously explain their position on the status of Hindi as the national language. Rai claims that Socialist party workers and intellectuals working in Punjab are uncomfortable with the fact that the central leadership has remained silent on the status of Hindi across India. Moreover, beyond a few speeches from Lohia, there is no clear statement on the Socialist Party's position on secularism.⁴

The Prime Minister of the Socialist Party Central leadership in Hyderabad responds to Rai and claims that the party wants Hindi to be the language of administration of the Central Government and not the states. More importantly, this letter highlights that some members of the Socialist Party's central leadership were concerned about the Socialist Party workers agitating against Gurmukhi in Punjab. The letter states in a tone of concern that:

हिन्दी और गुरुमुखी को एक दूसरे के सहयोग से चलाना चाहिए। दोनों देश की भाषा हैं और इनका साथ साथ विकास भी होना है। यही कोशिश होनी चाहिए। लेकिन पंजाब के आंदोलन में गुरुमुखी से झगड़ा है, इसलिए उसकी बुनियाद गलत हो जाती है।⁵

Hindi and Gurmukhi should work with each other's cooperation. Both are this country's languages, and they should develop together. This should be our effort. But the movement in Punjab is fighting against Gurmukhi, therefore it is foundationally flawed.

⁴ Letter from Sitaram Rai to Central Party Leadership, Khagriya, 5 December 1957. *Socialist Party Papers*, Serial No. 131, p. 341-342, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁵ Letter from Central Party Leadership to Sitaram Rai, Hyderabad, 16 December 1957. *Socialist Party Papers*, Serial No. 131, p. 340, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Instead of focusing on removing English from Punjab, the letter expresses its surprise at the Socialist workers' anti-Gurmukhi⁶ stance. Furthermore, instead of considering this a minor issue that can be corrected within the party, the letter highlights this as a foundationally flawed problem. Calling this a foundationally flawed position is, therefore, an acknowledgment of the tensions within the Socialist Party but also subtly refers to the risks of communalizing languages in India.

SECTION IV: Non-Socialist Party actors in Punjab

The third set of actors needs to be more explicitly mentioned in these documents. However, the fact that the Socialist Party workers agitated against Gurmukhi in Punjab and the tone of the response to Rai suggests that there may have existed discontent from some people in Punjab who may have viewed this agitation as a threat to their linguistic identity. Here, I am focusing on two letters to the editor that I found helpful in shedding more light on these actors.

Before 1961, Gokul Chand Narang wrote a letter to the editor stating that Punjabi is not a separate language and should fall under Hindi. Narang was a barrister and former Minister for Local Self-Government in pre-Partition Punjab. More importantly, he was a member of the Arya Samaj. Narang repeats Lohia's claims in a speech in Allahabad that Punjabi is "only a branch of Hindi just as Maithili and Rajasthani." Echoing Lohia's speech, Narang argues that Punjabi

⁶ Gurmukhi generally refers to the script in which Punjabi is written in India. However, in this context Gurmukhi can also refer to Punjabi.

should not be a category in the 1961 Census.⁷ (SP Papers, Serial 619, p. 91) Countering these claims, JB. Bali, an unknown reader, writes a letter to the editor criticizing the credibility of Lohia while simultaneously questioning Narang's awareness of South Asian History. More importantly, Bali criticizes Narang for assuming that a more extended pre-Islamic history of Hindi would make it a language of value. On the contrary, Bali argues that it is not the age of a language that matters but the works produced in these languages. Bali writes:

It was only a century ago with the writings of Bharatendu Harishchander that Hindi, or what was then called Khari Boli, began to enjoy a literary status. Punjabi attained such a position about half a century later. This should not, however, make Hindi protagonists raise their claims too high. Tamil and Bengali have much older literary traditions than Hindi and the artistic achievement of Punjabi too, does not fall short of Hindi.⁸ (Ibid. 92)

For Bali, the value of a language comes from its artistic achievements instead of the age of its literary tradition. He claims that Punjabi literary achievements are on par with Hindi despite being younger than Hindi, while Bangla and Tamil are much older than Hindi with their rich literary works.⁹

⁷ "Census and Punjabi", Letter to the editor from Gokul Chand Narang, Delhi, undated. *Socialist Party Papers*, Serial No. 610, p. 91, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁸ "Census and Punjabi", Letter to the editor from JB Bali, Delhi, undated. *Socialist Party Papers*, Serial No. 610, p. 92, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁹ Ibid., 92

These letters to the editor highlight two aspects of Hindi and its proponents. First, there is a conflict between the self-representation of Punjabi linguistic identity and the perception of Punjabi by the Hindi speakers. Bali's response to Narang suggests that not only should Punjabi be considered a separate language but that it is also a language of substantial cultural value. However, Narang, citing Lohia, views the existence of Punjabi as a matter of injustice towards the Hindus of Punjab.¹⁰

Second, this debate between two newspaper readers highlights the distinction between two conceptions of tradition. Bali's emotionally charged response to Narang shows that Tamil and Bangla's claims to tradition are based on time, while Punjabi claims value in artistic achievements. The implied criticism of Hindi places its proponents in a difficult position. If Hindi's value is predicated on a longer lineage, then Tamil and Bangla will always be more valuable than Hindi. Alternatively, if Hindi's value is predicated on the quality of its literary production, then Punjabi is equally valuable as Hindi.

SECTION V: Different Conceptions and Issues of Trust

The categories of actors that I mentioned here have different conceptions of Hindi and other regional languages in postcolonial India. The central leadership of the Socialist Party conceived Hindi as a non-paternalistic regional language. The party presented itself as more attuned to Indian needs than the Communists. By criticizing the Soviet Union, the Socialists also portrayed themselves as more autonomous in their understanding of Indian linguistic concerns.

¹⁰ Ibid., 91

While the agenda was to agitate against the use of English in Punjab, the party workers seemed to have a different conception of Hindi vis-a-vis the Socialist central leadership. The Socialist Party workers' agitation against Gurmukhi appears at least to resonate with Narang's view that Punjabi is not a separate language but, at most, a dialect within Hindi.

These categories of actors are not exhaustive and are strictly based on the case studies that I chose to focus on. Therefore, these categories may be modified as I go through more sources. However, by dividing these actors into three categories, I argue that there is distrust from some people in Punjab towards the Banish English movement. The Socialist project, as depicted by the central party leadership, is about removing English as a culturally hegemonic language in India. But the Socialist Party workers in Punjab also seem to see Gurmukhi as a threat. What is it a threat to? If Narang's letter is to be believed, at least one possible explanation is that Gurmukhi threatens the value of Hindi. So, suppose the central leadership states that Punjabi is a distinct Indian language and deserves to co-exist with Hindi, but their workers are agitating against Gurmukhi. Why should people in Punjab trust the Banish English movement? I argue that this potential lack of trust is productive for my research because it allows us to see various conceptions of Hindi, regional languages, and the psychological associations with these identities.

Trust (or distrust) is a relationship between two parties. As Collins et al. state in their introduction to *The Moral Psychology of Trust*, "we almost never simply trust someone. Instead, we trust someone *with something*."¹¹ In this essay, which will develop into my dissertation

¹¹ Collins et al., "The Centrality of Trust in Moral and Social Life," in *The Moral Psychology of Trust*, (London: Lexington Books, 2023), 4.

chapter, I want to focus on the Socialist Party leaders as the recipients of trust. There are at least two kinds of trust deficit that I have seen in the archives related to the Banish English movement. The first is from the non-socialist people of Punjab, as explained in this essay. This could potentially extend beyond Punjab into other states, such as the Tamil-speaking state of Tamil Nadu. The second kind could be broader—it is related to the general credibility of a Hindi-speaking intellectual on issues related to the nation-building project.

Ganesh Mantri, a participant in the Banish English movement, published an article on April 5, 1970, in the cultural Hindi magazine *Dharmyug*. This article focuses on the discussions in the Banish English meetings in Ahmedabad. More importantly, for our purposes, this article highlights how the movement was caricatured by the English newspapers and the English intelligentsia who wrote in these newspapers. The supporters of the Banish English movement are described as (1) conservative (*dakiyanus*), parochial (*sankeernvaad*), fanatic (*kattarpant*), and backward (*pichde hue*).¹² Furthermore, in response to these accusations, Mantri criticizes the English-speaking elite for perceiving themselves as the carriers of the nation's intelligence and wisdom.¹³ Finally, taking the English-speaking elites as an example, Mantri argues that removing English is a precondition to the removal of Englishness (*angreziyat*)¹⁴.

Mantri's criticism of the English-speaking elite raises two points. First, the English-speaking Indian elites ostensibly are credible as speakers on more significant Indian issues due to their linguistic identity. Conversely, it may also be true that the Hindi-speaking intellectuals are perhaps not taken as seriously due to their linguistic identity and not their credentials. The

¹² Mantri, Ganesh, *Dharmyug*, April 5, 1970, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

distrust due to their linguistic identity could be claimed as a form of moral harm done, especially if one considers the democratic nature of multilingualism that the Socialist leaders advocated for. Therefore, the case study of Punjab and Ganesh Mantri's attacks on the English-speaking elites could fall under the conceptual analysis of trust that I hope to do in subsequent sections of my chapter.

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