

A LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA

(Gokak Movement)

-B. MALLIKARJUN*

The sociological analysis of a movement rarely takes language into serious consideration. A language becomes a centre of an agitation in two contexts. One is the movement in which religion, ethnicity, politics or something else is the focal point. In order to sensitize or to mobilize the public opinion, language or an aspect of a language is used as one of the tools. Another one is a movement in which a language or an aspect of language use is the focal point, and religion, ethnicity or politics is brought in to consolidate or to break a movement.

In India, in the past decades, there had been many language movements. For example, the choice of the classical or modern colloquial style of Telugu for educational purposes; the movement in Tamil to purify Tamil by excluding or replacing Sanskrit forms; the Sindhi movement for its inclusion in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution; the language movements in the Hindi region to get recognition for one of the forms of Hindi as the literary language or choice of a literary Hindi among several competing standards; and the movements in non-Hindi States opposing recognition of Hindi as the Sole Official language. The present language movement in Karnataka stands unique because it aims at giving the sole first language status to Kannada in Karnataka. This movement has no parallel in any part of the country.

The linguistic profile based on the 1971 census gives a picture of multilingual Karnataka. In Karnataka, 166 mother

* Dr. B. Matlikaljun is the Academic Secretary of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. He has written several books e.g. Kannada, Nudi (1981), Vocabulary Education (1963), An Introduction to Kannada Script, and a dissertation on A Descriptive Analysis of Yerava (1982).

tongues are spoken. Out of these mother tongues, 9 mother tongues are spoken by nearly 99% of the total population of the State. Kannada is, spoken by 65.94%, Urdu 9.00%, Telugu 8.17%, Marathi 4.05%, Tulu 3.56%, Tamil 3.36%, Konkani 1.96%, Lambani 1.16% and Malayalam by 1.41 % of the total population. These mother tongues are not evenly distributed in different parts of the State. Out of 19 districts, in two districts, Kolar and South Canara, Kannada is spoken by only 24.29% and 20.44% of the people. Here Telugu and Tulu are spoken by 54.64% and 47.43% of the people respectively. More than half of the Telugu speakers are in Bangalore and Kolar districts. Of the total Tamil population of Karnataka, 42% reside in Bangalore. In 11 districts Kannada, is spoken by more than 70% of the, people. in Bangalore city, Kannada is spoken by 31.80% and Tamil, Telugu and Urdu by 25.37%, 16.52% and 13.91 % respectively. Nearly 45% of Marathi speakers are in Belgaum district. Bangalore, South Canara and Coorg districts account for 80 % of the, Malayalam speakers in the State. In Kolar Gold Fields, Kannada is the mother tongue of 3.76% and Tamil. Telugu and Urdu are of 67.49%, 13.45% and 9.14% respectively of the population.

The language movement that is being analyzed here is population known as the Gokak Movement. For the first time in Karnataka, a deep and widespread language movement took shape after the linguistic reorganization of the States in 1956. The focus of this movement when it originated was on the language choice in the curriculum of secondary education.

The Gokak Movement on the basis of recognizable turn of events can be classified into five phases.

- i. The language formula before the setting up of the Gokak Committee and the implications there-of.
- ii. The implications of commissioning the Gokak Committee.
- iii. The linguistic situation after submission of the Gokak Committee.
- iv. Revision of the recommendations of the Gokak Committee.
- v. Re-revision of the recommendations of the Gokak Committee;

FIRST PHASE

Karnataka has had a liberal language policy in education. There was provision for studying of Kannada, Sanskrit, English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi as first language. However, the Government decided to delete Sanskrit from the first language list in 1979 and included it in the second or third language list. But the same Government did not remain in power to implement its policy decision. The subsequent Government reconsidered the stand taken.. by the previous one. and decided to maintain status quo. At this point, the language formula that was available for the secondary school system is given below.

First Language:

Any one of the following languages:

Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, English and Sanskrit.

(150 marks)

or

A composite course of one of the following languages:

Hiridi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi carrying 100 marks and one of the following languages viz., Sanskrit, Arabic, Hindi and Persian.

Second Language:

Those who study English as First Language will study one of the following languages as Second Language:

Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi. Those who do not study English as First Language will study English as Second Language.

(100 marks)

Third Language:

- Those who study Kannada as First Language will study Sanskrit or Hindi as Third Language.
- Those who study Kannada as Second Language will study Hindi as Third Language.
- Those who do not study Kannada either as First Language or as Second Language will study Kannada as Third Language.

The Third Language is an optional subject for examination, carrying 50 marks

Here 'it' Was possible for a student to choose one of the 8 languages including Sanskrit as first language and study it for 150 marks. Also, third language was not compulsory but it carries 50 marks.

The decision of the government to restore the status of Sanskrit was 'not ' accepted by the anti-Sanskrit lobby. They put forth many arguments against the inclusion of Sanskrit as one of the first languages. The first argument was that Sanskrit is not the mother tongue of any person in the state, and it is neither spoken nor written by anybody. Hence, in order to facilitate the students adopting Sanskrit as first language, the syllabus and the content of the Sanskrit text book were made easy. Scoring in Sanskrit was easy and also almost all the rank holders had Sanskrit as their first language. If their marks in Sanskrit were not taken into consideration, they would have missed their rank. Another argument put forth against Sanskrit was that Sanskrit was a threat to the development of Kannada because the Kannada students were opting for Sanskrit instead of Kannada, there by not learning Kannada during schooling. It was possible for the students to complete schooling with Sanskrit, English and Hindi and without studying Kannada at all. The next argument put forth is that all other languages were learnt in the primary schools.

Some of the other arguments were as follows: no state other than Karnataka had Sanskrit as one of the first languages. The Sanskrit language is studied by Brahmin Students, and retaining it as such is a part of the game played by them. Having Sanskrit as first language is not only an advantage for them ,but also is an oppression on Kannada mother tongue students.

Throughout the movement pro-Sanskrit argument concentrated on the theme that Sanskrit is an integral part of the life and culture of the nation; it has enriched Kannada; it is a cultural language and the deletion of the same from the first language list would ignore the philosophy underlying the three language formula.

The controversy regarding Sanskrit provided a forum for the Kannada protagonists to raise questions about not only the status of Kannada, but also the status of languages in the school curriculum in general. When the situation became tense, the government appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. V. K. Gokak with the following terms of reference.

- i. Should Sanskrit remain as the subject for study in the school syllabus?
- ii. If so, how to retain it without its being an alternative for Kannada?
- iii. Would it be proper to have Kannada as a compulsory subject as per the Three Language Formula and should the option of the selecting the remaining two languages be left to the students themselves?(1)

SECOND PHASE

After the commissioning of the Gokak Committee, the anti-Sanskrit people were not happy with the constitution of the Committee because of its composition. Out of total 7 members, it had an English Professor as the Chairman and Sanskrit and Kannada scholars as members with an Officer of the Education Department as Member Secretary. It was feared that this committee may give a pro-Sanskrit judgment. The committee was greeted with slogans such as 'Gokak Go Back' in places like Dharwar. It rarely had any peaceful meetings to have a dialogue with people.

THIRD PHASE

The Gokak Committee recommended the language formula stated below:

First Language:

Kannada as the sole compulsory language

150 marks

Second Language:

100 marks for one of the following:

- Modern Indian Languages: Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Urdu, Gujarathi, Hindi.
- English
- Ancient languages: Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Latin, Greek.

Third Language:

50 marks. One of the remaining subjects other than the selected second language can be selected from amongst the second language (a), (b) and (c) groups. Third language is also a language compulsory for examination.
(2)

After the submission of the Gokak Report wherein Kannada was given the status of sole compulsory language with 150 marks, the anti-Sanskrit sentiments turned into pro-Kannada.

In the context of these recommendations which exceeded the expectations of anti-Sanskritists, they insisted upon the acceptance of the report in toto. So far, none of the linguistic/religious minorities were in the picture. For the first time, the linguistic minorities raised objections to the recommendations of the Gokak Committee on the ground that the committee had taken a decision without having a member of the minority groups in the committee. They dubbed the report as anti-minority.

The arguments put forth by the leaders and the supporters of the minority are that (1) the Gokak Committee had gone beyond the terms of reference that were assigned to it; (2) it proposed a language formula which is anti-constitutional and against Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The minorities feel that the survival of their mother tongue is in question in the secondary education system of the state. The study of Kannada by the linguistic minority children, they feel, would lead to, the neglect of his/her mother tongue and studying of the same in the lower level as second or third language may fail to maintain their mother tongue and alienate them not only from their cultural base but also from the Kannada cultural base. None of the minorities spoke against learning Kannada as a compulsory language. Their opposition was only against learning Kannada as the sole compulsory first language. If the minority children have to study Kannada as the sole first language, the Kannada mother tongue children, they contend, would have an edge over these children. For example, with the same marks and the same curricula the students of Urdu mother tongue will get less marks and have less chances of entrance into the institutions of higher education leading to curtailment of job opportunities. Some of the other arguments put forth by the minorities are that Kannada is not a fully developed language, the required number of teachers are not there in Urdu schools to teach Kannada, etc.

The linguistic/religious minorities went to the extent of saying that an over-emphasis on regional language might affect national integration and acceptance of the Gokak report might generate and intensify demands for more linguistic fragmentation.

One of the spokesmen of the linguistic minority group said that "this is nothing short of a cultural imperialism and we shall resist it".

In this movement, Urdu speakers took lead over all other minority mother tongue speakers. The following reasons could be identified for the same.

- i. they are the largest single minority group of the state
- ii. they are distributed throughout the state; in both urban (53.7%) and rural (46.3%) areas,
- iii. the availability of state level leadership to them.
- iv. they have a religion as solidarity factor,
- v. most of them are part of the Kannada speaking area for centuries together, but retained their identity with their mother tongue,
- vi. their socio-economic backwardness.

The minority mother-tongue speakers like Tamil and Malayalam were next to Urdu speakers in the movement. The following reasons could be identified for their participation and yet not being in the forefront like the Urdu speakers.

- i. their better socio-economic standards,
- ii. their concentration in two or three parts of the State. In case of Tamil, 42 % of the total Tamil population in Karnataka are in the capital, that is, Bangalore. The figures for both the languages are as follows:
Urban 68.2%, rural 31.8%; Malayalam, urban 33.3%, rural 66.7%,
- iii. lack of state-level leaders for them,
- iv. many of them are recent migrants due to the process of industrialization,
- v. lack of religion as a solidarity factor.

Though Telugus are next to Urdu speakers in Karnataka, they hardly participated in the movement, and this may be because of their acceptance of Kannada.

There are substantial number of Tulu, Lambani, Kodagu and other minority mother tongue speakers in Karnataka. It can be said that they did not participate in the language movement probably because:

- i. their languages are written in the Kannada script only; which indicates a degree of integration
- ii. their mother tongues and Kannada are complementarily distributed in nonformal and formal domains respectively. Their mother tongues are restricted to the home domains,
- iii. almost all of them are in the places where they are fully exposed to Kannada as a language from their birth.

Pro-Sanskrit people were also identified with the linguistic minorities and they said that their fight for Sanskrit was the fight for linguistic minorities.

FOURTH PHASE

By looking into these arguments, the government which had accepted Gokak Committee Report in the month of December 1981, reconsidered its views and on 30th April 1982 issued a revised order according to which the first language list consisted of Kannada (M.T.), Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, English, Hindi and made provision for learning any other two languages, with 100 marks each. The same is given below:

1. At the Secondary School level, the language pattern to be adopted will be as follows:
 - A. First Language:**
Kannada or Mother Tongue (Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, English, Hindi) to carry - 150 marks.

B. Two other languages from the following:

Kannada, Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi to carry - 100 marks

Note: (1) Students offering a language other than Kannada as First Language will study Kannada as a compulsory language and any one of the remaining languages (from Group B) both of which will be examination subjects for the S.S.L.C.

(2) Students offering Kannada as First Language will take any Two of the above Languages (from B Group) except Kannada.

2. Students coming from outside the State and joining VIII, IX or X standard and also those who have not studied any of the Languages listed as First Language may be allowed to take Additional English or Hindi as First Language.
3. The teaching of Kannada from III Standard in non-Kannada schools will commence from the academic year 1982-83 itself and the language pattern for the High Schools prescribed in para 1 above will come into effect from the academic year 1987-88.
4. Students joining VIII Standard from the academic year 1982-83 cannot take Sanskrit as First Language or' as Composite First Language. They can take Sanskrit as Third Language. This system will continue till the language pattern prescribed in para 1 above comes into force from the academic year 1987- 88.(3)

It is to be noted that the government for the first time discontinued using the terms such as second language and third language. This reconsideration of the Gokak Report by the government was not accepted by the pro-Kannada lobby. One of the Kannada champions. stated that 'if Kannada is not given the primacy it deserves in Karnataka, Assam may be re-enacted' .

Dharwar, the central place from which this language movement was maintained from the beginning, has 80.09% Kannada speaking population. The pro-Kannada movement was not very vigorous in other districts such as Bidar (51.21 %), Coorg (40.05%), North Canara (56.58%), and South Canara (20.44 %) districts. The Kannada speaking population are mainly rural (83.3%) and rarely urban (16.7%). The districts in which it was strong, it was strong both in urban and rural areas.

The pro-Kannada people put forth the argument that if Kannada is not given the status of the first language, it can never develop. Just in the name of protecting the minority rights, the majority rights cannot be curtailed and injustice done to them. It is not possible to raise the status of Urdu to the first language

and make it sit by the side of Kannada. If the linguistic minorities are ready to learn English why cannot they learn Kannada? When Muslims have assimilated in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and in Kerala, why can't they assimilate in Karnataka too by learning Kannada? The percentage of Urdu speakers in relation to Muslims some of the states are as follows:

States	Muslims	Urdu speakers	Urdu speakers in relation to Muslims
Kerala	19.50	0.053	0.273
Tamil Nadu	5.1	1.84	36.119
West Bengal	20.45	2.144	10.485
Karnataka	10.62	8.99	84.699

They put forth the argument that the rights are denied to Kannadigas in the neighbouring states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra. Then why should Karnataka extend the rights to the people who are denying the same to the Kannadigas? They went to the extent of saying that if the Constitution says that the minorities rights should be protected we should protest against the Constitution itself:

It was claimed that Gokak Committee report is a remedy for a multi-lingual country like India and that it is a model. People who are not ready to learn Kannada in Karnataka should go back to the places where their mother tongues are spoken. Also the pro-Kannada people recognised that in 10 out of 19 districts in Karnataka, majority of the minority languages are spread. Such a situation can exist only in Karnataka because of the liberal and open-mindedness of the Kannadigas. In order to examine such a claim some data were quoted from the 1971 Census.

Percentage of Kannada mother tongue people in some neighbouring states		Percentage of Malayalam/Tamil/Telugu/Marathi mother tongue people in Karnataka	
State	% age	% age	Language
Kerala	0.37	1.41	Malayalam
Tamil Nadu	2.56	3.56	Tamil
Andhra Pradesh	0.98	8.17	Telugu
Maharashtra	1.54	4.05	Marathi

According to this, there are 1.41 % of Malayalis in Karnataka whereas only 0.37 % Kannadigas are in Kerala. Similarly 3.56% of Tamilians are in Karnataka and 2.56% of Kannadigas are in Tamil Nadu. And in Karnataka 8.17% of Telugus are residing whereas only 0.98% Kannadigas are in Andhra Pradesh,

similarly 4.05 % of Marathi speaking people live in Karnataka whereas only 1.54% of Kannada speaking people are in Maharashtra.

Though the language movement began with a focus on language in education, as the movement gained momentum, it involved issues like language use in administration, judiciary and mass communication. It was insisted that Kannada should be studied by non-Kannada speakers because Kannada is the language of administration. Also it was argued that Kannada would not develop until and unless English ceases to be used as the language in administration and as a medium of instruction. It was insisted that Kannada should be the language of judiciary since it had enjoyed that status in the past.

The Urdu speakers at this stage demanded that the present 15 minutes a week programme broadcast by AIR, Banga lore be increased because 9 % of the population of the state speak the same as their mother tongue.

FIFTH PHASE

The government reconsidered its order dated 30th April 1982 and issued another order on 20th July 1982 which is given below:

A. First Language

(to carry 125 marks)

Kannada shall be the sole first language

B. Two Other Languages from the following

(to carry 100 marks each)

Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Malayalam and Kannada

Note:--15 grace marks shall be given for a period of ten years (a) in the first language examination to students whose mother tongue is not Kannada; and (b) in Hindi examination to students who study Hindi and whose mother tongue is not Hindi(4).

Here it was declared that Kannada would be the sole first language carrying 125 marks and the student can select any two languages out of 11 languages, which would carry 100 marks each. The analysis of this language formula indicates the following:

1. There is singular lack of understanding of concepts like 'mother tongue,' 'first language' and the strategy of Language use in education in a multilingual society. Expressions like 'assimilation of the minorities,' 'main-stream' etc., have been used in a manner which proves this point.

2. The language formula that emerges from the Government of Karnataka's decision stands out as an exceptional case where a regional (majority) language is ascribed a special status of 'sole first language'. and is made compulsory language for all students irrespective of their mother tongues with the same syllabus and enhanced marks. .

3. The language formula of the Government of Karnataka makes provision for the study of three languages in the education system. . However, it does not grade the languages as second language, third language in terms of pedagogical concept nor does it do so in terms of chronology of introduction. The sole first language carries 125 marks, the other two languages carry 100 marks each.

4. The language formula of the Government of Karnataka makes Kannada an obligatory 'sole First Language' and denies an opportunity to the Urdu, Tamil, etc., linguistic minorities to study their mother tongue as first language. In order to compensate for this inherent disadvantage of non-Kannada students, 15 grace marks are awarded to such linguistic minorities for the study of Kannada as first language.

In this context two points are to be noted:

- i. minority language speaking. students who have already accepted Kannada as mother tongue may try to misuse this provision of grace marks by reverting to minority mother tongue, and
- ii. the allocation of grace marks is likely to condone under-achievement in Kannada and thus frustrate the very purpose.

5. Some implications of the possible language choices by the students under this formula of the Government of Karnataka are as follows:

- i. The Kannada mother tongue student has an advantage over students of other mother tongues. He has Kannada as first language. He can also choose Kannada as second language. And he can choose English, and one other Indian language listed including Sanskrit or Hindi because of the advantage of 15 grace marks in Hindi.

In case he chooses Kannada as first and second language, the three language formula is defeated as he can pass SSLC with two languages and even without English and Hindi.

- ii. The Urdu mother tongue student has to take Kannada as the first language. He might select Urdu as one of the other two languages. The one other language .would be normally English. Thus Hindi, one of the languages of the three language formula fails to form a part of his education. If he desires to take up Hindi, then his mother tongue Urdu does not form part of his education.

The same would be the case of students of minority communities whose mother tongue is either Tamil, Marathi, Telugu or Malayalam. (Anyhow, one of the two languages of the three-language formula would suffer.)

In this context it is to be noted that normally a student having a literate language such as Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, etc. as mother tongue would not be ready to exclude his mother tongue from his education.

Religious-and political dimensions of the Language Movement

In the initial stages of the language movement, anti-Sanskrit movement was strong. Sanskrit was identified as the language of the Brahmins, and hence as an act of opposition to the process of Sanskritization, the same was dropped from the first language list. The moment the government changed hands thus bringing a change from non-Brahmin to a Brahmin orientation, the position of Sanskrit was restored at the request of a religious head. Having opposed the appointment of the Gokak Committee, the interested parties alleged that the government was expecting a report favorable towards Sanskrit. When it did not happen, it was alleged that the acceptance of the Gokak Report was delayed for this reason. The pro-Kannada agitation committee had its firm hold in Dharwar which is the base for the Lingayats. As and when the movement was gaining momentum, the action committee invited all the religious heads to support the pro-Kannada movement. Most of the Lingayat religious heads supported the movement. Fifteen Veerasiva religious mutts in the state urged the government to accord Kannada the sole first language status in the school curriculum. The Brahmin religious heads opposed it. Most of the important leaders of this pro-Kannada group were Lingayats. Hence many papers called this movement as one sponsored by the Lingayats who are numerically superior in Karnataka. This was supported by the argument that ever since the Lingayats lost political power, they were looking for a platform and the language movement provided such a platform.

When the pro-Kannada movement was strong, the Urdu speaking population (9 %) considered it to be hostile to their religion and asserted that Islam (10:63%) is in danger and declared jihad'. It is said that even Muslims who had Kannada as their mother tongue started to speak in Urdu and identify themselves with Urdu. It may be mentioned in this connection that as early as 1881 and 1891 the Urdu representatives in the then Praja Pratinidhi Sabha had demanded Kannada Education for Urdu speakers. The All Karnataka Urdu Conference had also spoken in favor of Kannada education. However the demand for 'sole, first language' status for Kannada not only welded all Urdu speakers, but also Muslims together and set them against Kannada.

Another important demand that was put forth during this period of the language movement was- the demand of the Karnataka Catholic Christian'

Kannada Sangh. It demanded that in Bangalore churches, mass should be held in Kannada. At the same time it was alleged that the Tamil Christians were adamant and that Tamil was imposed on children studying in the educational institutions run by the church. They were asked to reconcile to Kannada, The unstated reason, however, is that the Kannada Christians have the feeling that Tamilians get the lion's share of jobs in Church-run hospitals and other institutions where the church hierarchy is predominantly Tamil.

Economic issues and Language Movement

In India, the minority bilingualism is understandably higher than bilingualism among the majority language speakers. The linguistic minorities accept the necessity to learn Kannada in Karnataka because without the knowledge of Kannada, their employment opportunities would be severely curtailed. The Kannadigas took this language movement as an opportunity to fight the employment problem of Kannadigas in the State. They insisted that jobs should be reserved for the Kannadigas. They also indicated that private and public industries and government offices in Karnataka are dominated by Tamils and Malayalis and they are harassing the Kannadigas. It was alleged that most of the dismissed workers are Kannadigas. A case of partiality in advertisement for posts was also brought to focus, wherein it was pointed out, State Bank of India advertised for jobs in Tamil Nadu saying 'knowledge of Tamil essential', whereas the same advertisement in Karnataka required 'knowledge of regional language desirable'.

This language movement thus brought together on a single platform, elements who used the pernicious 'sons of the soil' theory to their advantage; and writers and educationists who genuinely believed in the enrichment of the regional and regional culture. It had very little grass-root support, but had powerful elitist platforms both in support and in opposition.

This language movement when studied more comprehensively is bound to yield valuable insights about interest group formation, minority politics, language as a tool for economic opportunity, language in education providing or inhibiting access to social and economic status, and a host of other matters of vital interest to socio-linguists.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the guidance he received from Dr. D. P. Pattanayak, Director, Central Institute of Indian Languages while preparing this paper.

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1. Report of the Language Committee (Dr. Gokak Committee) 27th January 1981 Page iv.
2. *ibid.*, Page 25 and 30 The ad-hoc arrangement and other suggestions etc., of the Report are not quoted here. Only the language formula is given.
3. Government of Karnataka Order No. ED 113SOH 79 Bangalore, dated 30th, April 1982.
4. Government of Karnataka Order No. ED 113SOH 79 Bangalore, dated 20th July 1982.