

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 7 : 4 April 2007

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.
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LANGUAGE NEWS THIS MONTH
ETHNIC KILLING IN INDIA, ETC.

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Ethnic Killing in India

City of Joy – A New Addition to Sanskrit Classics?

On the Definition of Who All Constitute a Linguistic Group

Should the Prime Minister Know English to Hold His Job?

How Do I Address and Refer to *YOUR* Leader?

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ETHNIC KILLING IN INDIA

Last month we received the sad and tragic news of the ULFA killing over 250 Hindi-speaking people in Assam since 2001. Of these, 107 Hindi-speaking people were killed in Tinsukia district and 25 in Dibrugarh.

Ethnic, caste and religious animosity is widely prevalent throughout India, but that such animosity would result in murder in cold blood merely because the hapless victims were from another ethnic community is, to say the least, a barbaric condition that should be condemned by all.

Several decades ago people of Bengali origin were the target in the same state.

If political agitations should take to killing ethnic, religious and caste minorities, the goals of such political agitations would be lost forever, especially in present day India, where the acceptance of the notion “One India, One Nation” is emerging stronger day by day with India seen as a united federal polity with a strong Central authority. Most of these Hindi-speaking people, we all know, are hard-working poor people, and killing these defenseless people cannot be condoned. If a political agitation wants to safeguard the linguistic rights and identity of their ethnic group, they should also be ready and willing to protect the minorities.

So, the question arises, “Is ULFA a political organization, or a terrorist organization?”

The Government of Assam stated, “Urgent instructions issued to the district police had already been implemented to bring the situation under control as well as for protection of the non-Assamese people across the State ... The urgent measures included identification of the pockets of Hindi-speaking people, increase of fixed pickets of security forces, area domination with visible presence at night and supervisory officers with security forces being visible in violence affected areas to restore people’s confidence. The Superintendents of Police had also been directed to constitute neighbourhood peace and protection committees for guarding their locality during the night to avert any untoward incident in Hindi-speaking areas.”

The future tragedies can be averted only if the Assamese people themselves take it their responsibility to stop this mayhem. We all owe it to our ethnic neighbours to ensure that they also pursue their happiness in life without hindrance, or in this context, without getting killed.

CITY OF JOY -- NEW ADDITION TO THE GREAT SANSKRIT CLASSICS?

Ramesh Bhattacharya is going to translate the novel *City of Joy* into Sanskrit, and the author of the original feels elated, "Now, my book will reach the pundits and holy men of India."

Dominique Lapierre, the author of the original, seems to be under the impression that only by translating his novel into Sanskrit the pundits and holy men of India would have access to it. Probably they have more things to bother about than reading and critiquing his novel in Sanskrit. School authorities also may not yet be ready to present a Westerner's view of an Indian City in Sanskrit, to the already burdened Sanskrit students! With all the problems he faces in the hands and words of Mamta Banerjee, the former West Bengal Minister of Information and Cultural Affairs and the present Chief Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, may have no time now to register his protest against the translation and publication of this novel in Sanskrit. Or perhaps his original resistance to the "misinterpretation" of Calcutta life in the English version may not find support in his party circles, with so many changes the party has undergone in recent years.

And yet it will be a sheer delight to see a report that will faithfully present the difficulties that the translator faced in Sanskrit while translating a modern novel written with European idiom. The translator, Ramesh Bhattacharya, already has compared *City of Joy* with the Kashmiri epic "Rajtarangini." He declared, "There is a considerable corpus of Sanskrit literature, which has parallels to it. That is what encouraged me to take up the translation." Certainly such assurances will help keep any political agitations against *City of Joy* being resurrected in Sanskrit under check. The definition of "epic" has certain specific features, and we are not sure that *City of Joy* will fit in well in this category. In any case, translation of modern works of merit into classical languages such as Sanskrit is a welcome *academic* exercise for those who have inclinations in this area.

ON THE DEFINITION OF WHO CONSTITUTES A LINGUISTIC GROUP

Once again we are visiting the beautiful State of Assam for this item:

The Government of Assam has constituted a committee to determine the definition of Assamese people in order to ensure the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985, signed on 15th August, by the All Assam Students Association, All Assam Gana Sanghram Parishad, Government of India and Government of Assam, in the presence of Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. This clause declared, "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards,

as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.”

Assam has gone through a very complex and difficult situation in our freedom struggle. The heroic Assamese people were attacked from several quarters and had been very apprehensive at one time that their province could be forced to become a part of East Pakistan. There were very tense moments during the last phase of our freedom struggle relating to the Sikhs in the Punjab and Assam. Some details are given in LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS DURING THE PRE-PARTITION PERIOD 1939-1946 M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

<http://www.languageinindia.com/july2005/prepartitionlanguagepolicy1.html>.

The suggestion of the State CPI seems to be a workable solution to the problem of identifying the **political meaning** of the word “Assamese.” The State unit of the Communist Party of India (CPI) has suggested that all those who were living in Assam on the day the Constitution was adopted or whose names were included in the National Register of Citizens, 1951 or electoral roll of the first general elections be treated as Assamese people. The definition certainly is not a linguistic definition. Senior CPI leader Promode Gogoi said the definition suggested by his party would not include the streams of immigrant settlers who came and settled in the State from 1951 till 1971.

SHOULD THE PRIME MINISTER KNOW ENGLISH TO HOLD HIS JOB?

I remember the days when the upper caste people among the Tamils, with a tradition of English education in their families, used to ridicule and make fun of Kamaraj for his faulty English: “***I is the Chief Minister of Madras.***” That he was not college-educated with the knowledge of English was seen as a great inadequacy in this eminent national leader, by these people. Stories were floated around narrating how some ministers in his cabinet in the fifties could not speak English and how this led to situations of great embarrassment, laughter and ridicule.

People in the opposition parties, especially the local DMK leaders, repeated such stories again and again to enthuse their audience, who themselves did not know much English!

Fortunately, these days, I think, are behind us forever. Competence in English is no more seen as a prerequisite for successful political leadership. Moreover, those who reach such status in national politics somehow manage to acquire a working knowledge of English and this satisfies the officialdom. While English is the language that is sought after by all, it is no more thought to be a pre-requisite for success in politics in India.

Things, however, are changing in other nations! In Taiwan, a presidential candidate for the 2008 presidential election, who also happens to be the present Prime Minister of that nation, was asked in the Taiwan Legislature: "If you don't even have a high-school student's English capability, how will you handle Taiwan's international relations?" Premier Su Tseng-chang responded, I should say correctly and ably, that "being a good administrator was more important for the island nation."

The Opposition has proposed, "Taiwan's Election Law be revised to require presidential candidates to possess at least a high school-level of English fluency." The Prime Minister took the position, "foreign language ability was not essential for a good leader, nor for that matter, should such ability be confined to English."

Good question, good response. As attendance in schools, which provides quality English education, becomes widespread, the future generations may not face the dilemma to answer the difficult question raised in the Taiwan Legislature.

At that time in the future, I believe that the question that will be raised in Taiwan, India and elsewhere, will be, "Does this candidate for presidency, prime ministership, or membership in the cabinet or other high elected positions, have sufficient smattering knowledge to carry out the officially demanded rituals in the native language of the nation! "

HOW DO I ADDRESS AND REFER TO *YOUR* LEADER?



How should we address or refer to a political leader, and what is the extent of respect that our terms of address and reference should carry when we address *your* leader? Should it go well beyond the normal terms of address and reference sanctioned in a language and society, and take on *your* traditions of addressing and referring to *your* leader?

Politically surcharged atmosphere in Tamilnadu gets more heated up when some one refers to Ms. Jayalalithaa, former chief minister of Tamilnadu by her name. It has become customary to refer to Ms. Jayalalithaa as Amma in her

party, AIADMK. Great respect is due and shown to her in her party certainly because it is her charisma and leadership that carries that party forward. However, in the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly, a minister of the DMK government continually referred to her by her name, which resulted in strong protest by the AIADMK members present in the Assembly. The DMK minister simply mentioned her name as Jayalalithaa, not with any title such as Selvi (Ms.), etc.

In political debates and discussions, it has become customary for the opponents not to recognize the names of adoration given to the leaders of the political party opposed to them by their followers. The leaders of opposing parties are referred to using normal channels of respect, which usually falls short of adoration.

C. N. Annadurai, a great leader among the Tamils who founded the DMK, is not referred to as Annadurai, but only as Anna (Elder Brother, or as a shortened term of endearment) by all, except usually by those who are determined to reveal their opposition to the Dravidian movement.

Ms. Jayalalithaa remains simply Jayalalithaa for all those who are opposed to her and her party. Likewise Mr. Karunanidhi, leader of the DMK, is never addressed or referred to simply as Mr. Karunanidhi, or Karunanidhi, but only as Kalaingar, referring to his truly immense attainments in arts including Tamil literature, by his followers. However, none in the opposing AIADMK would address and refer to him as Kalaingar. They will simply refer to him as Karunanidhi. When the AIADMK was in power, none in that ruling party ever referred to Karunanidhi with any title of respect or honor, and simply referred to him as Karunanidhi, something the DMK is returning back with great pleasure when it came to referring to Ms. Jayalalithaa!

Name-calling in politics thus has its own function of identify whom you belong to and whom you are opposed to!

According to the news report in *The Hindu*, the Deputy leader of the AIADMK in the assembly, O. Panneerselvam demanded that the Speaker not allow anyone refer to their party leader by name.

The Speaker of the Assembly, who was elected as a DMK legislator, said "Jayalalithaa is the name registered in the assembly records and it is not wrong to refer to her by that name". A convenient reason for the Speaker but not a convincing answer for the AIADMK members.

M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.
Bethany College of Missions
6820 Auto Club Rd. Suite C
Bloomington, MN 55438
U.S.A.

mthirumalai@comcast.net