

Letter from South

## The Agony of Hindi

*The self-immolations and the tenacity of the demonstrations by students in Tamilnad reveal a state of mind of the middle-class intelligentsia in this comparatively more advanced State that is dangerous and disappointing.*

*What we have seen is not so much a protest against Hindi as a display of perverse attachment to English. Those sections of the Tamil intelligentsia which have been rallied by the D M K do not fear that Tamil might get swamped by Hindi. What it is concerned about is that Hindi might swamp English.*

*It is tragic indeed that despite all the traditions of our national movement and after fifteen years of our Republic young men should burn themselves for English!*

*The logic of the 1947 compromise is working itself out.*

THE agony of Hindi has to be seen against the background of the language question in Tamilnad. The story is not different for that in the rest of India. The agony of Hindi is essentially the failure of our ruling party to take India beyond the bounds of a *mestizo* culture, beyond the limitations of an imitation nation.

Despite the fact that Tamilnad could boast of a Chief Minister, Kamaraj, one of whose main attractions was his steadfast refusal to be proficient in English, the unbroken rule of the Congress there saw no worthwhile attempt to push Tamil forward as the exclusive vehicle of administration and as the medium of instruction at the university level. The supremacy of English was never sought to be changed or even challenged, still less was any endeavour made to denigrate its status value and its role as the gateway to the more lucrative professions or official posts. Tamil never left the home or the cinema hall to become the symbol of free renaissance.

### Miserable Failure

Some feeble attempts were made to run colleges with Tamil as the medium of instruction and the students were given the option to answer questions in their own language. These attempts proved miserable failures both as far as attendance and results were concerned. This was only natural since there was absolutely no future for those students who went through such colleges. After completing their education where were they to go and what were they to do? The natural corollary of such a state of affairs was that the better teachers and students refused to come to such colleges.

It is significant that the D M K with all its professed passion for Tamil — the Dravidasthan idea was a hoax from the start and known as such to all concerned — never moved energetically to attempt to remove such an overwhelming obstacle to the rapid

and complete development of the language. It is also worth noting that despite its vehemence against Brahmin domination, even if not against the Brahmins as such, it did not seek to cut at the roots of this state of affairs by a campaign against English, the continuance of which certainly favoured that caste which had already a commanding lead in its proficient use. A confident challenge can be posed to almost all the leading personalities of all the political parties in Tamilnad — where to they send their children to be educated? The generalisation can be easily hazarded that the overwhelming majority of them have their children educated in convents, mission schools and at such other institutions where the medium is English so that they can proceed to similar collegiate institutions at a later stage in their educational career.

### Intellectual Waste

The shocking fact, however, cannot be denied that the overwhelming bulk of the students at the university find it almost unbearably difficult to follow the lectures, let alone express themselves with ease and confidence in English. The colossal intellectual waste that this involves, the frustration and desperation that it generates is known to anybody who has even the remotest of contacts with the students. It is not the best or the most intelligent, and certainly not the most idealistic, of the students who come through nowadays with the highest academic honours. By and large, it is those who have consciously chosen or been made to choose or, rather, been able to choose to master English as a result of parental affluence, as the pathway to one or another of the safer means for money-making, who emerge with brilliant results. As an encouragement to rootlessness, to careerism, and to becoming part of the ramified power elite with a maximum urge to be different from the commonality, nothing better could have been thought up.

It is not realised though that this

procedure will not even help to get for India a self-confident ruling group with a distinct culture and way of life. It is forgotten that the situation was quite different in the days of British rule. In the early phase the intelligentsia, drawn from the landlord class or from one or another of the compradore occupations, came to English as a means for westernisation, which they felt was the only way forward to the modern regeneration of their country. Their faith may have been historically pathetic but it was moored in the belief of the providential nature of British rule. As soon as a break was made from this belief, brought about by life and the growing national movement engendered by it, the mere idealistic and intelligent sections of the intelligentsia turned back to the nation. The most dramatic and most splendid symbol of this turn was Jawaharlal Nehru. Yet their very middle-class nature prevented a total break. The culmination of this refusal to espouse a truly radical, democratic nationalism came with the manner and the substance of the acceptance of the Mountbatten Award. Since then much has been accomplished that is, indeed, of enduring value and a matter of pride. But what has not happened is the creation of the Indian nation. This must rank as one of the biggest failures of the middle class in history. India still has largely only a pseudo-self. It has only itself to blame if the other nations of awakened Afro-Asia refuse to take it very seriously, especially after the best years of Nehru were over and radicalism asserted itself as the dominant trend of leadership in the newly-independent States of this region. The Indian Westernised Oriental Gentleman was almost as much an anachronism as the Kiplingesque Westerner. Yet this remained the ideal for the middle class Indian abroad.

No Attachment to Western Values

Something else had also happened. The intelligentsia in India since in-

dependence has appreciably broadened its base. The middle class in the towns and even more in the rural areas has grown enormously. It has also gone in for education, especially at the university level, in a big way. It certainly wants that this education be continued in English as part of its misplaced snobbery. But it totally lacks any commitment to the values of westernisation, in the sense of rationalism, humanism and a sense of egalitarianism. On the contrary, it clings tenaciously and with a new-found zeal to the so-called Indian way of life, which is largely an euphemism for the worse aspects of medievalism. Nobody can deny that the same student, who so passionately agitates that English be continued to be given to them, are quite docile enough when it comes to accepting all the social rigidities and inequalities of our caste and ritual. The student politics that go on nowadays, as a general rule, are far removed from any of the bigger themes of life and are more often a miniature world of Congress caste factionalism.

It can be legitimately asked why the anti-Hindi agitation has, however, taken a specially stormy shape in Tamilnad. The answer to this question has to start by making the basic point that nowhere in the South is there the slightest enthusiasm for the introduction of Hindi. If a referendum were taken as between English and Hindi the overwhelming bulk of middle class opinion (the rest would not know what the issue was at all since they have still to cross the illiteracy barrier) in all the four States would be in favour of the former.

In Tamilnad, the shape of politics was altered by the emergence of the DMK, the party of Tamil chauvinism. This emergence itself was chiefly conditioned by the fact that Tamilnad was the one State in the South which suffered as a result of linguistic redistribution of territory. It should not be forgotten that till as late as some ten years ago large parts of Andhra and Kerala formed part of the composite Madras State. The Tamils were obviously the topdogs in the South, which was particularly pleasing to its burgeoning bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. This is now no longer the case with Andhra and Kerala having come to acquire their full identity. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the Tamil middle class is easily the most developed among any of the Southern States. Central jobs apart, its mode of penetration of

the other Southern States will receive a decisive check with Hindi replacing English. All will then be at an equal disadvantage and the historically acquired superiority in English will go waste. It is this collective Tamil subconscious upon which DMK basis its appeal with its eloquent references to past Tamil glory combined with the defence of English.

Once the DMK got going on this basis, it was easy enough for it to emerge as *the* focus of opposition to the Congress. The discontent with other aspects of Congress rule could not only be utilised by it but, genuinely enough, those disconcerted came to believe: that the only feasible opposition to (the Congress in

the State could be the DMK, The breakthrough of any particular opposition party automatically places all the other opposition parties at a crucial disadvantage.

The only way forward for Hindi is, and foremost, an emphasis on the languages, a carefully worked out plan for their rapid take-over from English. This is a challenge that English will not be able to meet and which linguistic chauvinists will not be able to evade or to distort. Only when this has been accomplished can a sense of genuine Indianness, repelled by the artificiality of English in the Indian scene and drawn towards a link language which has its roots, in our soil, be created.