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Did controversies over language reflect differences between ‘culturalists’ and ‘modernisers’?

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Introduction

In Kizhappazhuvur on 25 January 1965, a 27-year-old man named Chinnasamy walked to the rail station, proclaimed his love for the Tamil language goddess, Tamilttaay, and set himself on fire.[1] Over the next six months, six more young men killed themselves in the same manner, all protesting the imposition of Hindi.[2] In India between 1947-73, some of the most influential political events concerned controversies over language policy and implementation. They consisted of public debates, discourses, and protests, normally to enforce or protest domination of one language group over another. These language controversies became a proxy war where religious, regional, and cultural antipathies were expressed under a guise of theory in India's 'secular' political theatre.

The question proposes an analytic framework of 'culturalists' and 'modernisers' to assess these controversies. This analysis shall define 'culturalists' as those who supported appeals to cultural heritage (through aspects such as literary prestige or use in traditional religious texts), and 'modernisers' as those who looked to ensure linguistic compatibility with India's modernization project (through more advanced and specific vocabulary and standardised usage). At a first glance, this question's dualism helps to clarify the divisions in the southern language controversies between Hindi and the Dravidian languages. The central government appear as 'modernisers', seeking national linguistic standardisation, with Dravidian agitators invoking literary tradition as the 'culturalists' attempting to preserve their regional culture. Despite the apparent clarity, this isolated assessment limits understanding of the multifaceted nature of these controversies and neglects the long-term foundations of these identities and historical processes.

By first assessing the debates in the Constituent Assembly and then placing southern language controversies in this context, a combination of 'culturalist' and 'moderniser' arguments can be seen used in conjunction with one another across both case studies. Advocates of Hindi relied heavily on the cultural value of Sanskrit; Urdu supporters proclaimed worth in its ancient poetry; proponents of Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, regularly announced its cultural superiority, whilst supporters of all three also argued along lines of modernising vocabulary, preparing languages for use in science and

[1] D. B. Donaldson, *The Self-Immolators* (2013) p.20
[2] Ibid

technology, and changes to education.[3] So although 'culturalists' and 'modernisers' may appear to apply to agitations in the 1960s, this limits our understanding. As shall be explored in this essay, southern cultural devotees did not take their lives protesting modernisation, instead their actions were the manifestation of both devotional language loyalties and extended inter-group conflict. In the political discourses surrounding these inter-group struggles, arguments that placed weight behind both cultural heritage and modernisation were used to legitimise both action and reaction by identity groups.

The two case studies presented in this essay, the Hindi-Urdu conflict and the south Indian anti-Hindi agitations, both frame the national language debate as an ideological context for the anti-Hindi movements. They demonstrate the complexities of oppositional language loyalties and show how this topic should be explored through a more nuanced analytic framework. By first outlining the processes that formed linguistic identities and then navigating the language discourses, the predominant conclusion is the nature and strength of linguistic identities.

The identity-forming processes began with colonial techniques of enumeration through censuses, resulting in an imposed solidification of linguistic identities along religious and ethnic boundaries, while political parties and language associations helped to form a codified history.[4] Then, personification of languages contributed to emotional attachments.[5] Through elucidating these processes and examining the two case studies, the fact that linguistic loyalties often subsumed both religious and regional identities and came to supersede political party allegiances should help develop the question's false binaries. It is this clash of multifaceted identities that was reflected in the Indian language controversies in this period.

Historical Processes

Before we discuss the substantive details of this inquiry, there must be theoretical clarity regarding the processes of oppositional socio-linguistic identity formation. To begin, language should be not be

[3] A. G. Noorani, *The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record* (Oxford, 2004) pp.328-329; S. Ramaswamy *Passions of the Tongue* (Berkeley, 1997) ch. 9; C. Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, 2007). pp.218-220

[4] A. Sarangi, "Enumeration and the linguistic identity formation in Colonial North India" *Studies in History, 25, 2* (2009) pp. 197-227.

[5] Ramaswamy (1993); Ramaswamy, (1997); Mitchell (2009). p.213

treated as a necessary or natural foundation for identity groups, societies, or nationalisms. As can be seen in the omnipresence of Spanish in South America and the plethora of languages spoken in countries like Switzerland today, linguistic homogeneity is neither a precursor nor a prerequisite to nationalism, but it has been constructed as such in many European conceptions. The outcome of fierce language loyalties was not inevitable, nowhere outside of South Asia in the twentieth century has language been such a volatile issue. Deconstructing the emergence of devotional multifaceted socio-linguistic identities and incorporating aspects of the specific regional analytic frameworks of Asha Sarangi (Hindi-Urdu), Lisa Mitchell (Telugu), and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Tamil), should explain the emergence of powerful identities that drove language controversies.[6]

Enumerative techniques brought by the British and expressed through censuses accelerated this formation through the documented studies of philology and linguistic ethnology. Regional and ethnic identities became systematically tied to language on a national scale. This process had been largely dictated by European conceptions and experiences of nation states and linguistic homogeneity.[7] Anderson's theorising of 'imagined communities' relied on the importance of a common language through print culture.[8] Europeans conceived of a fundamentally isomorphic connection between language and identity, as dictated by their own historic memories, which can be seen reflected through the British colonial attitudes to the plethora of Indian languages.[9] In the north, this was exemplified through religious criteria on the census: the origins of Muslims had to be noted whether they were 'converted Hindus or migrants from Arab lands.'[10] This created oppositional categories to describe the identity of Indian Muslims, helping to connect the idea of 'otherness' to Indian Muslims and Urdu. In the south, the same processes popularised the term 'Dravidian', categorised Tamil as a mere 'vernacular' in comparison to the praiseworthy 'classical' Sanskrit, and characterised the race as 'menial' and 'dark-skinned'.[11] These nationwide processes shifted the role of language. Where languages had been previously tied to the land, they were now inextricably linked to the people. The

[6] Sarangi (2009); Mitchell (2009); Ramaswamy (1997)
[7] Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, outlined that language was a necessary precursor to nationalism, and this built throughout western political thought. See King (1998). p.24.
[8] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983)
[9] Sarangi (2009) pp.223-225
[10] Ibid
[11] Ramaswamy (1997) Ch. 1

main impact of this was the polarisation of communities, as 'each one of them advocated a more exclusive, specific, and rigid linguistic-cultural and political identities and rights for their language.'[12]

These changes to the classification and documentation of languages on a quantitative basis drove a campaign of 'constructed majorities' in order to claim majority rights. In the north, Hindi and Urdu began a process of language appropriation for these purposes as Eastern Hindi, Western Hindi, Pahari, Rajasthani, and Bihari were all brought under 'Hindi, even though standard 'Hindi' was unintelligible to 90 per cent of self-identified speakers.[13] These ideas were somewhat paralleled in the South through theory of activists such as the Dravidian unionist E. V. Ramasami, who believed Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada all originated from old Tamil, even though 'Tamil' related to no 'singular, homogenous language' or community.[14] The 'Southern', 'Central', and 'Northern' classification of Dravidian languages nicely parallels the 'Eastern' and 'Western' divisions of Hindi as despite each group being unintelligible to the other, a collective identity still emerged.[15] Whilst the differences between languages were considered much more fluid in the mid-nineteenth century, there was now a widespread focus on notions of 'purification' as Hindi and Urdu sought to promote words from their Sanskrit and Persian/Arabic roots respectively.[16] So although linguistic divisions began along socio-religious lines, the resultant reorientation of vocabularies drove the languages apart. Fierce and 'noxious' divides emerged as purification campaigns continued, and inter-group antipathy built.[17]

With disparate and largely unconnected dialects, changes to Indian print culture facilitated a reconceptualization of collective linguistic histories. New patrons resulted in new anthologies, historical writing, and literary production along lines of language as opposed to regional or sectarian distinctions.[18] In the north, political elites 'exerted themselves to make language and the other symbols congruent,' helping to form a collective and symbolic historical past.[19] One of the key impacts was the personification of language through 'essays, poems, songs, textbooks, newspaper reports, and public

[12] Sarangi (2009) p.200
[13] Abbi, (1999).p.20; philologist George A. Grierson, quoted in Sarangi (2009) p.217
[14] Ramaswamy (1997) Ch. 1
[15] B. Krishnamurti *The Dravidian Languages* (Cambridge, 2003). pp.20-22
[16] J. Das Gupta *Language, Conflict and National Development* (Berkeley, 1970). p.83
[17] King, C. (1994) p.175
[18] Mitchell (2009) p.217
[19] Brass (1976) p.28

speeches.'[20] When this occurred in the highly devotional southern Indian society, personification led to deification as these physical conceptions of language were depicted as supernatural beings. This worked in conjunction with references to languages as a 'Mother Tongue', connoting family and promoting 'worship, devotion, and patronage.'[21] The deification process is epitomised by the Tamil conception of Tamilttaay, or 'Mother Tamil'.[22] The idea of language as a goddess incited passionate loyalties as a quasi-religion, and was employed as a rhetorical device to represent Tamil interests.

This culminated in the development of language devotions. Government-sponsored collective acts of worship through prayer songs like those seen in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry in 1971 served to reflect and enforce tangible loyalty to a language, denoted by a representative icon. [23] As such, when language controversies emerged as a proxy for other forms of conflict, they should not be immediately considered a conscious distraction to allow for brazen sectarianism, but because Indian self-conceptions of identity had become so tied to the language the distinction was no longer relevant. A wide range of grievances and interests became encompassed into these demarcated socio-linguistic groups, as they argued for the promotion of employment, education, and resources. Common causes politicised such bodies. This collective capacity to demand political rights was seen in the partition of Pakistan, which added weight to threats if demands for rights and protections were not met. The formation of these fierce, codified identities resulted in an unsustainable language situation, as each group wanted protection and development of its own languages.

The Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani Conflict in the National Language Debates

Through contextualising the southern language controversies through the Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani debate in the national language debates, the primacy of powerful, politicised language loyalties should present issues with the 'culturalist' and 'moderniser' duality. The acceptance of Hindi as the national language over Hindustani, the power of the Hindi language associations, and the suppression of Urdu

[20] Ramaswamy (1997) Ch. 1 and Mitchell (2009)
[21] Mitchell (2009) p.217
[22] Ramaswamy (1997) Ch. 1
[23] Ibid

were driven by a desire to protect group rights, driven by long-term socio-religious identity conflict expressed through language.

Hindi had been discriminated against under colonialism, particularly in employment.[24] The purpose of the Hindi movement was to enshrine, protect, and promote the language through language associations.[25] In the Constituent Assembly, Hindi had the weight of institutionalised representation through these language associations. They had emerged in parallel to the Hindu nationalist movement during Urdu's period of use in colonial governance, even though many of the Urdu-speaking elite were Hindu.[26] The century-long development and politicisation from of these language associations took them from 'small groups of like-minded reformers,' to the 'professional… well-knit organisation,' the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, with its own publishing arm and nationwide infrastructure for the dissemination of Hindi, this placed Hindi groups in a position to articulate desires as an homogenous block.[27] In the post-Independence debates these groups helped to foment a communalism that 'thrive[d] on a deliberate reactivation of communal memory' in an attempt to ensure the promotion of Hindi as the national language.[28]

The pro-Hindi groups transcended distinctions between 'culturalist' and 'modernist' lines of argument, serving instead to exploit socio-linguistic boundaries of identity through communal memory. One of the common pillars of both the Hindi movement and Hindu nationalism was the national cultural primacy of Sanskrit - proclaimed as 'the mother of all the world's languages.'[29] This view originated from linguistic investigation and classification of Indo-European languages by western academics, but it was taken to be the foundation of Hindu cultural superiority and aligned with language associations and their quest for Hindi recognition.[30] In conjunction with this culturalist line of argument was the idea that Hindi, as the majority language, should be the official language to act as a point of unification for political modernisation. The strength of these loyalties was paramount: despite the fact that the Congress dominated the Constituent Assembly, its party policy regarding the advocacy of Hindustani in

[24] King, C. (1994) p.10
[25] Ibid
[26] Ibid p.17
[27] Das Gupta (1970) pp.78, 80, 125
[28] Das Gupta (1970) pp.78, 80, 125
[29] Jaffrelot (2007) p.50
[30] Ibid p.51

1947 was largely abandoned in the Constituent Assembly due to the superseding of linguistic loyalties over party loyalties.[31] The Hindi faction of the Congress was strong, led by P. D. Tandon and Seth Govind Das with an 'aggressive zeal' and included Sampurnanand, Ravi Shankar Shukla, and K. M. Munshi.[32] They were often accused of 'communalism' and neglecting national concerns in favour of Hindi group interest, despite incredulous protestations to the contrary.[33] Seth Govind Das campaigned tirelessly, and described the national language debate as 'the most important day of [his] life.'[34]

The Hindi bloc hid behind inflated arguments of superior cultural heritage and politicised pseudo-academia to advocate their cause. The 'National Language Convention' in Delhi hosted several nationally regarded academics from various regions who came to the conclusion that Hindi should be the national language.[35] This Convention was, however, organised by Seth Govind Das and 'held under the auspices of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan' and the composition of delegates was managed to solely include Hindi supporters even though its findings were used to legitimise the demands of Hindi language associations under the guise of academic consensus in the Constituent Assembly.[36] Whilst many members of the Constituent Assembly primarily supported the protection and development of their own groups, few campaigned with such intensity. The divisions in the Assembly did not fall alongside debates regarding modernisation or culture but were instead driven by religio-linguistic loyalties prioritised over conciliatory party politics.

Hindi-Urdu conflicts on socio-linguistic lines were deep rooted and still powerful, demonstrated by the outright Hindi rejection of Hindustani. Its acceptance would have ensured greater linguistic homogeneity, political participation, and have prevented 40 million Muslims from having to learn Hindi. Even though differences in speech between Hindi and Urdu were less marked than differences between the speech of touchable and untouchable castes, the Urdu script looked more Arabic, more Middle Eastern, and by extension - less Indian.[37] In Govind Das's 1945 budget speech, he

[31] *Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD)*, 9.139.132
[32] Das Gupta (1970) p.131
[33] *CAD*, 2.15.145, 2.16.89, see *CAD*, 9.138.395 for protestations.
[34] *CAD*, 9.138.395
[35] *CAD*, 9.138.391
[36] Das Gupta, p.135; *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 9.138.391; Of the three Bengali representatives: none represented Bengali opinion, and the four Hindi writers were from Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.
[37] Das Gupta (1970) p.57; Abbi (1999) p.20

supported Hindustani but in the Constituent Assembly he advocated Hindi, several contemporaries ascribed the change to hostility towards Urdu and Pakistan in the aftermath of partition, nothing to do with modernising or Sanskrit culture.[38] This was furthered by Pakistan's enforcement of Urdu as a national language. This was, however, a largely inflated dualism. Urdu was 'cherish[ed] by… Hindus and Sikhs, Jains and Christians,' and by 1955 there were still Urdu language newspapers that were run by Hindu Mahasabhites and had four times the circulation of Hindi newspapers.[39] Despite this, writers of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan focussed on disseminating the message of Urdu's alien origins, one writer used evocative imagery to describe the 'mask' of the Hindustani being 'ripped off' and revealing an ugly Urdu truth, meaning that 'for the sake of honesty, only 'Nagari Hindi' can…' be the national language.[40] This imagery employed by Chandrabali Pandeya personified Urdu in a way that presented it as a deceitful being, hiding in a Hindustani disguise intending to mislead. This literary technique was common in the South, as shall be explored later, but not as much in the North. These depictions, describing Urdu through relatable human terms, spread implications of the anti-national nature of Hindustani and Urdu helped to appeal to identity-based antipathies towards Muslims and Pakistan.

The supporters of Urdu were also motivated by the furthering of their own religio-linguistic group, shown when Maulana Azad resigned from the Drafting Committee over the members' anti-Urdu beliefs.[41] The fact that Hindi proponents were unwilling to accept even the Urdu script demonstrates that the depth of group loyalties dictated positions on the language debate, Urdu was fighting for its survival, Hindi was fighting for domination.[42] Due to the fact that regional linguistic policy was largely left to the remit of the state, the linguistic majority could dominate the minority, as was seen in northern States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, even though it often infringed on the right to educational establishments under Article 30 of the Constitution.[43] Because Urdu had some level of legitimacy due to its position in the Eighth Schedule, responses to this consisted primarily petitions and delegations to try and exert political pressure on the state and national governments to enforce Urdu's protection in

[38] *CAD*, 9.139.132
[39] *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (1999) pp.91–2
[40] *Muslims in India* (1964) p.18
[41] Noorani (2004) p.297
[42] After the debates, this was manifested in a conscious repression of Urdu.
[43] Article 30, The Constitution of India

teaching.[44] This demonstrates that both inside and outside of the Constituent Assembly, Hindi majorities looked to repress Urdu. This was a clash driven by socio-linguistic identities as opposed to policy, therefore detaching Hindi from its role as a 'moderniser' in the language debates.

The National Language Debate through a Southern Lens

Dravidian languages[45] had convincing arguments regarding both their cultural heritage and suitability for modernisation in the Constituent Assembly, thus threatening Hindi hegemony. Dravidian script can be dated back to the second century BCE, the aforementioned four all have strong literary heritages, and due to the presence of Dravidian-origin place-names such as Gujarat, Konkani, Marathi, Marwari, and Sindhi, its spread could have been even more pronounced across the whole of India.[46] Such strength presented a challenge to the Hindi bloc and when seen in conjunction with the Hindi-Urdu debate and the later language controversies, this reveals that these disagreements were not simply opposition to modernisation, but a defence of identity.

In the Constituent Assembly, Naziruddin Ahmed, though not Dravidian, made the point that 'an official language should not be based merely by the fact that a large number of people speak it. Its suitability to express modern ideas, scientific, literary and other, should also be an important factor.'[47] Outlining capacity for modernisation in these terms discredited Hindi when compared to the Dravidian languages, as Krishnamurthy Rao listed a dozen examples of south Indian scientific terminology, noting 'that they are far more developed than Hindi is today.'[48] Rao also criticised Hindi's roots in provincialism, highlighting its lack of cultural heritage – despite attempts from the Hindi bloc to use capitalise on the reverence of Sanskrit.[49] Several decades previously, Indian and western scholars had tried to claim that the Dravidian languages had originated from Sanskrit in an attempt to uphold its sanctity, but this was disproven.[50] The widespread of the Dravidian languages heritage and development posed a threat to the Hindi case.

[44] *The Times of India*, 22 July 1958; Pamphlet published and circulated by Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu in 1954.
[45] Primarily Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada
[46] Krishnamurti (2003) pp.20, 22
[47] *CAD*, 9.139.420
[48] Ibid
[49] *CAD*, 9.138.439
[50] Krishnamurti (2003) p.17

This strength resulted in an attempt to undermine and silence Dravidian voices in the Constituent Assembly by the Hindi bloc. At the start of the Constituent Assembly meetings, after a row with the President for speaking Hindustani instead of English, the staunch Hindi advocate R. V. Dhulekar commented that: 'People who do not know Hindustani have no right to stay in India. People who are present in this House to fashion out a constitution for India and do not know Hindustani are not worthy to be members of this Assembly. They had better leave.'[51] Similar sentiments often flared up during discussions in the Constituent Assembly, and even after countless requests to speak in English were ignored, some members still spoke in Hindustani.[52] This exclusion received little sympathy or protection from the President of the Assembly.[53] Congress member and future finance minister, TT Krishnamachari, commented on this during an unrelated public health discussion. Describing the Hindi bloc, he lamented their 'fanaticism,' 'totalitarianism,' and 'language imperialism' as well as questioning their lack of concern for other areas.[54]

Where representatives were not actively promoting Hindi, there was often a lack of understanding at the nature of language loyalties. This was exemplified by Nehru and Gandhi. Before these debates Gandhi wrote that, '… no Dravidian [should] think that learning Hindi is at all difficult,' and that, 'to want every form of speech to be perpetuated and developed is anti-national and anti-universal… [They] should… be sacrificed and merged into the great Hindustani stream.'[55] This indicates a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the nature of language. The main issue for Dravidians was not the logistics of Hindi, but the sacrifice of the identity that had been tied to languages for the previous century. Considering both men were multilingual and obsessed with national unity, it could be said that that their socio-linguistic group loyalties were to their respective ideas of the Indian nation. This dismissal of the strength language loyalties was furthered seen in a letter from Nehru to Gandhi concerning national language, writing that 'its progress has been hampered by foolish controversies about the script.'[56] Considering the foundation of these identities had been icons such as

[51] *CAD*, 1.2.109
[52] *CAD*, 7.48.188; There are myriad examples, but on this day, *CAD* 7.48.257.
[53] Ibid
[54] By the Hindi bloc, I refer to members who submitted numerous pro-Hindi amendments, i.e. Seth Govind Das, R.V. Dhulekar, Purushottam Das Tandon, Ravi Shankar Shukla and others; *CAD*, 7.49.116
[55] *Young India*, 27 August 1925
[56] King, R. (1998) p.86

script, this lack of appreciation of the strength of loyalties could easily lead to a perception of the southern language agitations as an opposition to modernisation as opposed to an expression of deeper identity conflict.

Response to National Language Controversies in Southern India

Attempts to politically exclude Dravidian languages from the Constituent Assembly debates were relatively successful. The Hindi bloc was unified and powerful, and the anti-Hindi movement was split between disparate regions arguing for the protection of either their own language or English. Despite the codified place of English in the Constitution, non-committal terminology and a history of Hindi imposition meant that there were concerns for non-Hindi speakers. As a result, a series of reactions to the enforcement of Hindi occurred across southern India in this period. Through seeing these in the context of the historical processes of identity formation and the nature of pro-Hindi arguments in the Constituent Assembly, these controversies reflected Dravidian linguistic loyalties and its clash with Hindi imperialism. This is reflected primarily in the nature of rhetoric, language, and imagery. It sought to evoke anger and elicit action through using familiar motifs and characters that directly related to the Dravidian identities that had been formed through the historical processes over the previous century.

The main Dravidian leaders, C. N. Annadurai and E. V. Ramasami, the founders of the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) respectively, as well as Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, signed a resolution in 1958 arguing for the continuation of English.[57] This was a marked turn for Rajagopalachari, as in 1938 he had enforced the imposition of Hindi in 125 secondary schools, and had felt the full force of evocative Tamil propaganda – being depicted as holding a knife to the goddess icon of Mother Tamil, Tamilttaay.[58] This cartoon was used to play on the feelings of devotion and loyalty that Tamilians had to their Mother Tongue, and was a consistent theme throughout the anti-Hindi agitations. By the time Hindi had become the official language in January 1965, Rajagopalachari was decrying 'discriminatory tyranny'.[59] This marked the beginning of two

[57] *Modern India rejects Hindi* (1958) p.29
[58] Ramaswamy (1999) p.4
[59] R. L. Hardgrave, "The Riots in Tamilnad: Problems and Prospects of India's Language Crisis" *Asian Survey, Vol. 5, No. 8* (1965), p.399

months of the most serious agitations. Damages included sixty deaths by police shooting, several through self-immolation, the burning of books, the defacing of Hindi signs, the closing of schools, and the murder of police officers.[60] These reactions occurred along lines of collective identity, with political language mirroring those found in the formations of devotional loyalties, most powerfully through gendered conceptions of languages as physical female beings.

The anti-Hindi political activism of E. V. Ramasami had been ongoing since the 1920s, and as a Telugu-speaking, Kannada-raised, Tamil-supporting Dravidian nationalist he represented a significant group of southern identities and evoked linguistic loyalties through familiar language and themes.[61] He helped fuel language controversies before and after independence, opposing Hindi's status as a compulsory language, standing firmly on anti-Northern and anti-Brahmanical rhetoric.[62] This was most importantly seen with Ramasami's interpretation of the *Ramayana*, eliciting anti-Hindi agitation through intelligent use of language. He described Hindi culture as serving only to oppress non-Brahmins, and attacked Hindu myths, rituals, and caste.[63] By doing so, he attempted to evoke an emotional response to the regionalist conflict, portraying the *Ramayana*, an essential Hindu religious text, as a story of Dravidian Indian oppression by the Hindi north, hampering southern development. He wrote extensively of a golden age of Dravidian culture that existed before Hindi domination, as well as its potential for rebirth through overcoming Hindi.[64] He was articulating 'a message that followers see as addressing their own situation.'[65] The prevalence of the *Ramayana* in Indian culture meant that its story was widely understood, and this re-interpretation could provide Dravidians with a readymade metaphor for their oppression. Despite being first published in 1930, his pamphlet elucidating this argument, *Characters in the Ramayana*, had demonstrated longevity with its tenth printing in 1972 and a Hindi translation.[66] Furthermore, his extensive references to 'learned men' such as Nehru, placed these interpretations in a modern, political context, through respected politicians and academics from

[60] Ibid, p.400
[61] Ramaswamy (1997) Ch. 1
[62] Richman (2009) p.189
[63] Ibid, pp.177-8
[64] Richman, (2009), p.179
[65] Ibid p.178
[66] Ibid, p.180

across India.[67] As Paula Richman's study noted, these citations came at the end of his argument, serving 'not as documentation but as affirmation' of his argument.[68] By playing on these existing Dravidian conceptions regarding the strength of their languages and cultures, Ramasami helped to combine existing sentiments on the *Ramayana*, Hindi domination, rich Dravidian culture, and respected political and academic figures to articulate language arguments through familiar concepts, rooted in Dravidian linguistic identities.

Similar arguments against Hindi emerged through Dravidian depictions of language, often as a physical female being. Sumathi Ramaswamy's seminal study of the gendered nature of Dravidian linguistic nationalism noted the use of female deities as icons of language.[69] The concept of Tamilttaay as a female goddess, had been present since the 1890s, and had initially been used to connote senses of devotion to the 'Mother Tongue' through language of family, affection, and maternal love. During the anti-Hindi movement, this was inverted to elicit sentiments through portraying Hindi as a 'temptress', an 'upstart maid', a 'whore', and a 'bloodthirsty demoness'.[70] A 1938 poem used phrases such as 'She will control the newspapers… She will control the purse strings; Everybody and everything will seek her affection. Along with her will come her men.'[71] This simplified and focused the debate, evoking both anger and disgust towards Hindi and 'her' followers, as well as filial loyalty to protect their mother Tamilttaay. The success of these techniques was seen through its physical manifestations, as college students burnt large effigies of the Hindi 'demoness' in Madras, Madurai, and Chidambaram in 1965.[72] Through using simple, provocative imagery to explain a complex issue, the leaders of the Tamil movement could promote mass mobilisation through outrage without needing to outline the intricate details of the ramifications of Hindi imposition. To many, these details were irrelevant, it was connecting the policy of Hindi imposition to the emotions of maternal desecration.

The tangible power of this gendered manifestation of language was most apparent in the six self-immolations that occurred around Hindi's ascension in 1964-65, all committed by young men. In

[67] Ibid, p.188
[68] Ibid
[69] Ramaswamy, (1999)
[70] Ibid pp.1-28
[71] Ibid
[72] Ibid p.11

Chinnasamy's letter to his brother-in-law on the eve of his death, he wrote, 'I plan to die in order to protect Tamil… O Tamil! In order that you live, I am going to die a terrible death! Let Hindi die!... May Tamilttaay flourish!'[73] Not only did he refer to Hindi's death, as if it were mortal, but he also refers specifically to Tamilttaay, the goddess, as opposed to just the Tamil language. This was not an isolated example either. Of the other self-immolators, two others had written letters to politicians protesting Hindi imposition: Sivalingham gave '[His] body to the soil, [his] ife to Tamil', Veerappan wrote that his life was sacrificed to 'Tamil Mother'.[74] These actions, in particular Chinnasamy's, were widely publicised, leading to further unrest as the power of these devotional language loyalties fuelled opposition to Hindi. Popular protests that ended with death were then also presented back to the public through this same devotional framework. After sixty deaths at the hands of police gunfire, cartoons depicted Tamilttaay as crying over the bodies of her dead 'children'.[75]

The use of powerful imagery and rhetoric connoting Dravidian identities during the anti-Hindi conflict had a tangible personal impact. Several others committed suicide in various ways, which marks an interesting complication. In Indian society, suicide is considered a shameful act, whereas these 'language martyrs' were sanctified as their deaths came to represent the struggle against Hindi. These deaths had a significant political impact. By the election of 1967, Hindu nationalists had realised the unsustainable nature of Hindi imposition in ensuring national election.[76] The Congress lost in Tamil Nadu and in Madras State and have never won since. Through the Official Languages Act of 1968, the duality of Hindi and English was strengthened as non-Hindi areas were given the power of a veto to prevent the displacement of English.[77]

Conclusion

Through seeing anti-Hindi language controversies in a longer-term context, apparent dualities between culturalists and modernisers become less effective at reflecting realities when we assess the motivations behind the arguments. The two language clashes here, Hindi/ Urdu and Tamil/ Hindi provide

[73] Donaldson, D. B. (2013) pp.20-28
[74] Ibid
[75] Ramaswamy (1999) p.9
[76] Jaffrelot (2013) p.219
[77] King, C. (1994) p.7

demonstrations of communal separation that developed along the lines of language. Although the northern clash took a distinctly religious tone and the southern opposition to Hindi expressed itself more devotionally, the two clashes are not considered in conjunction enough, as analyses largely focus on isolating specific conflicts as opposed to illumination through comparison.

By seeing these language controversies as a result of historical processes, one can apply a basic nationwide framework with allowances for regional variation. Through techniques of linguistic enumeration, purification, personification, reconceptualization, historicization, and codification of myths, the power of language as an icon for identity was ensured. The associated emotions were then utilised to promote both pro- anti-Hindi sentiments by mass-mobilisation. Perhaps paradoxically, the main issue in South India was not the conflict between Hindi and Dravidian languages, but Hindi and English, potentially making the language loyalties of the south seem misguided in their imagery. Despite this its efficacy in producing an emotional response cannot be doubted.

This brief assessment has tried to raise some of the issues with the narrow view of language controversies but has only been able to assess two brief periods of tension. The most important points for the continuation of this research should include a detailed look at the use of gender roles and portrayal of women in the post-colonial south. What did Hindi's representation through figures such as the 'upstart maid' reveal to us about the impact of family life on conceptions of nationalism? And what was the wider impact of these gendered portrayals of languages?

Although language has lost much of its potency in India, there have still been several recent controversies. With the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh describing India as a monolingual, mono-religious nation, describing the Muslim community as a 'green virus' and telling them to 'Go to Pakistan', one can't help but note the parallels to Dhulekar's speech in the Constituent Assembly advocating the exclusion of those who don't speak Hindustani.[78] The inflammatory and evocative language used in this rhetoric echoes what was seen in the post-Independence discussions. Seeing present policy events through this historical lens shows the roots of this Hindu nationalism.

[78] Al Jazeera, ''Go to Pakistan', says India officer as leader praises crackdown', (28 December 2019) https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/pakistan-india-officer-leader-praises-crackdown-191228080506372.html, (15 Jan. 2020); *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 1.2.109

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