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The Intelligence of Language

It is in the embrace of our native tongues that we find solace, understanding, and the immutable truths that bind us together as a collective consciousness



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Howard Gardner, the renowned scholar who introduced the theory of Multiple Intelligence, posits that language proficiency is a crucial facet of human intelligence. Alongside analytical prowess, spatial acumen, musicality, bodily kinaesthesia, and interpersonal finesse, the mastery of language stands as a pillar of intellectual capability. He argues that it is not merely a skill but a cornerstone of human cognition.

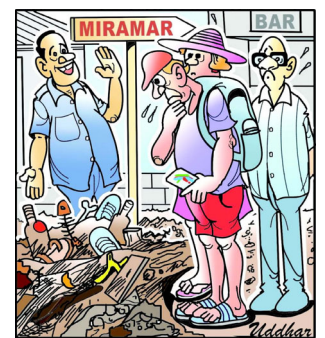
India, a mosaic of myriad languages and dialects (121 Languages and 240 mother tongues with roots from various geographical influences), bears witness to the intricate dance between linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Yet, the spectre of colonial influence, epitomised by Macaulay's decree to Anglicize the Indian populace, casts a long shadow over indigenous tongues. Under this hegemonic imposition, many vernacular languages, repositories of ancestral wisdom and communal ethos have withered in neglect. India has many languages and dialects, and with the emphasis by Macaulay to introduce English (to ensure Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect), many of the 'vernacular' (root meaning being the language of the slaves, originally been derived from Verna, a slave born in the house rather than abroad.) languages have languished.



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Our felicity for the English language arguably proved to be a boon, as India is an easy country to communicate with, the business language being English. Paradoxically, our affinity for the English language has been hailed as a modern boon, fostering facile communication in a globalised world where linguistic homogeneity reigns supreme. Indeed, English has emerged as the lingua franca of commerce, propelling India's ascent in the realms of IT and ITES, where fluency in this imperial tongue is de rigueur for success.

Today, the local language is not given much importance compared to English. Few books are translated into English. And fewer still translated from English to the Indian languages. This creates a natural barrier to accessing current and cutting-edge knowledge. However, amid the clamour for English fluency, the resonance of local languages has been relegated to the periphery of societal consciousness. The paucity of translated literature and the dearth of linguistic preservation efforts belie a troubling disregard for the intrinsic value of vernacular expression. And yet, amidst this linguistic dichotomy, the vibrancy of local language newspapers and television channels stands as a testament to indigenous dialects' enduring allure and relevance.

The mother tongue has a remarkable quality. Words do not carry the implied meaning. The tone, the nature of connectedness between the speaker and the listener, and the context in which the words are used are all determinants of the complex psychological process that leads to the "aha!" moment, the critical moment when one feels "I know". Language conveys a truth, especially in its local dialect, which cannot be accessed through a learnt language. It steers to an exact approximation of the essence of what wishes to be conveyed. In the rich tapestry of Indian languages, each dialect carries its unique wisdom, encapsulating centuries of cultural heritage and collective knowledge. Language is more than a mere communication tool; it is the crucible wherein the alchemy of wisdom transpires. In its manifold forms and nuanced idioms, language serves as a conduit for transmitting truths that resonate with the essence of human experience. Whether whispered in the mellifluous cadence of Tamil, the lyrical beauty of Bengali, or the resolute eloquence of Hindi, each dialect embodies a distinct tapestry of cultural heritage and existential insight.

It will be essential to examine the difference between the samskruta-based languages, either verb-based and or experience-based, and English, which is thing-based. Samskruta naturally plays a more significant role in English's denotative world. The denotative language reflects a focus on the sensory world. It has fostered a civilisation concerned with conquering the external world both in the realm of knowledge and resource control. The connotative invites introspection and delving into the mysteries of one's existence.

Every Samskruta word can be traced back to root sounds that have very specific connotations. Space in English refers to an object; AkAsha in Samskruta can be derived from avakAshate it AkAsha- That which allows objects to be in. So a notion like 'inner space' does not evoke the same associations as antarAkAsha.

A person without a deep knowledge of the Indian tradition will jump to the notion Macaulay and his progeny propagated and say that's why India is mystical and impractical. This is entirely untrue; Indian tradition values the transcendent (called parA vidyA) and the worldly (aparA VidyA) equally. A study of India's Mathematical and scientific history will provide all the evidence one needs. However, it is important to realise that there are a whole

lot of ideas and insights about one's psyche that cannot be conveyed in English. The language does not have the vocabulary, and there are no associative notions in English that can adequately point to the inner universe. It must be explored through direct meditative experience. Similarly, many modern concepts in Science cannot be conveyed easily in Indian languages. One must actively engage in performing the experiments and so on to understand what 'titration' (for instance) means!

Let's delve into a few examples to explore how these languages express simple and everyday inner truths through choice sayings:

1. Hindi:

- Andher Nagari, Chaupat Raja - This saying reflects the chaos and confusion in a society where the leadership is incompetent. It highlights the importance of good governance and the perils of ignorance.
- Apna Khata Khojo - Translating to 'Find your own account', this phrase emphasises the need for introspection and self-awareness. It encourages individuals to reflect on their actions and take responsibility for their lives.

2. Tamil:

- Sollin Pazhaiyantraga, Vinaiyin Pudhiyantru - This proverb underscores the timeless nature of words and the evolving nature of actions. It suggests that while words may remain constant, actions should adapt and evolve with changing circumstances.
- Annaiyum Paraiyum Sendru Irundhal, Appadiye Pogum - Translating to "if your mother and your ancestors have walked this path that's the ideal one for you", this saying emphasises the importance of respecting traditions and preserving cultural heritage.

In the crucible of language, truths are distilled to their purest essence, transcending the boundaries of syntax and semantics to resonate with the deepest recesses of the human soul. It is in the embrace of our native tongues that we find solace, understanding, and the immutable truths that bind us together as a collective consciousness. Our call to action is this: profit from your knowledge of English, but savour your being and nourish your soul by immersing yourself in your Mother tongue.

(Steve Correa is an Executive Coach and author of The Indian Boss at Work, Thinking Global, Acting Indian. Raghu Ananthanarayanan is a behavioural scientist, yoga teacher and author of several books)

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