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### Scientific terminology in Indian languages

A question of capital significance to the cause of science in India is that of a standard terminology in Indian languages for scientific and technical ideas and objects. With the growth of the movement for the adoption of our various provincial vernaculars as the media of instruction in schools and even in colleges in the several Provinces, the importance of the question has naturally increased; and some provincial Governments have given evidence of their appreciation of the fact. In June last year, the Government of Madras appointed a committee to consider (1) to what extent the equivalents of foreign technical terms already in the use in the South Indian languages are acceptable for educational purposes; (2) whether it is desirable to retain for school purposes the use of English technical terms where there are no accepted equivalents in the South Indian languages; and (3) whether, in the alternative, it is necessary to draw up new and standardized lists of equivalents of certain foreign technical terms for all the South Indian languages.

The subject is surely one that should be viewed from a higher standpoint than that of linguistic purism and of provincialism of every kind. The first consideration to be borne in mind is that of facilitating the spread of the knowledge of science in the country, whichever the linguistic medium employed. It should, by every means within our reach, be made easy for the school student, and for the man in the street too, to acquire knowledge – clear and accurate knowledge – of the thought and the achievements of science in its various manifestations; and then, incidentally and without prejudice to the first named object, all-Indian uniformity and approximation to international phraseology should be attempted, even this second

consideration being meant to help the first.

Science, as it has gone on drawing the several parts of the globe nearer to one another, has also gone on developing a vocabulary of its own which must be regarded as international. A bigoted and self-sufficient nationalism has been the tragic folly of several countries in the past. Just as there are spheres and levels of life, appropriate to nationalism, we must recognize that there are other spheres appropriate only to internationalism. The commerce of culture, the diffusion of knowledge and the pursuit of science which is search for the laws of the workshop of Nature and the truths of life – these belong to the higher levels; and Indians would be anticipating that better future for which the world is longing, and setting an example to others, in being all-Indian and international in their policy as regards the compilation of their scientific vocabulary.

When so much has been said in favour of India's adopting English for its scientific vocabulary in the higher grades, it seems necessary to say a word to prevent any misunderstanding of our attitude as one of insufficient appreciation of the importance of developing Indian languages. The importance of these languages is undoubted; and they cannot afford to forego the contribution which the development of a scientific literature can make to their growth. But the question at the moment is – of the two extremely desirable objects we have before us, namely, diffusion of the knowledge of science and development of the local language, which do we want more urgently? It is impossible that both can be secured equally well at one and the same time. To us it seems, firstly, that the knowledge of science and of modern world-conditions is more urgently needed, and, secondly that the development of vocabulary is bound to be a matter of slow growth in any case. It will, we think, be no advantage to the country to hold up the progress of education in science by the reason or unreason of our linguistic difficulties. There are a great many good things in this world all equally to be desired. But it would only make for waste of time and effort if we tried to snatch all of them at once by one single grasp of the hand. We have to postpone some in order that we may be sure of getting hold of the others.

It must also be recognized that it is given to no language to do equally well in all departments of service. Some excel in some and others in others. If Italy excelled in music, England was ready to borrow musical phraseology from there. If France was eminent in the culinary art, England was similarly prompt again. There are fields of life and achievement in which it has been given to Indian languages to attain high success. In the realms of the mind and the spirit, in poetry and philosophy, Sanskrit has made a record which is the envy and the admiration of other languages. The remembrance of the distinctiveness of the gifts and merits of the various languages of the world should be an influence for moderation on our linguistic patriotisms. If each separate language had not had an ethos of its own and a separate 'mission' of its own, there would be no justification for the world's allowing so many languages to live and thrive. Diversity has its uses, like unity; and it profits nobody to bewail that any one's single language cannot do *all* things or have *all* things desirable. The greater destiny of the Indian languages is before them – yet to come as the crown of their present enrichment and growth.

The problem, as we have said, is not one confined in its significance to any one region or province, but relates to the whole of India. It therefore needs to be taken up by an all-India agency. His Excellency Lord Linlithgow will have rendered a service of first-class importance to India if he would move his Government to set up a special all-India committee to consider this matter in all its bearings and, in consultation with the Inter-University Board, the All-India Educational Conference, the Indian Science Congress and similar other bodies, to formulate proposals for the compilation of Scientific and Technical vocabularies in two grades, one for each important linguistic area and limited to the simpler and more easy objects and ideas, and the other for the whole of India and extending to complex and difficult items of scientific knowledge and thought. The urgency of the matter must be obvious to every one who has appreciated how far behind Europe and America and Japan this country is in respect of the power which science has made available to man.

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