Settling the Language for Cooperative Federalism

Why in news?

The latest effort to impose Hindi raises once again the issue of cultural nationalism, quite retrogressively.

What is the issue?

- Language is an essential ingredient of identity.
- The question of expressing national identity in a linguistically diverse society anxious was debated by the Constitution-makers and even linked to national prestige.
- The **11th volume of the official language committee** recommended Hindi as the language of instruction and examinations in technical courses.
- This touched off a debate on its implications and practicality in terms of the availability of course material and of teachers qualified to communicate it adequately.
- Other issue is the competence of candidates undertaking examinations in Hindi language and competing in equal measure with those whose mother tongue it is.

What are the major provisions regarding languages?

Source	Provision
Article 345	The State legislature may adopt any one or more of the languages or Hindi as the official language of that State. Until the State Legislature otherwise provides, English shall continue to be used as official language of the State.
Article 348	Until Parliament by law otherwise provides, all proceedings in the Supreme Court and High Court, Bills, acts, amendments, ordinances, rules, etc. shall be in English.
Article 351	It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.
The Eighth Schedule	It consists of the 22 languages and spells out the diversity of the language landscape.
The Official Languages Act, 1963 and its Rules	The Act provided for the continuation of English language for official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament. It recognizes the complexity of the language landscape in India.
Union List	Covers educational institutions of national importance, scientific and technical education financed by Government of India
Concurrent List	Covers education including technical, medical and universities

- The Constituent Assembly debate covered language of legislatures, language of the courts and the judiciary, and language of the official work of the Union.

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What about the origin of the dissent?

> *The Linguistic Provinces Commission (S K Dhar Commission) set up in 1948 argued against a linguistic basis of reorganisation of states, as it could lead to further division.*

- The dissent began with the appointment of the First Official Language Commission headed by B.G. Kher in 1955.
- It assumed a violent form in 1965 in Tamil Nadu, where violent disturbances led to more than 50 deaths.
- So far, only the recommendations of the official language committee reports up to the ninth have been forwarded to the Parliament.
- The 10th and 11th reports have been submitted to the President and are not in the public domain.

What is the national language issue?

- **Linguistic chauvinism** is the term that firmly exercises power and superiority of one language over others.
- Excessive pride in one's own language breeds resentment and division.
- There are multiple concerns about imposing Hindi, such as the implications for competitiveness in the job market.
- Neither the chapter on Official Language nor Directive Principles of State Policy or Fundamental Duties, mention about national language.
- The constitutional course would be to opt for the language of Article 345 that allows each Legislature to use Hindi or to choose its language, for all official purposes.

Quick Facts

Parliamentary Committee of Official Language

- The Parliamentary Committee of Official Language was set up in **1976** under **Section 4 of The Official Languages Act, 1963.**
- The Committee is chaired by the **Union Home Minister** and has **30 members** - 20 MPs from Lok Sabha and 10 MPs from Rajya Sabha.
- **Purpose of the Committee**
  - To review the progress made in the use of Hindi for official purposes, and
  - To make recommendations to increase the use of Hindi in official communications.
- Under the provisions of the 1963 Act, the panel submits its report to the **President**, who shall lay the report before each House of Parliament and sent to all the State Governments.

References

1. The Hindu | Settling the language for cooperative federalism
2. UTS | A closer look at India's language

