

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Language is crucial to regional identity and India's federal spirit

The barbs and salvos flying thick and fast between Chennai and Delhi over the Centre's three-language policy could be the beginning of a new language war unlike anything the country has seen in decades. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandates that students in India learn three languages: one of them should be a modern Indian language, another a regional language, and the third can be a foreign language, with English being an option. However, the policy has become a flashpoint in Tamil Nadu, where it has been widely perceived as a potential imposition of Hindi at the expense of regional languages, particularly Tamil. The debate has sparked passionate arguments from both sides, with the state's Chief Minister, MK Stalin, leading the charge against the policy, claiming it is a form of "Hindi colonialism".

At the heart of the opposition lies the fear that the three-language policy, despite its apparent flexibility, will eventually lead to the imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister Stalin and his party, the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), have argued that imposing Hindi on the state's education system would be a direct attack on Tamil, a language that holds immense cultural, historical, and emotional significance for the people of Tamil Nadu. The DMK's stance is based on historical context. Tamil Nadu has long resisted efforts to impose Hindi, with a prominent anti-Hindi agitation taking place in the 1960s, led by the DMK's predecessor, the Justice Party. The state's two-language formula - Tamil and English - has been in place for decades and is seen as central to the region's identity. Tamil Nadu's

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successful economic progress, despite the lack of widespread use of Hindi, is often cited as proof that learning Hindi is not essential for the state's success. Stalin's assertions that the region's people are better off without Hindi in their daily lives are grounded in this argument.

Furthermore, Stalin has criticized the Centre's educational policies for promoting Hindi in public institutions and awarding funds disproportionately to Sanskrit and Hindi over Tamil. He claims that this creates a sense of alienation for the majority of non-Hindi speakers in India, suggesting that the dominance of Hindi in national policies marginalizes regional languages and cultures.

On the other side of the debate, supporters of the three-language policy argue that multilingualism is an essential part of India's cultural fabric. The BJP, which is backing the NEP, maintains that the policy is not an imposition but rather an attempt to bridge linguistic divides and promote national unity. Party leaders, including Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai, have highlighted the need for students to learn Hindi, pointing to the advantages of being able to communicate across India's diverse linguistic landscape. Annamalai has also criticised Stalin for accusing the Centre of Hindi imposition, pointing out that Stalin's own government has not made Tamil compulsory in matriculation schools. He argues that Stalin's real concern is the erosion of political support for his party rather than the protection of Tamil.

While the political debate remains polarised, a more nuanced approach to the issue suggests that language is both a tool of unity and a medium of division. Tamil Nadu's long history of linguistic pride is undeniable, and it is crucial to preserve regional languages like Tamil, which have deep cultural and historical roots. The three-language formula, in its original intention, seeks to ensure that students do not become insular in their linguistic capabilities. In a globalised world, the ability to communicate in multiple languages, including English, is increasingly becoming a necessity. However, the implementation of the NEP needs careful consideration of regional sentiments. States like Tamil Nadu, with their strong linguistic identity, must be given autonomy to decide how best to incorporate multilingual education into their system. While promoting Hindi can foster national integration, it should not come at the cost of regional languages that are vital to the identity of millions of people.

The ongoing language debate in Tamil Nadu reflects a broader issue that transcends state boundaries: how to foster national unity without undermining regional identities. The challenge lies in striking a balance that respects both regional autonomy and the need for greater linguistic cohesion across the country. Rather than viewing the issue as a zero-sum game between Hindi and Tamil, the focus should be on creating an inclusive, flexible framework for language education. Tamil Nadu has the right to protect its linguistic heritage, but it should also recognise the value of multilingualism in fostering unity in diversity. The Centre, for its part, must ensure that any language policy respects the diverse linguistic landscape of India and provides the necessary safeguards to protect regional languages.

comment



CLEOFATO ALMEIDA COUTINHO

Hurt sentiments are at much lower pedestal than free speech. Fragility of sentiments is understandable, but must give way to free speech. To protect the freedom of speech only bigotry which spreads hate is criminalised, not points of view or legitimate free expression or even hostile viewpoint



expression would only lead to death of democracy and end of democratic civilization.

Intolerance to dissent has a clear authoritarian streak and here we find a majoritarian outlook. Our country faces staggering targeting of minorities portrayed as outsiders whose allegiance to motherland is questioned. If Muslims are accused of having allegiance to Pakistan, the Christians in Goa are portrayed as having allegiance to Portugal. According to India hate lab, a Washington based research group there has been a 74% increase of hate speech incident in 2024. Strangely any debate over history of the Marathas is seen as an attack on religion.

Manipur has taught us that it is easy to light a fire but

Freedom of Speech is the mother of all freedoms. The foundation of democracy is freedom of speech. 'We are a mature democracy. We are 1280 million people and there would be 1280 million views. One is free not to accept the views of the others...' said Justice Lodha in a matter dealing with hate speech. The debate between free speech and hate speech is as old as World War II.

Uday Bhembre had his counterpoint over Chief Minister's viewpoint on the Portuguese and Shivaji. He is accused of distorting history. Oscar Wilde said 'I may not agree with you, but I will defend to the death, your right to make an ass of yourself'. That is his right. Arguing new ideas and Debating interpretations of existing historical material is the flavour of speech and expression. In fact, a point of view against the mainstream view is a clear dissent and a great characteristic of a thriving democracy. Rosa Luxemburg summed up "freedom is always the freedom of dissenters". A democracy flowers only in a liberal atmosphere. Suppression of Speech and

Whether Uday Bhembre has breached the line between hate speech and freedom of speech is for the police to investigate. Trolling on social media and abusing him at night after criminally trespassing into his house on the spacious ground of him hurting sentiments with the cops looking the other way, only proves that the hooligans have state patronage. If not checked, Dissent will be an endangered species with liberal thinkers going into silence mode leading to tyranny of the karyakartas.

In our country, we have 153A IPC (now 196 BNS) or 295A (now 299 BNS). At the instance of Supreme Court, we got Law Commission recommended sec. 153C IPC (prohibiting incitement to hatred) and sec 505A IPC (causing alarm, fear, and provocation of violence). Even prior to the World War II, the British incorporated sec 295A IPC by secularising English Blasphemy law as existing sec 153A IPC was found wanting. Rampal Malhotra who published

a book Rangila Rasul on the marriages and sex life of Muhammed was acquitted twice for lack of law prohibiting insult to religion. The Muslim community demanded a law against insults to religious feelings. While drafting the law, a select committee of law was conscious of mischief by suppression of candid, Bonafide criticism and hindering of historical research required for uprooting of orthodoxy and superstition via social reform. Hurt sentiments was not felt enough. The words 'deliberate and malicious intention' came into Sec. 295A IPC to avoid courts being clogged by frivolous complaints. It was a temporary remedy for a temporary aberration. Who knew it would be used a century later?

It is in this context that Bhembre's video on Chhatrapati Shivaji must be understood. Some may not appreciate it. For many, Chhatrapati Shivaji is an icon. His video may hurt the sentiments of many. Hurt sentiments are at much lower pedestal than free speech. Fragility of sentiments is understandable, but must give way to free speech. To protect the freedom of speech, only bigotry which spreads hate is criminalised, not points of view or legitimate free expression or even hostile viewpoint. His interpretation of history needs to be dealt with through newspaper columns and videos, not by threats, intimidation, and abuse. Personally, my first Op-ed column in O Herald was a counter to Bhembre mocking at Catholics on the medium of instruction issue.

Calling for DNA test on the relics of St. Xavier was clearly 'malicious with deliberate intent'. It requires a sense of commitment to democracy to understand that an alleged faulty interpretation of history is not incendiary in nature. The Supreme Court is spot on. Last week, while dealing with a poem written by an MP, who was booked by the Gujarat police, Justice Oka questioned whether the police has still not wrapped their heads around fundamental right of free speech and expression 75 years after Independence. Chalk is not cheese!!

(The writer is a practising Advocate & political thinker who taught Constitutional laws for over three decades)

March of free speech over hurt sentiments

people's edit

THE NEWFOUND HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS

K S S PILLAI

There was criticism in the media when many cars accompanied a past Chief Minister who went to Punjab for a ten-day meditation. He had come into politics denouncing the luxurious lives of politicians in power and had vowed never to do so if he became one. He used to cough almost continuously and there was always a woollen muffler around his neck, but his health seemed to have improved after a long stint in power.

The health consciousness seems to have spread among the people as a whole. The young generation has acquired higher physical dimensions than their parents. Numerous factors contribute to this phenomenon. Schools ask their students to wear uniforms unmindful of the climate. The young ones in hot places wear neckties and leather shoes, adding to their discomfort.

Modern workplaces have air conditioners that require all windows and doors shut, depriving the occupants of fresh air. Drinking water comes from water purifiers and refrigerators, not the mud pots as in the past.

Several health clubs, managed by physiotherapists and dieticians, have appeared with equipment for different exercises.

The problem has become acute with the advent of fast food, aptly named 'junk food'. They appeal to the taste buds but contain a lot of saturated fat, sugar and many disease-causing elements. Added to the modern sedentary life, they contribute to people's health problems. Some types of chicken, like broilers, are injected with hormones for faster growth. Even fruits are seen 'ripened' with chemicals. The dangerous bacteria in such chemicals, which can resist medicines, enter the bodies of consumers with undesirable consequences, including untimely death.

People consume non-vegetarian food in most parts of the country. In cookery shows, beautiful maidens are shown cutting and cooking large chunks of meat with no more emotion than handling tomatoes, not remembering that the flesh belonged to live animals till a few hours ago. Traditional dishes have given place to paratha and beef in restaurants. Roadside eateries remain open till early morning in cities.

Most of the food items are adulterated. One comes across 'Chinese rice' or chemicals used to make thousands of litres of 'milk' and its derivatives. Though we wrinkle our noses when social media shows the unhealthy and dirty ways in which 'pani puri' and similar popular snacks are made, there is always a jostling crowd before shops that sell those items.

The craze for a healthy body is not confined to the youngsters. Even the elders are seen walking, and sometimes running, and doing different exercises in open places and public roads. They seem bent upon evading the call from above as much as possible. Those getting a good monthly pension are goaded by their family members to exercise so that they may live longer.

There was a time when people used to take baths in nearby rivers whose water had a natural temperature. Without factories and 'modern' farms on both banks, the water was unpolluted.

Food was prepared over hearths whose fuel was split wood, leaves, and twigs of trees that grew in one's compound. As vehicles were rare, people got all the necessary exercise by walking barefooted through sandy roads.

Now, the elders can only dream of the past while gulping down junk food with youngsters.

Healthier footwear for school students

The recent decision to review the use of canvas shoes with rubber soles as part of school uniforms deserves thoughtful attention. While uniformity in dress code fosters discipline, the choice of footwear should prioritise the health and comfort of students, especially in our region's hot climate. Canvas shoes with rubber soles, often standard in many schools, come with significant drawbacks.

On hot asphalted roads, these shoes can trap heat, causing discomfort, headaches, and even health issues. Prolonged use also leads to foul odors, further emphasizing the need for change. Parents, educators, and the education department must collaborate to identify healthier alternatives. Breathable and heat-resistant materials, such as natural fabrics or mesh, can offer relief. Ergonomic designs with proper ventilation could mitigate these issues while maintaining affordability. The feasibility of any proposed solution should align with the economic realities of all families. Partnerships with local manufacturers could keep costs manageable while ensuring high-quality alternatives. Furthermore, pilot programs in selected schools, along with feedback mechanisms, can provide valuable insights before rolling out changes on a larger scale. Students' well-being must remain the priority. As this discussion progresses, it is essential to involve stakeholders and consider diverse perspectives to

make well-informed decisions that cater to the region's specific climatic and social needs.

Everette Assis Telles, Margao

letterstotheeditor

All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

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Everette Assis Telles, Margao

Communal harmony is in DNA of Goans

In a shocking incident, a statue of St Francis Xavier was reportedly stolen by some unknown persons from a grotto in private property located barely 30 meters from the Quepem police station. Why would thieves target a statue that is 30 years old? This seems like an attempt to create communal tension and create division among Goans. However no force on earth will succeed in disrupting the harmony among the different faiths in Goa. Recently unidentified persons entered into the St Anthony Cross at Chicalim and decamped with a donation box containing cash. In 2022, miscreants burgled a temple near River Sal and decamped with cash from the donation box. Not long ago, thieves struck Azad Jama Masjid at Bicholim and decamped with money from the donation box. Desecration of a cross at Maina Curtorim recently, the third in one month, triggered protests amongst people as they demanded action in the matter. It must be said that theft is not restricted to any particular religion.

However, thefts at religious structures have the potential to create communal tension. Com-

munal harmony is in the very DNA of Goans. Built over generations, it transcends politics. Some undesirable elements are out to foment communal disharmony in the state. We need to be alert and foil these attempts. One of the oldest strategies in politics is to divide and rule. Goans show respect to all religions which is on display during festive seasons of various faiths. We need to keep this spiritual bond which has stood the test of time.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Save Goa before it's too late

As a senior citizen, I have never witnessed a time like this under the current government. Even during the Portuguese era and during the tenure of former chief ministers Dayanand Bandodkar and Pratapsingh Rane, Goa was much better and more peaceful. Today, we are surrounded by projects everywhere—on hills, fields, seashores, lakes, rivers, and beyond. But who benefits from these projects? Outsiders are taking control, while Goa's natural beauty and resources are being exploited.

The law and order situation has deteriorated. Crimes such as rapes, murders, and robberies are on the rise, yet the police and other authorities seem to be under the influence of the government, leaving Goans vulnerable. There are no jobs for

the locals, while outsiders are taking the available opportunities. Documents like Pan cards, ration cards, and other essential records are being handed over to outsiders first, just for the sake of vote banks.

Despite efforts by activists to save Goa, there seems to be little support from the people or the opposition. It has become a situation where only the "survival of the fittest" matters.

Goans must rise and fight for their rights. In the upcoming 2027 elections, we must demand paper ballots, not EVM votes, to ensure fairness. Irrespective of our religion, it's time to unite and save Goa for future generations. If we don't act now, Goa as we know it may no longer exist.

Let's not wait until it's too late. Stand up, fight for Goa, and ensure its preservation for the generations to come.

Edgar Martins, Chinchinim

Money just cannot buy luxury

Clint Eastwood, the 94-year-old acting legend, formulated one of the most important lessons of his life which can be a guiding beacon for gen-Z, the millenials and youngsters at large. He says, "Don't look for luxury in watches or bracelets, don't look for luxury in villas, private jets and yachts. Luxury is certainly not a diamond bauble on your wrist, a Rolls Royce or a fleet of

Ferraris parked in your garage.

Luxury is laughter and having true friends, luxury is the gentle rain on your face, the petrichor of wet soil, luxury is hugs and love, luxury is experiential travel. Luxury is being loved and respected by people, luxury is having your parents alive, luxury is being able to play with your grandchildren in your garden. But the greatest luxury is the luxury of time; when you have time to do whatever your heart desires, the time to be with your loved ones, the time to be an asset to society. Luxury is something that money can't buy.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim

History is not politician's forte

Surprisingly, the centuries-old rivalry between Mughals and Marathas continues to witness sword and dagger fighting. This only proves that history is being manipulated in the hands of present day politicians to gain mileage.

The suspension from the Maharashtra assembly of Abu Azmi, a legislator from the Samajwadi Party, for his attempt to defend the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb is a case in point. The unearthing of historical truth must be left in the hands of scholarship that prioritises a methodology based on facts, sources and texts, a methodology that shuns the lure of sensational reinterpretation. A dispassionate appraisal of context and prevailing conditions is needed to attain a fair assessment of such chequered characters.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai