

## **The Scene of Multilingual Education In India: The Issue of Medium of Instruction – A Spatial Study**

Apala Saha\*

(\*Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, School of Arts and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab & Research Scholar, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi)

Corresponding Author: Apala Saha\*

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**Abstract:** *Language is not everything in education but without language everything in education is nothing. Equally true is the reality of Indian diversities. The convergence of the two brings individuals and communities to a situation where choice of a language within the education system of the country becomes a very crucial question to answer. Moreover, the geography of the country is seen to play an especially active role in determining the choices available to one and the languages that are finally accessed thereafter. This paper not really provides solutions but bring forth the many questions.*

**Keywords:** *Multilingualism, Education, Spatial.*

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### **I. Introduction**

India is diverse in more ways than one and multilingualism is a part of this diversity. India is functionally multilingual with 47 languages used in education as the medium of instruction, 87 in press, 71 in radio, 13 in cinema and 13 in state administration. The major literary languages of the country are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and of course English out of over 1500 mother tongues in the country, (Das Gupta, 1970). With this extensive use of multiple languages, one wonders what is it that still maintains solidarity and unification in this nation? This question has always been on the country's agenda and continues to be so even today. In fact nation itself is like an ideology, a perspective. Then it is up to the observer to fit in physical space within the realm of this ideology. There could exist heterogeneities within this physical space, the idea is to resolve and appropriate them into a compact national identity (Chakravarti and Guptoo, 2000).

Multilingual education is not a recent existence in India. It has been there even before colonisation happened. The initiation of education could have been in any language but higher education was mostly in languages like Sanskrit as this was the language of the religious texts which predominated in early times. With colonisation of course there has been a distinct change in the medium of instruction in this country. English became the language that gave one access to power and position within the British ruling system. It was not only included in the education system of the country but it was very soon recognised to be the most important medium of instruction. And not just that, English was used like a tool for administration (Annamalai, 2008). Therefore one had learnt to live with English so much so that it did not even appear to be an alien language when the formulation of policies started. Thus, the importance of English was retained even after independence but a subsequent effort was also made to revive the Indian languages into education system as they were no less rich. Attempts were also made in the post independence period to make education available in the mother tongues to even the minority sections of the society. The paper makes an attempt to understand how far these goals stand achieved and where exactly laid the gaps?

India is inherently multilingual in nature. A child growing up in any part this country is likely to learn more than just his/her mother tongue. There are several contact languages which a child learns, at least comprehends if not read or write. The problem is that in the presence of so many languages, which should be the dominant one in the education system?

There are four possibilities:

- a) Should it be the mother tongue which is the child's first medium of expression?
- b) Should it be English, India's official and the world's most understood language?
- c) Should it be Hindi, the most widely spoken language in the nation?
- d) Should it be the regional language of that state in which one resides if this regional language is different from Hindi or the mother tongue?

The options that fit into these possibilities largely depend upon the part of the country in which one is located and that in turn determines his/her mobility within and outside the concerned area. Therefore a spatial approach to the study is important because it is differential location which is the deciding element.

## **II. Literature Review**

‘Linguistic diversity is not merely reached by accidental processes but is inherited and is an integral part of nation building, philosophy and history’. (Mahapatra, 1990). The association of multiple languages with education is not a recent phenomenon either. And the resultant hierarchies are also as old as this association. In the pre colonial period, education was designed along caste lines where the Brahmins were imparted knowledge in Sanskrit and the monks in Pali and the common human was taught in the local language (Annamalai, 2008).

Standardisation was attempted for the first time by the British with the introduction of English as a medium of instruction. There is a consensus among all authors with regards to the motive of introducing English into the Indian system. Three groups emerged at that stage: the Anglicists who wanted English to be learnt by a small section of the population who in turn can impart European knowledge to the masses in vernaculars, this would cut down on the governmental expenditures as well. The Orientalists who wanted English texts to be translated in the oriental languages like Sanskrit and Persian, this in turn could be passed down to the masses. Thus both were based on ‘downward infiltration’. (Annamalai, 2008). The third group were called Vernacularists who wanted education to be imparted directly in the vernaculars.

Change came about much before independence. As an expression of political reforms, the major Indian languages were used as medium of instruction at the secondary level from 1921. Krishnamurti (1990) is of the opinion that by 1947 the problem of medium of instruction was almost solved and a state of stability was reached. He opines that ‘a century long dichotomy which started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century ended’ by the 1920s. But it is also true that the sudden incorporation of the major Indian languages created much disturbance as not many schools of the country embraced them readily. But, English for some implied vernaculars for all. English education at that time was able to provide equal opportunities to students from all social backgrounds on one hand but it was highly class based on the other.

With independence in 1947, came up three issues. Choices had to be made for the medium of instruction, the medium of administration and the medium of law. The consensus was to shift from English to the major Indian languages. When the states were asked to choose between Hindi and their regional languages, they chose the latter over the former. Some states with minority languages or without even one dominant language chose English over both Hindi and other Indian languages. The decision was left to the states whether or not to fund the English medium schools and in many instances vernacular medium was made obligatory (Annamalai, 2008). This in turn generated turmoils. Advantages of English have been asserted by many but at the same time Mother Tongue medium of instruction is also important because ‘Mother Tongue anchors the child to culture, the loss of which results in the loss of intellectual and aesthetic creativity and results in intellectual impoverishment’ (Pattanayak, 1990).

In 1950, the Constitution of India recognised 15 languages, 14 modern Indian language and 1 classical language (Sanskrit) by including them in the eighth schedule. Hindi was made the official language of the country and English was the associate official language. The 14 modern Indian languages were spoken by 87% of the population. Linguistic states were formed in 1956. (Krishnamurti, 1990). The three language formula (1957) also provided a higher position to English as compared to the Indian languages. However the minority and the traditional languages found no place. In 1964-65, The Education Commission decided to replace English with a regional language at the highest level of instruction and examination and English was to be taught as a subject only. The implementation was however haphazard.

The 1986 Education policy of India said, ‘steps will be taken to foster among students an understanding of the diverse cultural and social systems of the people living in different parts of the country. Besides the promotion of the link language, programmes will also be launched to increase substantially the translation of books from one language to another and to publish multilingual dictionaries and glossaries. The young will be encouraged to undertake the rediscovery of India, each in his own image and perception’. On the equality front it aimed at providing education to the scheduled tribes in their own language in the initial stages, subsequently shifting to the regional language in the later stages. Efforts were made to promote the regional language, implement the three language formula from the secondary stage, develop Hindi and lay special emphasis on Sanskrit and international languages.

In the period between 1947 upto the present times, the position achieved by English has been mainly because of its usefulness and its unifying character. Khubchandani writes, “The use of English in the post colonial India in a way reflects on the nation’s capacity to accept and make a language as foreign as English so utterly her own.” Therefore there existed as much a sense of acceptance among the masses as a sense of replacement among the segment of leadership.

Presently, a huge body of literature covers issues like the declining importance of the classical languages from the curriculum, the improper implementation of the three language formula, the problem of ignoring the number of speakers in deciding the medium of instruction, the problem of Hindi overpowering the regional languages and the associated politics, and rise of urban based privately owned English Medium schools and the resulting disparities thereafter and the high dropout rates in the tribal pockets. What exists are discrete studies on particular languages or communities or areas and what is missing is the link between all these which somehow have similar roots. This paper makes an attempt to fill up this gap.

### III. Objectives

- To find out the spatial variations in the major choices available to an individual in terms of medium of instruction.
- To find out the spatial variation in the distribution of English and vernacular medium schools and suitable reasons for such a distribution.
- To find out the position of Hindi (as a medium of instruction) in the Hindi and non Hindi speaking belts.
- To find out the place of tribal/minority languages in education and alternatives available in case of their lack or absence as medium of instruction.

### Central Question

There is no doubt about the fact that ‘English is the language of globalization, science and technology and social mobility;’ (Ruanni and Tupas, 2008). Again, India has a huge spectrum of mother tongues with rich literary cultures on the one hand and some languages without even standard written forms on the other. Given the above situation, this paper tries to answer the question: What is the place of English and the vernacular medium of instruction and whether it is more feasible for the nation to encourage the English medium of instruction or should we make an attempt to make education available in the numerous Mother Tongues existing all across this country and their relative importance through the different stages of learning? Also how important is Hindi both within the Hindi speaking belt and outside it?

### Database

- Seventh All India School Education Survey, 2002
- District Information System for Education, State and District report cards, 2007-08.

### IV. Methodology

- Location Quotient (LQ):

$LQ = (\text{Number Of Speakers Of The Dominant Language Of A State} / \text{Total Population Of The State}) / (\text{Number Of Speakers Of That Language In India} / \text{Total Population Of India})$ .

This is to show the relative concentration of languages at the state level. This will reveal to what extent the dominant languages are contained within or have spilled over their boundaries. A comparison of the Hindi and non Hindi belt will also be possible. A district level study will help in bringing out the tribal/minority pockets and the surrounding languages which are most likely to act as alternative media of instruction in case of their absence.

- Linguistic Diversity (Greenberg’s Method)  
 $= 1 - ((L1/TP)^2 + (L2/TP)^2 + (L3/TP)^2 + \dots + (LN/TP)^2)$ .

Where L1, L2, L3 are the number of speakers of each language and TP is the total population.

This is to understand the linguistic diversities and compare it with the available choices for medium of instruction which can be found out through **maps and graphs** both at the state and district level and across the stages of learning.

The location quotient method can also be used to find out the concentration of English medium and vernacular medium schools within a state and a rural-urban comparison can be drawn.

### V. Results And Discussion

#### 1) The Multilingual Scene in India

In India, multilingualism is a more common phenomenon than monolingualism. It is said that on an average every Indian language has at least three contact languages. And all major Indian languages exist beyond their home territory. The language divides in India are not very distinct resulting in the formation of continuums. Thus the major languages in this country have a distinct flavour within their home territories and outside as well. And all of these results in the ‘Indianisation’ of languages, where by the multitude of languages within the domestic boundary of this country converge to become ‘Indian’. ‘Functionality’ is yet another aspect of Indian

multilingualism. The multitude of languages spoken in the country does not come into conflict with one another. There are different languages for communicating at home, at the market place, in administration, in cinema, music etc.

### **Map 1 And Map 2 Is Here**

Different from the general picture, there are specifications within the nation as is visible from maps 1 and 2. Bilingualism and trilingualism are common phenomena in the north east, in Kashmir, in Punjab and the Maharashtra-Karnataka region. North east has several languages in contact with each other, thus multilingualism is not an uncommon phenomenon in the area. Punjab could be multilingual because of the simultaneous presence of languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Haryanvi, Sindhi and others. Jammu and Kashmir also is also an area with people having Kashmiri, Hindi, Urdu, Dogri etc. as their mother tongue, thus making the area highly multilingual. The Hindi speaking belt is relatively homogeneous with only 0-20% of the population being multilingual. It is not that that this region does not have variations, it definitely does. People here speak different dialects or forms of the broader language 'Hindi'. Marwari is different from Maithili, yet both are called 'Hindi'. These issues keep the area more or less monolingual. More Indian men are multilingual as compared to that of women, as is understood from figures 1 and 2. This is because men are more mobile, better placed in education etc. Multilingualism can be attained both through education and migration apart from simply being in contact with many languages.

Fig 1 And Fig 2 Is Here

### **2) Relating education and languages through the different stages of learning**

The All India Education Survey shows that only 41 languages are currently used in schools, 33 at the primary level (first five years of school), 25 in the upper primary level (sixth and seventh years of school), 21 in secondary level (eighth to tenth year of school) and 18 in higher secondary (eleventh and twelfth years of school). Multilingual education is an integral part of the Indian System of learning and the three language formula says that an individual passing higher education should be at least a trilingual. Thus formal education is a tool to maintain the multilingual character of our society.

**Primary level:** Most schools in India have one medium of instruction at the primary level. It is most likely that this will be the mother tongue of the majority of the population, a dominant regional language or Hindi (mainly in the Hindi speaking belt).

### **Fig 3 Is Here**

Jammu and Kashmir is the only state in the country where three or more media of instruction is prevalent even at the primary stage of education. Mostly again the states with multiple contact languages reveal heterogeneity whereas homogeneity prevails all along the Hindi speaking region. In states like West Bengali, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh etc. that distinctly has a dominant language also show an almost single medium of instruction at the primary level.

**Upper Primary Level:** At the upper primary level also a similar picture prevails. The only difference being that at this level in more states a second or a third medium of instruction is incorporated.

### **Fig 4 Is Here**

This could be Hindi in the non Hindi dominant areas or English in the Hindi dominant areas and in the non Hindi dominant areas as well. However the general picture remains the same. In the schools which are primarily English medium, at this stage there could be the incorporation of the regional language of the area, be it Hindi or otherwise.

**Secondary Level:** At this stage the incorporation of a third language becomes all the more prominent. In most states therefore the three dominant media are thus, Hindi, English and the regional language. People in the tribal states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya get very little chance to learn in their mother tongues because of the predominance of English all through the four levels of learning. Similar is the case with Sikkim where education is available mainly in English and languages like Tibetan, Bhotia etc. are used only in the monasteries and not so much in the formal education system.

### **Fig 5 Is Here**

**Higher Secondary Level:** The dominance of a single medium is seen to decline at this level in many states. In fact, two, three or more languages are more common at this stage of education. If the beginning takes place in the language a child understands then picking up any number of languages at a later stage is no big deal for the same child. However this is not true for states like Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, these three states remain monolingual in their education systems all throughout.

### **Fig 6 Is Here**

Multilingualism is not always acquired as a part of the process of becoming educated. It is possible that like general education, language learning takes place more than inside, outside schools. There are three sources of learning a second language in India apart from one's mother tongue. Firstly, through formal education imparted by schools, secondly, non formal education by adult literacy centres voluntary organisations and thirdly informal education through interactions within and across different speech groups.

### **3) The three language formula: two emerging issues**

The three language formula was the official policy of the Government of India which in 1957 recommended the use of:

- Regional language or the mother tongue as the first teaching language for five years.
- Hindi in non-Hindi areas and any Indian language for Hindi Areas as the second language (as a school subject).
- English as third language subject from the third year onwards.

From the above conditions, two distinct issues find importance in the Indian Scenario:

- a. Predominance of Hindi over English or vice-versa.
- b. Position of the Mother Tongue.

Predominance of Hindi over English or vice-versa: Comparing the past with the present one thing becomes obvious that unlike the past, today English is the politically and economically dominant language. Due to the unilateral imposition of English during and after the colonial rule, English today has gained the strength to overshadow Hindi which has been the language of our protests in the pre independence era. After independence an attempt was made to replace the foreign language (English) with a native one (Hindi), but it was looked down upon by a section of the people to be a symbol of communism and language chauvinism and over and above a tool for subordinating the language and the voices of the minorities.

### **Map 3 And Map 4 Are Here**

Hindi, in the present day India qualifies as a language of wider communication. It serves as a link language throughout the country for trade, commerce, entertainment etc. English is the only competing language. It also acts as a connecting language. Hindi is our national language and English is our official language.

Spatially viewing, the number of English speakers does not stand a competition with Hindi speakers in this country because English is the mother tongue of a very small percentage of the population whereas millions claim Hindi as their mother tongue. Therefore linguistically the position of Hindi is stronger than that of English. This is strengthened by not only its inclusion in the eighth schedule but by virtue of the very fact that Hindi is our national language despite whatever hindrances, it legally and politically has a much stronger space in the Indian linguistic scenario as compared to that of English which is a non scheduled language in this country.

### **Fig 7 Is Here**

However the education scenario is quite different from this. In reality the importance of English has only increased in the post colonial period. Today, English education is extremely important for our progress especially in the industrial and scientific fields. English attaches a certain sense of honour to itself and thus claims a certain level of prestige. It divides the society into the English speaking sophisticated class and the non English speaking backward class. Its neutral character also cannot be denied in this nation of diversities. Moreover, the fact that English opens up global opportunities cannot be denied at all. But in India, it is seen that English gains an absolute supremacy only in higher education.

### **Table 1 Is Here**

But English medium schools in India to mainly urban areas and as far as the overall scenario is concerned most states of India provide the opportunity to learn in the regional language in non Hindi speaking regions or in Hindi in the Hindi speaking regions. This in most instances thus coincides with the child's mother tongue in most areas of the country.

### **Fig 8 Is Here**

Most states in India have primary education in the regional language or in Hindi. It is only with up gradation in education that the importance of the regional language declines to be replaced with English in most instances. In the Hindi speaking belt, Hindi and English are taught as first and second language interchangeably, whereas in

the non Hindi speaking areas, it is usually English and the respective regional language. In these states Hindi is taught only as a third language from the fifth year of school whereas English, even if it is not the medium of instruction is taught like a compulsory subject from an even earlier stage. Thus, the position of English is better placed than Hindi in most instances in India. Therefore, learning English and learning in English, both are extremely important. Apart from segregating the society, English has also been successful in creating a market drive for private education in this country especially in the urban areas.

**Position of the Mother tongue:** The Mother Tongue should be the medium of instruction at least at the elementary stages of education. This has several advantages because it is the child's first medium of expression, it makes education broad based and it helps in bridging the gap between the home and the school. Studies have shown that children who do not begin their education in their mother tongue do not fare as well as compared to those who do.

In most states of India, elementary education does take place in the mother tongue. This is especially true for states that have a dominant regional language. The problem lies with the tribal states especially the north east. Because of the presence of numerous tribes in one area, nobody's mother tongue can be called the language of the area. Thus the dominance of any one of those languages naturally subordinates the others. In these areas, English becomes important in a big way, thereby connecting the heterogeneous population of the area.

#### **Fig 9 And Fig 10 Are Here**

It is important to show rural and urban areas separately because, mother tongue medium of instruction is more prevalent in the rural areas only. The urban areas are driven by trends of English medium schools. Thus the overall picture of the country is primarily because of the rural areas. In almost all the states mother tongue medium is more prevalent in the rural areas as compared to their urban counterparts. States like Delhi and some of the union territories show an opposite trend mainly because these areas are predominantly urban in nature.

#### **Fig 11 Is Here**

As far as the stages of education are concerned, there are more schools with the mother tongue medium at the primary level as compared to that of the upper primary. The importance of mother tongue medium is valid mainly at the early stages, after which it declines to provide space for other languages so that an individual at the completion of school can become at least a trilingual. Indian education therefore must remain multilingual (even if it starts with the mother tongue) to preserve its all inclusive character.

#### **4) Tribal languages as against traditional languages**

One of the prime concerns of the language policy of India was to provide the linguistic minorities the facility to attain education in their mother tongue at least at the elementary stages. India has been constantly questioning the fact as to what should be the medium of instruction especially with reference to the tribal communities. Most of their languages lack standardized written forms. One finds that the tribal children are mostly out of school due to linguistic and physical inaccessibility to school. Attempts have been made to provide Alternative Schools for them. These efforts have paid off in many ways through increase in enrolment, retention rates, participation etc. this is because in these schools, the teachers and students mostly have a one to one interaction. Though use of derogatory language, lack of interest and absenteeism are common problems among teachers of these schools. What makes the linguistic scene all the more complex is the fact that most of the tribal communities are heterogeneous in their mother tongues. And with increased intervention, many have embraced the dominant language of their area of residence, even if they have not, most of the times education is available in this dominant language and they are left with no choice but to embrace it. Today many languages compete for the dominant position and it is the language of the minority that has to seek protection from unfavorable domination. This leads to language conflicts at societal levels. The problem here is a little different, when one among two minority languages is given preference in the education system, or when a non-scheduled language is preferred over a scheduled language, the situation becomes all the more unfair. Santali is a scheduled language, but its position in the education system is not so impressive as compared to Arabic, which is not even included in the eighth schedule of the constitution.

#### **Table 2 is here**

#### **Fig 12 is here**

Languages like Bhil, Gondi, Santali etc. has so many speakers, yet their position in the education system is almost absent. Some of these languages do not even have one registered school teaching them or teaching in them. These are just few examples; there are many other languages which are totally absent in the education system. On the other hand languages like Sanskrit and Arabic have very less speakers, yet their place is well defined at all stages of education. This is because these languages have tradition and religious sentiments

attached to them. These traditional languages should not be disrespected in any way, but one should understand that there are many other languages existing in this country as well which can die a silent death if their speakers are not given a chance to learn them and develop literature thereafter.

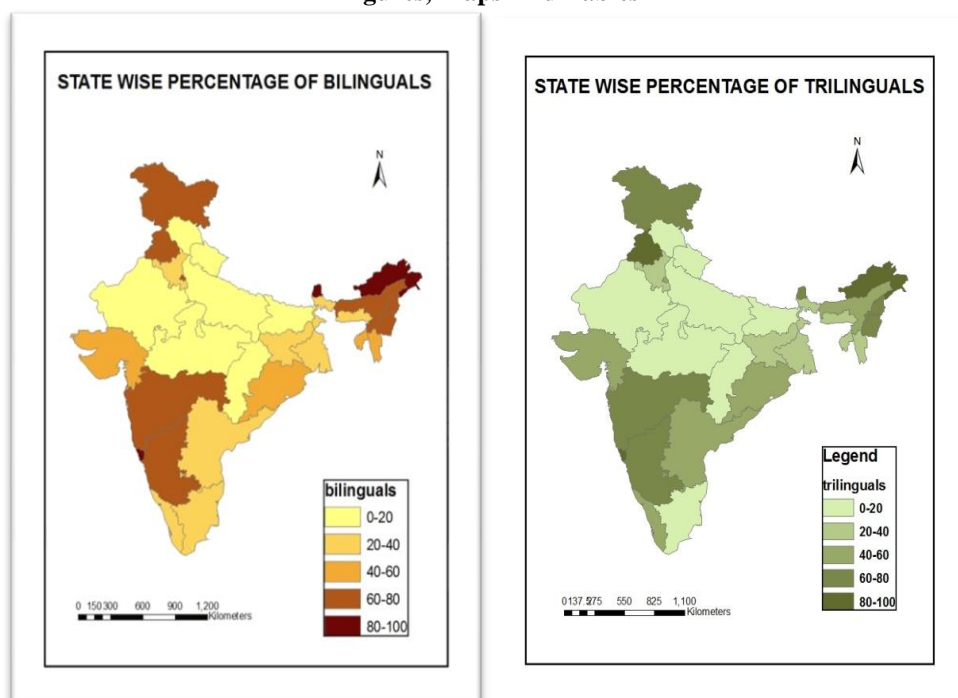
## VI. Conclusion

India is a multilingual country and best it remains so. The idea is not to remove variety and make the whole system a homogeneous one. But the importance of the link languages cannot be denied. Language after all is a medium of interaction and this purpose has to be served. Therefore learning these languages is important. But when a child first steps into a school, education should not be presented like an alien object delivered in an alien language, then the desire to listen and learn disappears at the very outset. Therefore familiarization is very important. Today, an individual can learn a foreign language in just a span of three months but have never probably written an alphabet in his/her own mother tongue. This is not desired. Indians are blessed in the sense that just contact can make us multilingual. Most Indians are multilingual first through contact and then through education. Education therefore should help retain the multiplicity rather than erasing it.

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## Figures, Maps And Tables



Map 1 and Map 2 (Source: Computed by author using data from the Census of India, 2001)

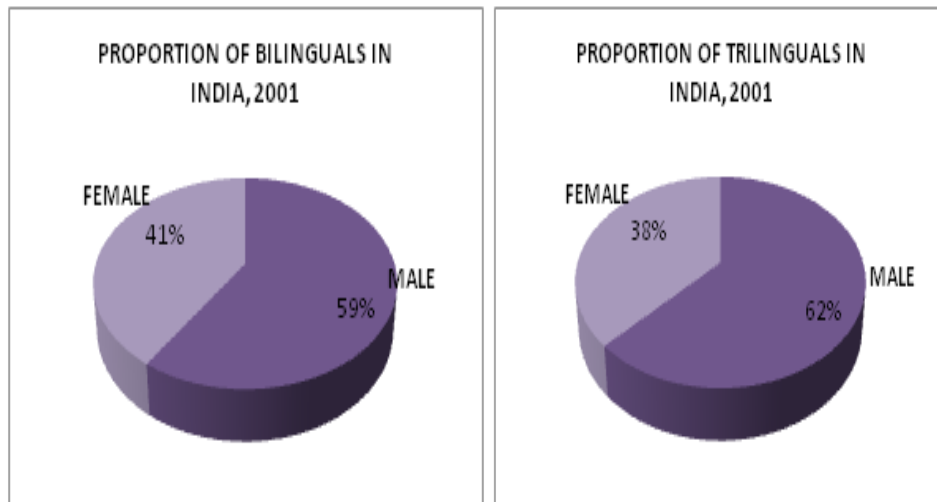


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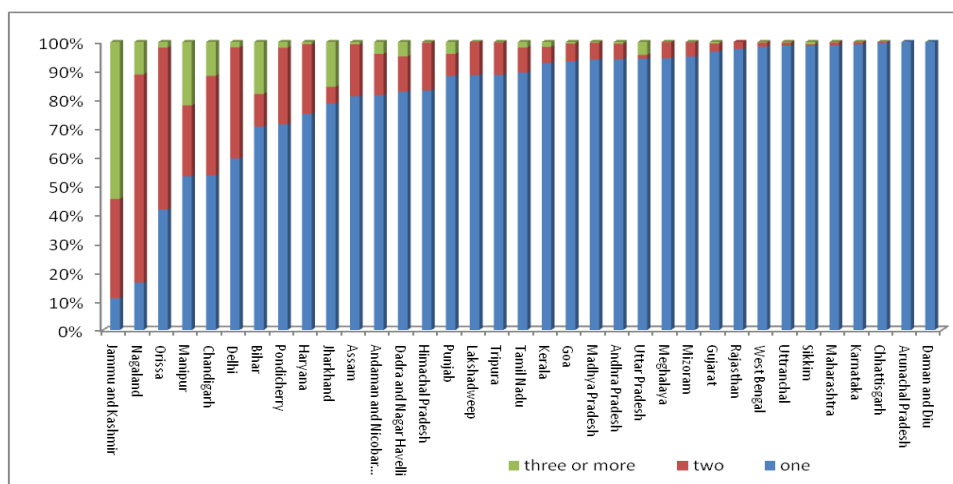


Fig 3: State wise percentage of schools according to number of media of instruction at primary level (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

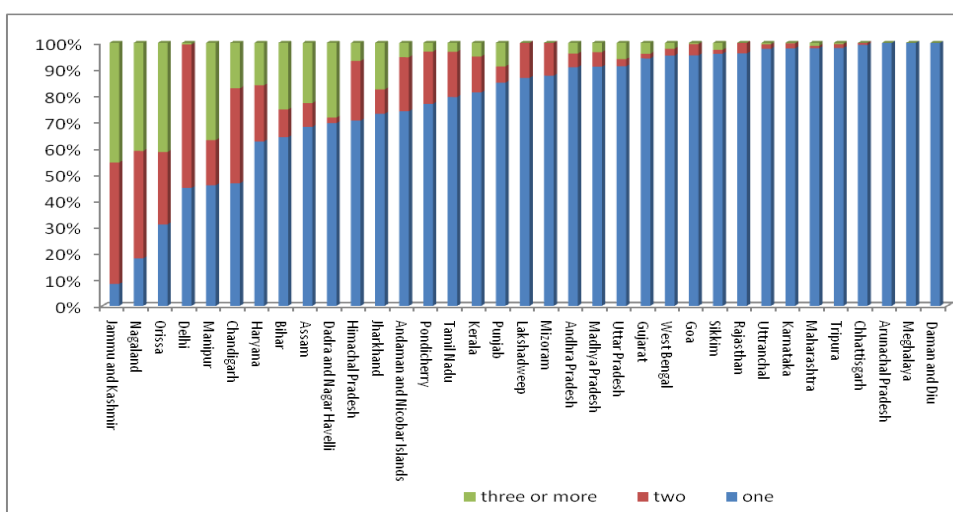


Fig 4: State wise percentage of schools according to number of media of instruction at upper primary level (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)



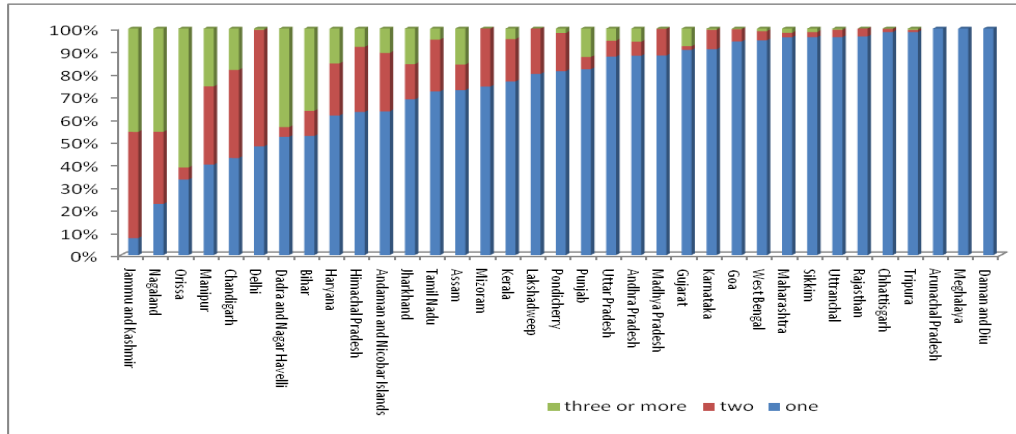


Fig 5: State wise percentage of schools according to number of media of instruction at secondary level (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

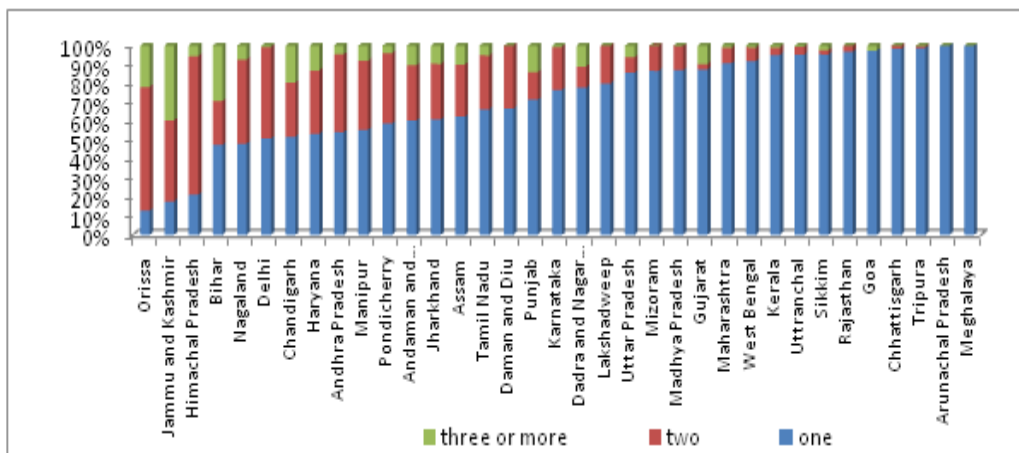
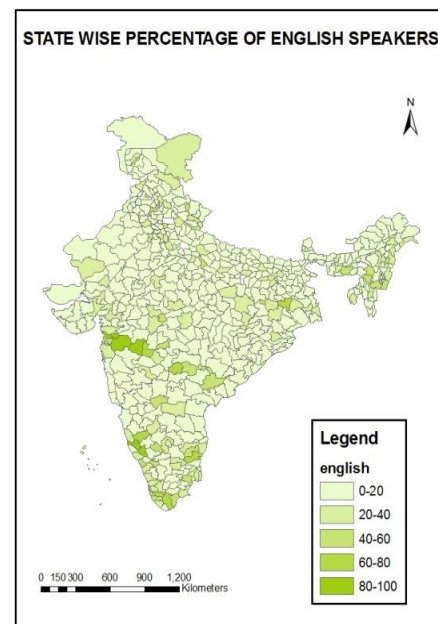
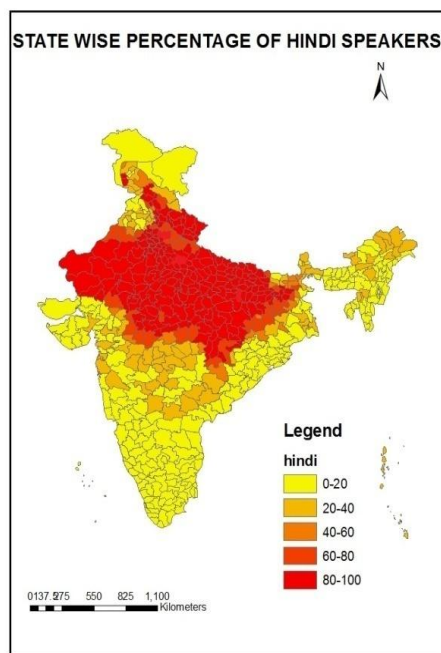


Fig 6: State wise percentage of schools according to number of media of instruction at higher secondary level (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)



Map 3 and Map 4 (Source: Computed by author using data from the Census of India, 2001)

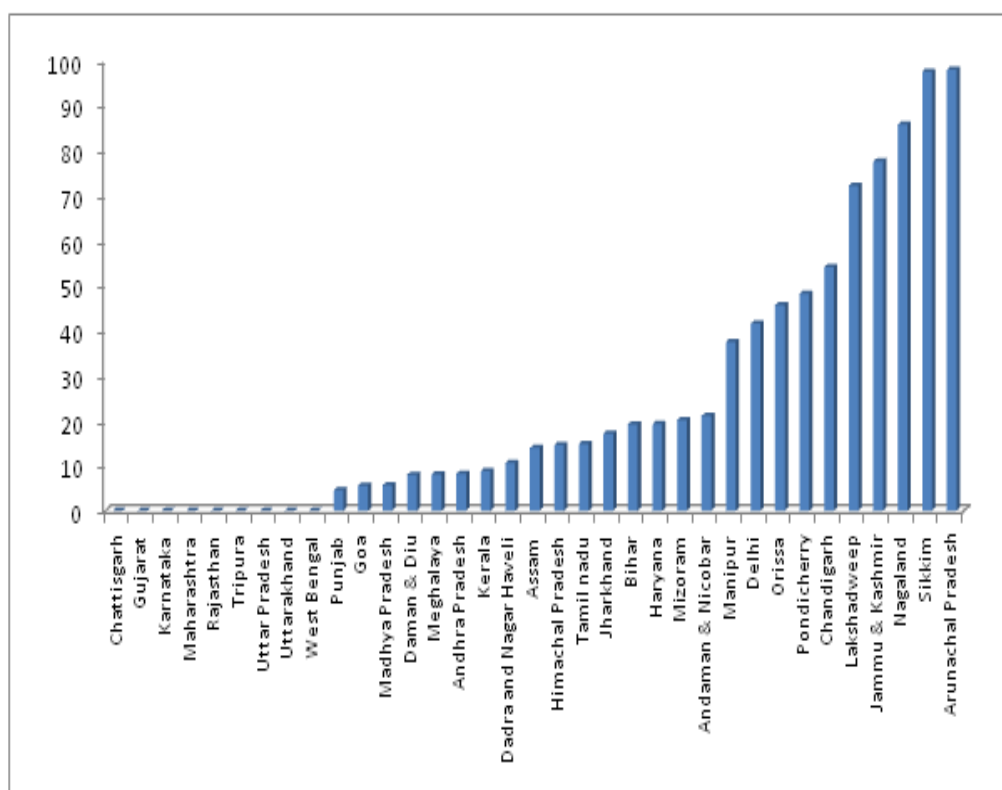


Fig 7: State wise percentage of English medium schools (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

**Table 1:** Percentage Of Schools That Teach English In India

	PRIMARY(CLASS 1-4/5)	MIDDLE(CLASS 4/5-8)	SECONDARY(CLASS 9-10)
ENGLISH AS FIRST LANGUAGE	2.91%	4.25%	6.57%
ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE	21.65%	55.05%	54.12%
ENGLISH AS THIRD LANGUAGE	6.58%	38.02%	35.79%
TOTAL FOR ENGLISH	30.40%	97.32%	96.48%

Source: Annamalai, 2008.

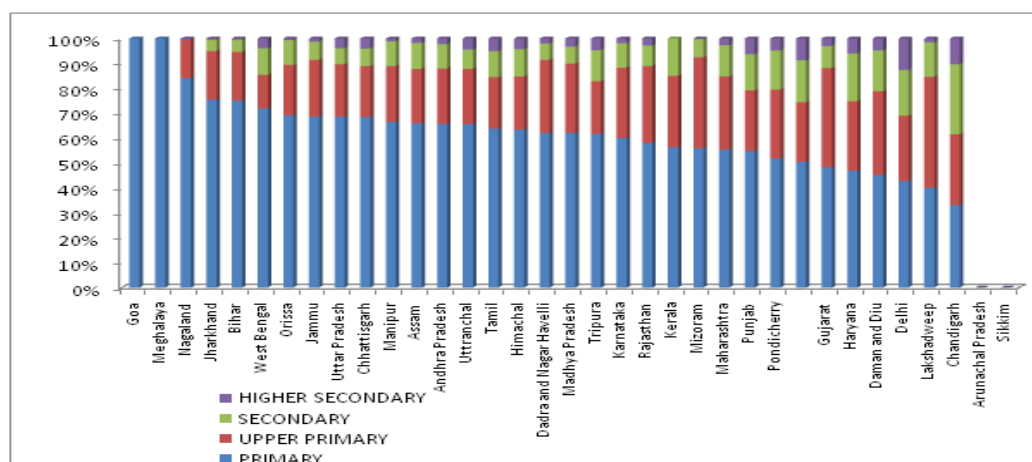


Fig 8: State wise percentage of schools having Hindi or a regional language (in areas where Hindi is not the predominant language) as the medium of instruction across all levels (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

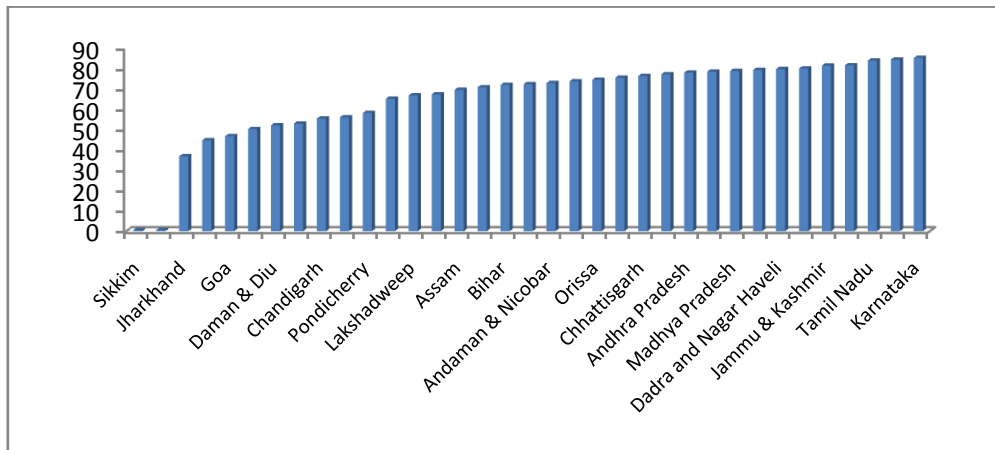


Fig 9: State wise percentage of schools having mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the elementary stage of education (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

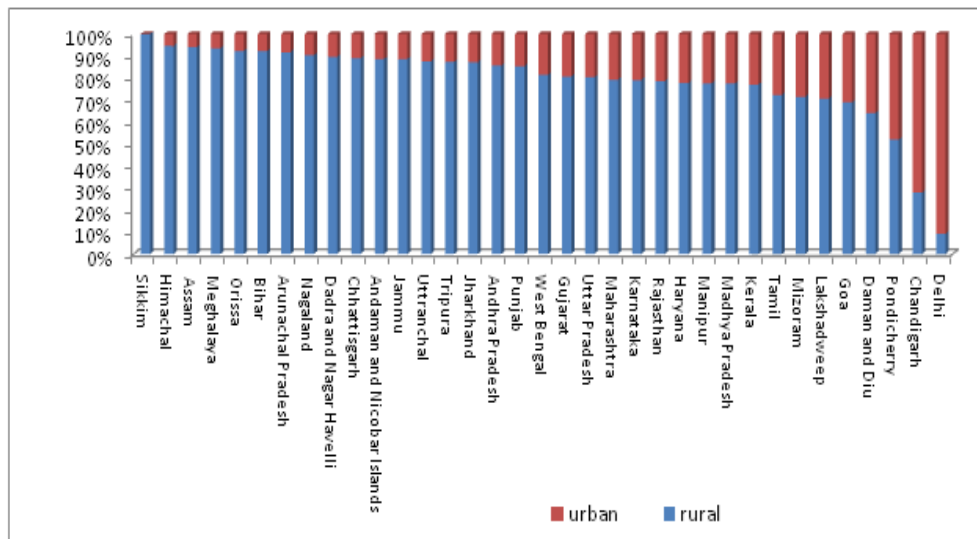


Fig 10: Percentage of schools where the medium of instruction is the mother tongue at the elementary stage of education in the rural and urban areas separately (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

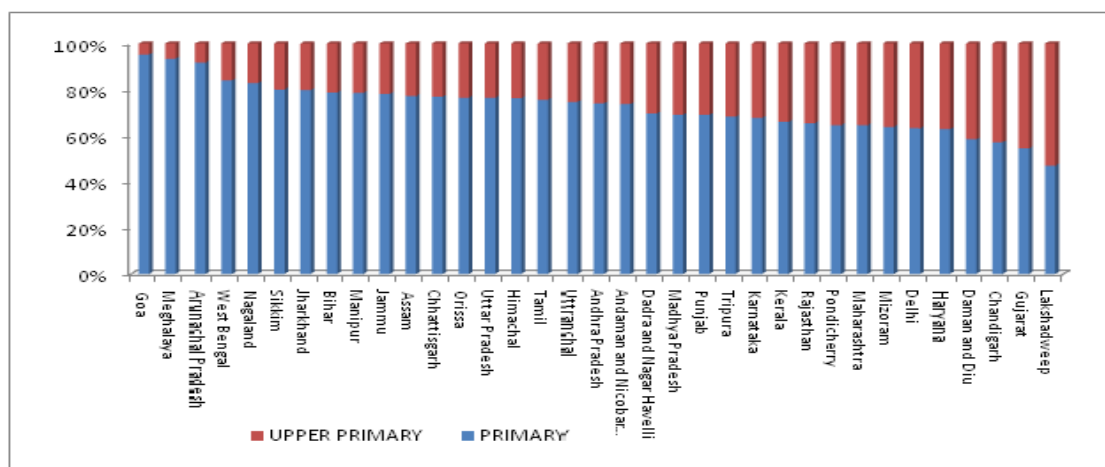
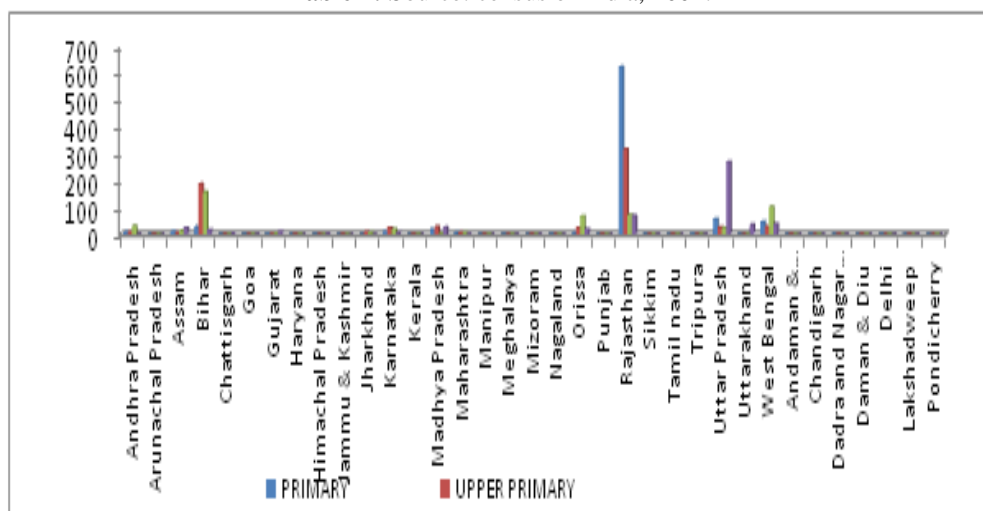


Fig 11: Percentage of schools in India where the medium of instruction is the mother tongue at the primary and upper primary levels separately (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

Language	Speakers
Arabic/ Arbi	51728
Sanskrit	13038
Bhil/Bhilodi	9582957
Gondi	2713790
Santhali	6469600

**Table 2:** Source: census of India, 2001.



**Figure 11:** State wise number of Sanskrit pathshalas across different levels (Source: Computed by author using data from the Seventh All India Education Survey, NCERT, 2002)

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