To a Hindi Enthusiast

You are naturally devoted to the language which is as natural to you as swimming is to a fish. But you do not realize that a dry-land creature like me cannot step into the water with the same confidence. Aquatic competence (even more so amphibian competence) can be acquired only with hard practice. Practice implies time. Time alone can mature certain things. You feel fifteen years is a long enough time. In a matter like the nation-wide adoption of a language you cannot fix a time-table in advance. You cannot command a tree to put forth fruit on such and such a date. You cannot stop the waves on a seashore, as King Canute ably demonstrated long ago. One may multiply instances and analogies, but the point is really this; ripeness is all, as Shakespeare has said somewhere. Ripeness cannot be forced by a government order or even by the recommendations of a commission. You cannot coerce nature, and the rooting and growth of a language is a natural process. You must first shake off the notion that the time element is all important. It is not. It can be altered, the more easily because it is in the constitution. Do not look so outraged at this suggestion. You know as well as I do that any constitution worth its name must be amended, if not forgotten.

Do not imagine that I underrate the urgency of the question. The country should stir itself from the spell cast on it by a foreign language is a point that anyone, will readily grant, although personally I think otherwise. For me, at any rate, English is an absolutely swadeshi language. English, of course, in a remote horoscopic sense, is a native of England, but it enjoys, by virtue of its uncanny adaptability, citizenship in every country in the world. It has sojourned in India longer than you or I and is entitled to be treated with respect. It is my hope that English will soon be classified as a non-regional Indian language.

You have perhaps a suspicion that we in this part of the

country are not sufficiently devoted to the cause. Let me assure you that we are in dead earnest and putting forth our best efforts. Our homes resound with Hindi declensions night and day. The domestic atmosphere is fully Hindi, let me assure you. South Indian womanhood, at any rate, has lent the cause its unstinted support. It may be that the men here are not showing equal competence or application for the task. It is because they are still entangled in the sordid business of working for a living and do not have the time or the energy for mastering a new language, but our women are forging ahead with single-minded devotion. Their zeal has made men nervous. Multi-lingualism is threatening to invade our homes too. Women flaunt their Hindi with undisguised glee; men do not understand a word of it. Presently we may need interpreters in every home for the efficient management of home affairs. The women's zeal is such that men, in their selfishness, sometimes wonder if they will attend to anything else at home, a rather unprogressive fear. Women do attend to both home and Hindi. As the season of Visharad or some such examination approaches, it is a common sight in any household to find the lady putting in twenty-three hours of study, all the while carrying on all her routine domestic activities. While her left hand holds open the textbook under her eyes, her right hand prepares the meal, washes the clothes and rocks the cradle. The indications are that presently an average south Indian housewife will prove an adept not only in Hindi but also in the use of a single hand for various purposes. I could not help asking a certain lady why she went through all this travail. She did not say that she felt it to be a national duty or that she hoped to be recruited to the I.A.S., but simply, "I find it interesting, that is all." This is what I would like you to note. Leave it to our good sense and pleasure and nothing will go amiss. It is not necessary to hold threats to your fellow men who, after all, belong to the same civilization. It is odious to be told, "You will not get your salary or your ration card unless you speak this tongue or that."

Here are my tips if you want Hindi to flourish in this part of the country:

Do not send us postal stationery with Hindi inscriptions on them. At the moment it only puzzles and irritates us, and wastes a lot of our time as we try to divine where to write what. Form-filling, even with the old money-order form with its payee
and remitter (instead of receiver and sender), has been a trying business, always making one pause to wonder whether one was a payee or a remitter, but with Hindi text on it, it is becoming just impossible to get through any business at a post-office counter nowadays. It is childish to imagine that by sending us Hindi forms you are making us more Hindi-conscious. Shall we supply your post offices with forms and stationery printed in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada? That would at least give this whole business a sportive and reciprocal touch.

Secondly, try to make your textbooks attractive, not only in contents but in format. I may say without fear of contradiction that some of the Hindi textbooks I have seen are the shoddiest specimens of book production in the world. The Rashtrabhasha deserves a more dignified dress. Flimsy newsprint pages; thin, coloured covers, smudgy blocks of indifferent drawings and a stiff price are the components of a Hindi textbook as far as my observation goes. It should be possible to spend a little more on paper and production, seeing that every book of this kind has an assured sale of several thousand copies each year. Remember that half the charm of English was engendered by the manner in which its schoolbooks were produced, at least in the old days. I still keep with me an old Nelson Reader, nearly forty years old. I still get a peculiar delight out of turning its pages: its exquisite coloured frontispiece showing some London bridge and river and towers in a fog, its thick and smooth pages, its typographical excellence and, above all, its carefully selected content with relevant black and white pictures, all these have in a subtle and unseen manner helped the language in this country.

‘No School Today’

By the time one comes to the stage of being called an adult, one has left behind all the travails of school-going. One does not entertain any worry on that account. It is one of the few compensations of age. One could afford to look on with detachment at all the children hurrying along with their satchels. And then one forgets one’s past so much as to admonish some child who may show reluctance to move in the direction of school. Most of us are guilty of such forgetfulness. It makes us say, “It is a pity that the present generation is developing on these lines. In our days, school was something which we looked forward to with pleasant anticipation. In fact we used to hate our holidays and vacations.” Sheer falsehood. Adulthood may be defined as a phase of self-deception. Nowhere is it carried to a greater extent than in statements beginning: “In those days....” The listener, inevitably not a contemporary but one of a younger generation, has no courage to contradict the man nor has he any means of checking the veracity of his statement. No adult ever speaks the truth about his schooldays, partly out of bad memory and partly out of diplomacy. The man does not want his child to take his schooldays casually. But the fact remains that no child with red blood in its veins could ever think of its school with unqualified enthusiasm. It is no use asking why it is so. It is so and it is to be accepted as an inevitable fact. The Monday-morning-feeling is a solid reality. An adult experiences it as keenly as a child. He reflects in bed, “I wish I had no office today.” It is a routine sentiment for a Monday morning. The adult may be the sort who loves his work excessively. He may be the sort who cuts short his holiday because he cannot keep away from his desk too long and does not know what to do with his leisure hours. Even he cannot help feeling, “Oh, the wretched Monday again.” It is subsequently suppressed, rationalized and sublimated, so that the man moves down the rut smoothly the rest of