

developed political aspirations, whereas for the first 30 years of her life in India, Sonia Gandhi did not bother to learn Hindi nor taught her children to learn it seriously.

The political power of regional languages and regional elite is evident from the fact that a person who is not deeply entrenched in the language and culture of his/her constituency is not likely to win an election, no matter how high his/her other qualifications. This is an indirect indication of the language policy that people actually endorse

when they have the power through their votes. However, the judiciary, bureaucracy and elite professions are dominated by people who cannot write five sentences in the regional language, all because people have no power to influence the language preference of the elite in those areas, as they do in politics through their votes.

However, this has also meant that our politics has come to be dominated by people who have failed to acquire good quality education. Consequently, most of our elected

representatives are ill equipped to handle the job they are meant for, namely, legislation. Therefore, bureaucrats and hired legal professionals end up conceptualising and drafting most of our laws, rather than people who get elected to legislatures. Thus the decline in the performance and standards of our political institutions is a direct consequence of the dual language policy we have adopted, which leads to poor quality education for the general mass of people in India.

*To be continued.* □

## Mapping Womanhood

*in a child's understanding of geography  
the boundaries were set by paper margins  
and tumultuous folds of countries  
that unsteady fingers could not charter*

*Perinthalmanna was a dot  
on a map thus created  
a noisy, unglamorous pit stop  
with a name far too long perhaps  
though the letters rolled off one's tongue  
distinctly, comfortingly, tasting of home*

*in womanhood, the once-child  
is introduced to the virtues  
of a dusty town with nothing to claim  
as its own  
except clandestine bars  
where men throw up on statues  
of voluptuous, naked women  
their curvatures even more pronounced  
after one drink too many*

*by the roadside  
lined by bars they call 'cool',  
on a hilltop,  
stands the temple  
where girls are promised grooms  
in return for prayers*

*she climbs the steps her silk skirt swishing against her toes  
the jasmine flowers in her hair  
wilting in the sun*

*wondering about the goddess  
in whose name  
women were encouraged to  
jump into their husbands' pyres*

*in Perinthalmanna,  
the goddess answers prayers  
with a groom  
to die for,  
she frowns as she imagines this*

*she has seen no temple  
where men can pray  
for worthy wives  
where a morning of chants  
and push and shove  
to see a bedecked goddess  
gets you closer to the  
one with whom you will share your bed every day,  
the father of your children,  
and if lucky,  
a man who will not be angry  
if you do not make his tea  
sugary, as his mother always did*

*in the redrawn boundaries  
of womanhood  
she wishes a pencil stroke  
could smoothen the jagged edges,  
that all uncomfortable topography  
could be overlooked,  
or translated into a straight line  
with a child's quiet self-assuredness*

*Deepa Anappara*