

Party to respond to citizens' complaints.

What lies ahead? Goble foresees "a period where there will be a series of ratchet-

like adjustments of freedom and repression, as both Moscow and the other actors feel the situation out."

### *You Say Tomato . . .*

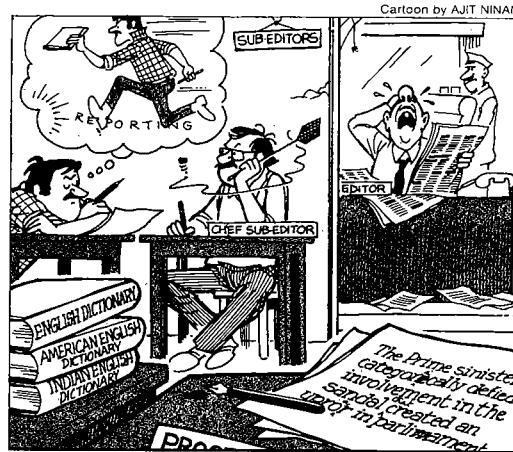
"Of Skylarks & Shirting" by Sarvepalli Gopal, in *Encounter* (July-Aug. 1989), 44 Great Windmill St., London W1V 7PA, Great Britain.

In 1937, the Malagasy poet Jean Joseph Rabearivelo killed himself in despair over his inability to reconcile his nationalism with his need to write in French. The reaction was extreme, but similar to that suffered by people in many colonial lands, writes Gopal, a historian at Nehru Collège. India has been an exception.

The use of English has caused Indians no great discomfort in part because the elite has always spoken a second tongue—first Sanskrit, later Persian, then English. After the British withdrawal from India in 1947, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru bore English no special malice but expected it to die a natural death. After all, Gopal observes, it was a language of "sceptered isles and country churchyards" which touched little in the Indian soul. So in 1950, Nehru supported a constitutional provision which called for phasing out English as the nation's official language by 1965 and replacing it with Hindi, the native tongue in much of northern India.

But it turned out that Hindi replaced English only as the nemesis of non-Hindi speakers in southern India, and actually stirred more political protest. Recognizing the threat posed to national unity, and the fact that Hindi "was neither graceful, artistic, nor generally understood," Nehru declared in 1959 that *no* single language would be imposed.

The result has been an expansion of English, writes Gopal. Some 35 million Indians (four percent of the population) speak and write it; India is also the world's third largest producer of books in English. English remains the language of the Indian Establishment, "the unavoidable avenue to status and wealth," and the only language spoken by members of the elite everywhere in the country.



Three kinds of English, *India Today* noted recently, often add up to bad English.

One reason, says Gopal, is that after independence, English "began to sink roots into the upper layers of the Indian soil." Increasingly, the subcontinent's English-speakers have made the language their own. Men carry "bucks" or "chips" (rupees) in their wallets; sneakers, called "plimsolls" in Britain, are called "fleetfoots" in India. "Plenty of Indian writers of talent and passion find English a language in which they can deal adequately with the special realities of their country," says Gopal.

He believes that Nehru was right to let events shape themselves. Now that language has been depoliticized, radio and television are spreading all of India's languages. He expects that English will remain the language of the growing middle class, but will gradually give way to regional tongues as the language of Indian politics. The media, Gopal says, "are achieving imperceptibly what governments and politicians have struggled in vain to do."