

English in India: Journey from Colonial to Global

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The place of English in Indian education setup is one of the most controversial issues. There are two extreme opinions from 'Angrezi Hatao' to English as a solo medium of education and there have been varying shades of these two opinions about the function of English and its place. English in India came with the colonial rule and during the pre-independence period played a very important role in the Indian national and social life. Although Lord Macaulay wanted Indians to be "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect", he unconsciously did immense good to us. He paved the way for development of English in India by making its study compulsory. The introduction of English proved to be a great integrating force for uniting the Indians with their diversified cultures, regions and languages and was responsible for creating an atmosphere of political awareness and consciousness and awareness of our own rights and privileges. The pendulum of the future of English in India is swinging from darkness to brightness due to progress in science and technology, the whole world has become a hamlet and English is the only link language at the global level. Aspiring to become a superpower, India can't afford to neglect English. In spite of the various controversies it has survived to maintain its importance. The paper is an attempt to trace the journey of English from colonial to global 'Lingua Franca'.

KEYWORDS: pre-independence, Lingua Franca, technology, colonial, global.

The place of English in Indian education setup is one of the most controversial issues. There are two extreme opinions from 'Angrezi Hatao' to English as a solo medium of education and there have been varying shades of these two opinions about the function of English and its place. English in India came with the colonial rule and during the pre-independence period played a very important role in the Indian national and social life. During the thirteen years of stay in India [1767-1780] Charles Grant, a Christian Missionary, 'The Father of British Education in

India' made observations about the deplorable state of Indians and recommended the study of English as the "best remedy for their disorders". These observations became the starting point of British Education in India followed by Lord Macaulay in 1835, who paved the way for development of English in India by making its study compulsory.

Although Lord Macaulay wanted Indians to be "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect"¹, he unconsciously did immense good

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to us. The introduction of English proved to be a great integrating force for uniting the Indians with their diversified cultures, regions and languages and was responsible for creating an atmosphere of political awareness and consciousness and awareness of our own rights and privileges. The wave of independence spread from North to South and from East to West. In this connection Narullah and Naik have written:

“It is a doubtful issue whether this political agitation could have originated in the absence of English education”² (quoted in Neena Dash)

After 1920 up to the dawn of independence although Gokhle, Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash Bose and other Indian Leaders rose to the occasion and preached the cause of Indian Language and argued for its inclusion in school, college and university curriculum. But due to the occurrence of many historical events followed in quick succession, the British Government could not implement any changes in their policies. Thus, English continued to dominate the curriculum of Indian schools, colleges and universities and administration. Although English is the vestige of foreign rule but its importance for Indians cannot be ignored or wiped out because English is an international language, a link language, a library language and it is considered to be a window to the rapid progress of technology and advanced scientific knowledge.

The pendulum of the future of English in India is swinging from darkness to brightness due to progress in science and technology, the whole world has become a hamlet and English is the only link language at the global level. Aspiring to become a superpower, India can't afford to neglect English. “The limit of my language means the limits of my world”. English language is unanimously considered as the most popular language of the world today and is true for the Indian sub-continent as well. It would be profoundly unwise for us to look at English from

a narrow nationalistic point of view. It would be a stupendous mistake to minimize its importance or neglect its study. In view of this, it seems practically difficult to dispense with English. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had said:

“The position that English is occupying today in our education and official life cannot be sustained in future. But you will create a chaos and confusions in all affairs, if you suddenly displace a language which is holding on its own for the past one hundred and fifty years”³

As to the question and debate for and against making, English a compulsory subject in the curriculum, The University Education Commission (1948) was of the opinion that:

“Our regional languages are not fully developed. There is a dearth of books and efficient teachers in these languages. Most of the inter-state matters are carried on in English and the official language at the center is also English. Hence, its study should be compulsory.....”⁴ (Neena Dash-14)

On this issue the commission recommended as follows:

“No student should be handicapped by the ignorance of a language which will ultimately determine the carrier that he should choose. It should also be recognized that even in regard to many of the diversified courses of instruction... a knowledge of English will be entirely useful for understanding the subject better and for further study of the same matter.”⁵ (Neena Dash-14)

The Chief Ministers' Conference, 1961, concluded that English should be taught along with Hindi in order to get outside affairs for All India Services, for engineering, medical and forests departments. Later National Policies on Education (1968, 1979, 1986 and 1992) have stressed the importance and the need to study the English language. Having the importance of English in mind, a rightful place should be assigned to this language in the school curriculum.

The preceding makes one thing clear that English is important at the school stage and for higher education and there are no other alternatives. Thus teaching and learning English in India has become a complex affair and the problem that arises in our approach to ELT and ELL are multidimensional. No one approach can be our panacea as each of the dimensions call for different solutions. We have universities that are purely English medium and other universities where English is just a compulsory subject. Between these two extremes we have a wide variety of situations for which suitable ELT and ELL methodology needs to be developed.

In fact, it will not be wrong to say that English is the only window through which we can see the progress been made in the scientific, technological, agricultural, literary, political, social and economic field of the world. In short, knowledge of English helps us to keep in touch with world's ever-increasing explosion of knowledge and technological advancements, which is an important factor to a developing

country like India. P.G. French has rightly observed-

It is only through this (English) language that we have distilled essence of modern knowledge in all fields of human activity. Anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the whole world without leaving his own house.⁶

English is the 'Lingua Franca' of the world. With the IT Revolution and most of the operating systems and the software being in English language, a new utility of writing and oral communication has emerged. The world is making a tremendous progress in the field of Science, Space and Technology. And for this importance of English cannot be denied. Our own regional languages do not have the depth and capacity to understand and co-relate all those technologies developments as most of the best books on all such subjects are in English language. English is a highly communicative, educative, dynamic, flexible and progressive language and universally renowned for its power of expressions.

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