



CONSOLIDATION OF ENGLISH IN THE EDUCATIONAL SET-UP OF INDIA

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Abstract

English first came to the Indian Sub-Continent through trade. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth-I granted a charter to some London merchants giving them a monopoly of trade with India and the East. The East India Company gradually gained control over most of India. During this time English was first introduced to Indians through Christian Missionary Schools and its fast spread in India has been the insistence on English education all over the country. The famous Macaulayan Minute of 1835 envisioned the creation of a class of Indians that could effectively act as a buffer between the British ruling class and its subjects in the Indian sub-Continent. It is for this purpose that various Schools, Colleges and Universities were set up in India to boost the designs of imperialism in the country. However, India has nativised this language that was primarily an imperialist imposition. There is an emerging consensus in India today that English is no more a question of choice but a question of necessity because it got consolidated as the link language between the different states of India and because it has become a language of information and knowledge due to the rapid influx of Computers and IT in education and subsequent globalization of English. It has also long been the preferred medium of instruction in higher education and research areas. It was accepted as the 'Associate Language' in the Constitution of India (1950) as Hindi seemed to be an imposition by non-Hindi speaking states and regions. Today, in the domain of education in independent India, English is the most dominant language used as the medium of instruction in a vast number of schools, colleges and universities.

Key Words: English, Indian Sub-Continent, Education, Macaulayan Minute, Globalisation

Introduction

The influx of European languages in India began by about 1500 AD after the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama's famous voyage to India (1497-99)- one of the main landmarks of geographical exploration, removed all doubts in Europe about the possibilities of reaching India by sea. The voyage was the first to link Europe and Asia by an ocean route that connected the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Impelled by religious fervor and missionary zeal, the Portuguese were the first to come to the Indian Ocean for the cause of commerce and colonization and under the command of Alfonso de Albuquerque, conquered Goa in February 1510 from the Adil Shahi Sultan of Bijapur. The Dutch came to India in 1605, the British in 1612 and the French in 1667 mainly for trade. Where the British were qualitatively different from the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French is that they consciously tried to promote English wherever all the colonial powers set up their factories, till it became a *lingua franca*. So, on the Indian subcontinent the roots of English can be traced to 31 December, 1600, When Queen Elizabeth-I Queen of England- the then economically and geopolitically foremost global power, granted a royal charter to a few wealthy merchants of London organized as 'The Governor and company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies' giving them a monopoly of trade with India and the East, for a period of fifteen years. This commercial venture of some merchants from London which later came to be known as



East India Company, established settlements in Madras, Calcutta and later Bombay and focused only on trade during its first century of operation and not on building an empire in India. But with the passage of time, it increasingly took on governmental powers with its own army and judiciary. Its rule in India effectively began in 1757 from Bengal after its decisive victory in the battle of Plassey in June 1757 over the Nawab of Bengal and its French allies, and lasted until 1858, when after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, it was replaced by direct British rule under the Government of India Act 1858. As the company focused only on trade, it was reluctant to shoulder the responsibility of education of people of India but left it to private efforts like Christian missionaries that took keen interest in the education of Indians so that they might be able to understand the principles of Christianity. In fact, it was the early overseas Christian missionaries that pioneered English and modern vernacular education in India.

The first Christian missionary to take up the task of propagating Christianity and education in India, was St. Francis Xavier of Spain, co-founder of the Society of Jesus (1540), who was asked by king John-III of Portugal to restore Christianity among the Portuguese settlers in his Indian possessions who he believed were losing their faith and Christian values. In May 1542 he arrived in Goa, then capital of Portuguese in India and began his mission as an apostle to the east. He was admired in India for his ability to live and work side by side with the poor. Today a great multitude of English medium schools and many colleges named after St. Xavier exist in more than fifteen states of India, contributing to education in English language in India. In 1614, British Christian missionaries started to come to India and became more and more effective after 1659, once the missionaries were allowed to use the ships of the British East India Company. In 1698, when the charter of the company was renewed, a 'missionary clause' was added to it which silenced the critics of the East India Company in Britain by emphasizing the fact that the company was not merely interested in trading and commercial activities, but also in the enhancement of the church.

In 1765 the East India Company changed its policy of encouragement of Christian missionaries when it became a political power in India after its decisive victories against local rulers in the battle of Plassey in 1757 and the battle of Buxar 1764. From 1765 to 1813, the company did not support the missionaries for the propagation of religious education among the common people in India because they felt that education about Christianity from the missionaries for proselytizing purpose would rouse religious sentiments among Indian masses that would severely affect the business policy of the company. But during this period of indifference of the company towards Christian missionaries, Reverend Friedrich Schwartz - a German missionary to India, after spending some time in England to acquire English language, embarked for India in 1750 and established two English-medium missionary schools in Tanjore (Tamil Nadu) and Marwar (Rajasthan) for the children of soldiers. In 1787, the Court of Directors of the East India Company appreciated his efforts and encouraged him with special grants every year for these schools. The Company's non-cooperation with missionaries in India created a great resentment in the missionary circles in England and the Clapham Sect- a group of social reformers of the church of England based in Clapham, London, started agitating for the freedom of missionary activities in India. Charles Grant -one of the members of Clapham Sect and a British politician who also served in the Company's Court of Directors in 1804 and also as the chairman of British East India Company, Vociferously championed the cause of the missionaries in India. In 1792, Grant wrote the tract '*Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*'. This well-know essay pleaded for the permission of Christian missionaries and



education in India alongside the Company's commercial activities. In 1813, with the efforts of Charles Grant along with the reformer William Wilberforce and the foreign secretary Lord Castlereagh the House of commons of the British Parliament resolved in its 13Th Resolution that "It is the opinion of the committee that it is the duty of this country to promote the interests and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India, and that measures ought to be introduced as may tend to the introduction among them, of useful knowledge and of religious and moral improvement".

The efforts of Charles Grant and Wilberforce, carried on for about twenty years, came to a successful ending when the Charter Act of 1813 was passed by the British Parliament. This charter forms a turning point in the history of Indian Education as there was a provision in this Charter act that the Company should invest one lakh rupees every year "for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories". It also asserted the British Crown's sovereignty over British India, ended East India Company's monopoly of trade in India and permitted Christian missionaries to propagate English and preach their religion in India. A large number of missionary schools were established in India during the 1820's and when in 1835 English was officially made the language of instruction for promoting European literature and sciences among Indian masses, British Education got consolidated in India. Thus the Charter Act of 1813 officially introduced a state system of education in British India as the East India Company was made to accept the responsibility for the education of Indian people. As a result, the Company opened many English medium as well as vernacular schools and colleges in India from 1813 to 1857. The reason behind promotion of missionary schools by elites in India was also because of the public perception of better quality these schools offered in education in both English and the vernacular as compared to local schools and traditional centers of learning like, *gurukuls*, *patshalas*, *madrasas* and *maktabs* which mostly catered to the elite classes of the Indian society. The impact of the new educational system was such that between 1881 and 1947, the number of English primary schools grew from more than eighty thousand to more than one lakh thirty thousand and the number of students in such schools grew from two million to more than ten million during this period. P.L Rawat, in his *History of Indian Education (1956)* observes that India will for ever be indebted to the missionaries for the production of test books, grammars and dictionaries and for their zealous pursuit of educational advancement of Indians.

Anglicist - Orientalist Controversy

Although the Charter Act of 1813 was the first act through which the education system was formally introduced in India, yet it created a big controversy between the Anglicists and orientalists on the medium of instruction for the education of Indians, as it did not clarify the medium of instruction, the objectives of education and the methods to be employed for the improvement of literature of the learned natives in India. In this respect, the Governor General in Council, appointed a committee of ten members in 1823, called 'General Committee of Public Instruction'. The committee members were divided into two groups – Anglicists and Orientalists. The opinion of the Anglicists led by Charles Grant and T.B Macaulay was that western sciences and knowledge should be promoted among Indians through the medium of English, while the Orientalists led by H.T. Prinsep, were against the use of English as a compulsory language. They insisted on education through the classical languages namely Sanskrit and Arabic. Actually both the arguments were flip sides of the same coin as both



were drawn by the same pedagogic principles. The logic for both the groups was the same: the natives are backward and immersed in darkness who need the light of education to dispel it; but they are not fit enough to formulate their own education policy, thus the British rulers should formulate it for them. It was however the argument of the Anglicists that gained the upper hand in 1835 after twelve years of controversy, resulting in the passage of Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education (1835)*.

The real beginning of introduction of English as the medium of education in India can thus be traced to the year 1835, when Governor General William Bentinck (1828-35) appointed Thomas Babington Macaulay- a renowned British historian, essayist, thinker and orator, as the chairman of the Committee of Public Instruction, who gave his verdict in favour of English as the medium of instruction and western education and literatures and sciences as the subjects of study for the Indians, in his famous '*Minute on Indian Education*' of 2nd February 1835. Macaulay came to India in 1834 when he was appointed as the first Law Member of the Governor General's Council and served on the Supreme Council of India between 1834 and 1838. As the chairman of the Committee of Public Instruction, he urged the then Governor general William Bentinck, to reform secondary education on utilitarian lines to deliver '*useful learning*'- a phrase that to Macaulay was synonymous with English education. In his '*Minute on Indian Education*', he proposed the creation of:

"a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of persons Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".

It is well known that in the passage of the crucial *Minute on Indian Education 1835*, Macaulay's hand was considerably strengthened by a small group of Indian scholars and reformers led by Raja Rammohan Roy who preferred English to Indian languages for academic and scientific reasons and for participation in international life. Referring to *Sanskrit and Arabic*, Macaulay says:

"I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one amongst them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of Indian and Arabic".

Macaulay also recommended that Britain should officially withdraw its support to Arabic and Sanskrit. He also recommended replacement of Persian by English as the medium of Instruction in all schools and the training of English-speaking Indians as teachers. His *Minute on Indian Education* received the seal of approval from the Governor General William Bentinck-as the minute largely coincided with Bentinck's own views, and on 7 March 1835 an official resolution endorsing Macaulay's policy of English education in India, was passed. At a stroke English became the language of government, education and advancement. The Macaulayan policy of English Language and English education firmly established English in the Indian Subcontinent.

However in 1839, Lord Auckland- the then Governor General (1836-42), through his *Minute* dated 24th November 1839 tried to put an end to Anglicist – Orientalist controversy by allocating funds for the development of both the English and the oriental education. Auckland favoured the promotion first of oriental instruction and then of the English education. But in 1854, the Macaulayan course of language and education underwent a



review in the President of the Board of Control-Sir Charles Wood's *Education Dispatch of 1854*- also called '*The Magna Carta of Indian Education*'. On 9 July, 1854, Sir Charles Wood sent the Court of Directors the Dispatch which reviewed the past educational policies and outlined a policy for the future. The Indian Education Commission (1882) appointed to enquire into this Dispatch and to suggest methods for more completely carrying out the policy laid down in it, supported the Dispatch and made a specific recommendation for the study of English. It recommended that:

“the English language is to be the medium of instruction in the higher branches and the vernaculars in the lower. English is to be taught wherever there is a demand for it, but it is not to be substituted for the vernacular language of the country.”

It did not make any recommendations to help the study of modern Indian languages or decrease the dominance of English. *Charles Wood's Dispatch* itself has stated:

“ We look, therefore, to the English language and to the Vernacular languages of India together as the medium for the diffusion of European knowledge, and it is our desire to see them cultivated together in all schools in India, of sufficiently high class, to maintain a school master possessing the requisite qualifications”.

The Dispatch thus rejected what according to the British was a retrograde policy as approved by Lord Auckland. The Indian Education commission (1882) noted in its historical review of education in India: “*Since that time education in India has proceeded upon the recognition of the value of English instruction and of the duty of the state to spread western knowledge among its subjects*”.

Hence English brought about a more drastic change in the Indian linguistic situation than it may appear as it took on the role and functions of several languages. Its introduction especially in Education in India was even more radical a step than that of Persian. Indians, especially from the elite classes considered it as the language of power, prestige, social and economic advancement, opportunities and employability. The study of English was encouraged by those Indian scholars and reformers that saw it as a means of gaining access to the rich literature of the west and the western thought, culture, science and technology. The Indian middle classes realized that English was the language required for a secure career in a government job, they started to demand English as the British government gave preference in jobs to English-speaking Indians.

It was due to *Wood's Dispatch of 1854*, that in 1857 three English medium universities were established in India at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and by the end of the 19TH century, the Punjab (Lahore) and Allahabad universities were established. With the spread of large number of colleges and increase in the number of universities, the importance of English was rising and in the early twentieth century English was formally established as the official and academic language of India which then became the prestige language completely replacing Persian and the Indian vernaculars.

Though Lord Curzon- the Viceroy of India (1898-1905), was a protagonist of the development of modern Indian languages, he also supported the extensive use of English at high School and attached great importance to the task of university reforms. He appointed 'The Indian Universities Commission' on 27TH January 1902 which submitted its report in the same year. The commission emphasized the need for the better teaching of English at school



level and extension of European knowledge in higher education through the medium of English. The period from 1854-1921 saw a large expansion of modern system of education at the expense of traditional system. In spite of efforts by Indian freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Annie Basant attacking the predominance of English in Indian education and advocating teaching of modern Indian languages, the medium of instruction still remained English at the higher levels of education and the craze for English education continued to spread and dominate the Indian education scene due to the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy, Lala Lajpat Rai and many such scholars and reformers who argued that in our need to become modern and to be able to shed the illogical constraints on our thought and society, we must learn the modern sciences, the modern literatures, the western political thought, western languages and literature. Through English Indians started to study the literature of western philosophers like J.J Rousseau, Thomas Mill, Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke, Spencer, Locke etc and they adopted modern, rational, secular, democratic and national political viewpoint. Indians also studied the masterpieces of English literature like Shakespear's dramas and Milton's *Paradise Lost* and those of other great English writers. Even during colonial period a galaxy of Indian writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabhani Bhattacharya and even earlier poets like Henry Vivian Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Manmohan Gosh, Aurobindo Ghosh etc wrote in English and earned name and fame all over the world.

Although, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries powerful voices continued from even great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dr Zakir Hussain and others for Indian languages and vernacular education but still English continued to gain importance in pre-independent India and English- medium schools and colleges continued to multiply and flourish.

After India got independence from the British rule in August 1947, the importance of English which had got consolidated in India with the consolidation of the Colonial power, continued to rise due to the tremendous "upmarket value" it had got because of its association with career advancement, social mobility, social status, power and prestige and because of its being a world language with vast opportunities for its proficient speakers not only in India but also all over the world. Be it education - especially profession or technical education, administration, judiciary, information technology, commerce, industry and banking or job opportunities in multinational companies, fluency in English continues to be the primary requirement and most Indians regarded it as an Indian language and a necessary part of everyone's development. They felt that English had made positive contribution to the freedom struggle of India and occupied a neutral position as the Indian leaders used English- the language of the colonizers, against them as it had become a medium of sharing, collecting and spreading information in different parts of the multilingual and heterogeneous country during the colonial period.

Soon after the freedom of India, the immediate task before the leaders of the country was to find a lingua franca, which would serve as the a symbol of the unity and integrity of the nation. As there were fifteen major regional languages as per the first census of free India (1951), none of them could claim superiority to the others and the battle came down to two languages- Hindi and English. The resistance to the imposition of Hindi by non-Hindi speaking states especially of south India, grew so strong that the framers of the Constitution of India (1950) made English second official language after Hindi under Article 343 of the



constitution, to be in use for the official purpose of the union for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of the constitution. It was expected that by 1965 Hindi would replace English and become the language of mass communication but in 1956 the Academy of Tamil Culture objected to the plan of imposition of Hindi as the official language on the grounds that it is the language that is not known to a population of about one hundred million. Again in 1958, the All India Language Conference demanded the continuance of English as the union language without any time limit. Anti-Hindi agitation of similar nature continued through the 1960s. In 1959, India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-1964) assured the non-Hindi speaking people, in a speech in the Lok Sabha, that English would continue as long as they wanted it. Finally in 1967, *The Official Languages (Amendment) Act* settled the issue by making English an associate language of the Union of India without any time limit.

In a multilingual nation like India, an integrated language policy became all the more necessary for educational, cultural and political reasons. The specific problem was the need to introduce the vernacular and yet retain English for a variety of needs- as a medium of education at the higher levels, as a link language between various states and regions of India and as the official language. The language issue gave rise to diverse controversies which led to the appointment of various education commissions, languages commissions and study groups, by the Government of India in an attempt to find a solution to the vexed language problem.

The first education commission set up in post colonial India was the University Education Commission, appointed by the Government of India on November 4, 1948. Dr S. Radhakrishnan- the eminent educationist who later became the president of India, was the chairman of the commission and it is on his name that the commission is also known as Radhakrishnan Commission. The main aim of the commission was to "report on Indian university education and suggest improvement and extensions that may be desirable to suit the present and future requirements of the country". In Independent India, it was the tertiary level of education that first received attention of the leaders, intellectuals and educationists. The commission submitted its report in 1948 and among various other recommendations argued for the replacement of English with an Indian language, but at the same time proposed the retention of English with a view "to keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of ever growing knowledge".

Even after more than a decade of independence from the colonial rule, the relative status of English, Hindi and other regional languages-both as official languages and as media of instruction, was still not clear even in official documents. The anti-Hindi riots in the South, especially in Tamil Nadu as well as the anti-English campaign in some parts of North, lent such urgency to the problem that the Conference of Chief Ministers *in 1961*, recommended the use of the three-languages formula:

- a) The regional language or the mother tongue.
- b) Hindi or any other Indian language in Hindi-speaking areas; and
- c) English or any other European language.

The three -language formula whereby English, Hindi and the regional language had to be in use simultaneously was a pragmatic proposal. In 1964, the Government of India appointed an education commission called the Indian Education Commission, under the chairmanship of Dr D.S Kothari. It is also popularly known as Kothari Commission set up to examine all



aspects of the educational sector in India. Five special members of it were taken from the educationally advanced countries of the world. The main aim of the appointment of this commission was evaluation of the different stages of education and to suggest guidelines and policies for the development of education in India. On the inauguration of the commission on October 2, 1964, Dr S. Radhakrishnan- the president of India said, “it is my earnest desire that the commission which includes representatives of progressive areas in the world, will survey all aspects of education- Primary, Secondary, University and Technical and make recommendations which will help to improve our educational system at all levels”. Among various other recommendations, this commission reiterated the three-language formula for the development of education in India. So from the 1960s to 1990s the, English language teaching received a new impetus from the various establishments of English language Teaching Institutes (first in Allahabad in 1954 then in Hyderabad in 1958) all over the country in collaboration with the British Council.

The next landmark in the history of English education in post-colonial India was the Ramamurti Committee appointed by the Central Government on May 7, 1990 under the chairmanship of Sarvodya leader Acharya Ramamurti-a well-known educationist and academic, to review the 1986 National Policy of Education and the Programme of Action. It submitted its report on 26 December, 1990 in which it made a frank analysis of the problems in the implementation of the three language formula. However, it observed that whatever the difficulties in the implementation, the three language formula has stood the test of time and that it was not desirable or prudent to reopen it. It strengthened the hold of English on contemporary education in India and it was the common consensus that English- a language that opens newer worlds of knowledge and information and opportunities and power, would stay as a necessary part of education in India. As Professor Amitabha Basu put it: *“English is the language of the new global world. Wherever you go, you can manage with English. There is no point in wishing away the importance of English”*. (Agnihotri and Khanna: *Problematizing English in India-1997*)

Though the University Education Commission had recommended in 1949 that regional languages be the medium of education, but in most Indian Universities English continued to be the medium of instruction. The demand for English education in Post-colonial India has led to a phenomenal growth in the number of English-medium schools and colleges with lakhs of students competing for admission to such schools and colleges for standard education. In fact, English has blended itself with the cultural and social complex of the country of diverse languages and regions and has become what Indian writer of English-language novels and short stories-Raja Rao (1908-2006) says “it is the language of our intellectual make-up”. In the post colonial India, people in general and students in particular have realized that English not only gives them “information advantage”- i.e., provides information in every conceivable branch of knowledge, but also the ability to understand our social environment. In other words, it is the language of modernization and not of westernization. Students also realized that English is necessary, if they have to talk about their identity, their languages and literature, their science and technology, their polity, society and economy, their values and traditions and their culture so that the world outside will get to know what they are. In fact, Indians need English to project and interpret India to the rest of the world as it is the same language about which Shri. C. Rajagopalchari- the Governor General of India (1948-1950) once said, *“English language is the greatest gift of goddess Saraswati to India”*.



According to one estimate about the present status of English in India, 4 percent of the population of India use English regularly. However that percentage translates into 50 Million people, making India the 3RD largest English-speaking country after the United States and the United Kingdom. India also ranks 3RD for the publication of books in English and offers over 3000 daily newspapers in English. The prevalence of English in the higher echelons of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, in print and electronic media, on news channels and its hegemony in the academia, at seminars and conferences, in professional sector and in the field of information technology, has consolidated the position of English in the educational sector of post-colonial India and today, for Indians it symbolizes better education, better culture and higher intellect with great demand for it to meet the demands of globalization.

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