

A Critical Study of Significance of English Language in India

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Abstract

In the 21st century many changes in science and technology are taking place so also in common sense, education and approaches towards human life. In this backdrop, the English language has been indispensable to modern education system for Indian people. The language came to India with the British and has intermixed with the local, social, cultural, economic, political, and legal aspects of the people. The emancipation of the people especially from the down trodden and marginalized communities who have been victimized through language for many years now, have started thinking unfailingly for a language in which they can live and survive, they can read and write and express themselves without any restrictions. In such a situation, they have adopted and mastered the English language when they came to know that the English language and knowledge can emancipate them from any kind of bondage, superstition and ignorance. They have accepted that it is not only the most powerful language of the world but also can give them the space, they needed for thousands and thousands of years. Now, the middle classes, the marginalized and neglected people of India have understood the real meaning of the English language for their study, research, expression and knowing the truth of the world that were untold to them by anyone. With the knowledge of English language, they are now able to get good education, good jobs, reputation, social prestige, and making their life

better. The modern development in the field of science and technology, moreover, information and communication and the craving of freedom to reaching out to the unreached have made them to learn English language for their own survival and development.

Keywords: English Language, Education, Significance, Freedom of Expression.

Introduction

The significance of English language dates back to the British Era in India. When the East India Company was established in India in 17th century by the Charter of Queen Elizabeth, business, trade and commercial relations between India and the Great Britain took a new high. Although, the British came to India for trading purposes but seeing the conflicting situations and continuous enmity that were there among the Hindu and the Muslim rulers, paved the way out for the British to defeat them easily one after the other and got control of the entire country (Pillalamarri: 2019). “The Mughals and the Marathas, the Nawabs and the Rajas, the petty chieftains of the North and the South, warred suicidally among themselves, and sometimes fought the foreigner, sometimes sought his help” (Iyengar Srinivasa: 2019: 23). The most notable war was the Battle of Plassey of 1757 in which the British East India Company won over the joint forces. It was a turning point in history of India. The Company now could do trade and commerce on any goods and articles although for a short period.

‘However, it was the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 because of which the political power of the East India Company got transferred to the British Crown and thus, a new beginning happened. Now, the British Crown took over all charge of administration and started ruling the country directly. “The tremendous upsurge of imperial activity during the nineteenth century, though physically taking place in areas distant from British shores, had a broad and pervasive impact on British culture” (Shankar: 2011: 5). It was this time from where the English language became the lingua franca of India and used for all official purposes unfailingly. However,

nothing headways could be achieved on teaching and learning of the English language until, 1835 when Lord Macaulay introduced the English language in the educational system of India giving it a national status (Macaulay's Minute: 1835). It was he who was not only instrumental in replacing the prevailing Persian Language but also made English language as the medium of instruction in India in the educational system. So, right from 1835 to 1947 the English language became the most dominant language of educated and elites of India. It was no surprise to know that when the Constitution of India was enforced in 1950, English language not only became the “official language” (Gopal: 2019: 329). for fifteen years but also became the language of educated, researchers, students, teachers, businessmen and language of knowledge.

Language Explained

A language in ordinary sense of the term is a system of communication of people living in a particular land area. It is the way through which they express their thought, speech, ideas, and feeling for each other. “Thus, practically every linguistic utterance a ‘creative’ in essence” (Devy: 2010: xiii). In fact, a language that can have power to communicate in sound, speech, orally or in writing or in any other gestures as well. “Certain aspects like gestures, facial expression, voice modulations, and tone can all be done using oral communication” (Rizvi: 2018: 133). So, any form of communication including speaking, reading, writing, symbols using or even indicating by gestures between two persons or a group of persons can be called as language. “Communication is an exchange of meaning and understanding” (Rizvi: 2018: 4). Even, not speaking is also a language but in law it can be a ‘form of torture which can be a ground of divorce in India also. “In law, mental cruelty can be a ground of divorce” (The Hindu Marriage Act: 1955: Sec 13 (1), i-a). It is beyond doubt that a language can have oral tradition and so also can be in the written form. Nevertheless, modern language is recognized through its rules of grammar and syntax making it organized and evident than the oral language. In other words, whatever may be the size of the speakers, if, it doesn't have a particular rules of

grammar in the written form, it is not considered as language. Such expression of thought is very often described as colloquial and not a language proper. However, despite, having rules of grammar, many languages in India have either been given secondary importance or negligence or over dominance in terms of use by other languages giving rise to political questioning. It has not been uncommon in politics historically that language has been a tool of assertion of political power and imposing it on all others has been justified on the ancestral pride. Cultural hegemony has a strong impact on educational system of the country a fact, worth discussing (Gramsci: 2015). Such a mistake is being committed by clever politicians to confuse the common men and their personal and social goals. The intention is to gain political mileage and an attempt to push them to hopelessness and destitution.

While, constitutionally, India is a federal state and federalism should have been maintained at all costs but the unwarranted desire to organize the entire country with a single dominant language has led to all kinds of skirmish and suspicion in the eyes of the people of the so called regional languages and sub languages. When the Constitution of India was enforced, the same question of language got a place of major debate and discussion in 1950. The linguistic states were structured on the basis of languages and in that way 22 languages were recognized as official languages of India (Gopal: 2019: 466). India being a federal state had to respect each and every language giving them all constitutional status.

Although, a revered political thinker John Locke has said “of government as a contract between governor and the governed” (Alexander: 2000: 175). But a recent political move and propaganda have been channelized by some vested interests to reorganize the State of India under one language became the real bone of contention especially between Hindi language and other languages in India. When the Central Government pushed Hindi language through the public policy and planning, a major debate concerning whether promotion of Hindi language as the language of the Nation-State of India would cater to the need of all Indian people at large

or not. Whether all the citizens of India would be comfortable with Hindi as their national language or not etc. have become issues of politics. This has been contested to the tooth and nail by the Non-Hindi-Belt of the country. If, there is any language which can bind the entire country together with a single string then, it is definitely English. “To the critic in England I would say: English is a world language” (Iyengar Srinivasa: 2018: 9).

Significance of English Language

When India got her independence from the British in 1947 and the Constitution of India was implemented in 1950 all efforts were made to declare Hindi as the official language of India but many non-Hindi speaking states protested against it. Amidst all these protests, it was agreed that Hindi shall be continued as “official language” (Art. 343, The Constitution of India) but English also should be used simultaneously. It was decided that English shall be continued for the next fifteen years and after that Hindi shall be the official language of India in 1966. However, even after the deadline, the English could not be replaced because of protests from non-Hindi states especially the state of Tamilnadu (Kumar: 2025). Thus, out of compulsion, it was admitted by all that the English language shall be continued as an associate language for all Indians (The Official Language Act of 1963). The English is a powerful language in India and serves as the link language between the Hindi-Speaking and Non-Hindi Speaking people is a fact which cannot be denied, at least officially speaking. Till this date, neither the Hindi could be the compulsory language nor the English could be an optional language in India.

English as Medium of Instruction

English language has been used by many states in India for medium of instruction. It is no surprise to see that all the states including Hindi speaking states clearly accept the English language as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. Many well-to-do families insist on sending their wards to English medium schools only. They never send their

children to any other medium schools even if, they speak their regional language or Hindi language. They have an invincible faith that in English medium schools their children will learn better. All the private schools are imparting English medium education. Internet and computer learning are being highly demanded by students. It has been well understood that without the knowledge of English language they shall not be able to do anything on Computer, Internet, and Mobile Phones. They would be discharged from much talked about IT Sector.

No Ground Works in Regional Languages

Another notable point is that despite being an independent country. India could not develop the Hindi language as the lingua franca of the country. Only propaganda and no ground works sincerely have been done by the successive governments. There are Central Schools so also there are Private Schools but none could think of giving education to the children in Hindi. The central government as well as the state governments have never made Hindi as official language, leaving a few northern states. Only by writing a poster in a bank asking the customers to deal in the banking transactions in Hindi, a language is not going to be promoted. The English language still, a dependable and acceptable language of official relations between the central government and the state governments. The famous author George Orwell's view on the Newspeak is very relevant here when he says, "The purpose of Newspeak was not to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (Orwell: 2005: 298)

Research Works Not Possible:

It has been a strange kind of problem that even after a very long time, the country could not be self-sufficient in language. Who is responsible for such a national debacle? Where is the accountability of politicians? When it comes to research works, serious academic study or rigorous searching of facts or dependable data no research materials can be found in other

language except in English. “Inevitably academic writing employs a great deal of technical vocabulary. It is quite understandable that a thesis should contain a number of specialist terms” (Oliver: 2008: 14). In regional languages many books, articles and writings are published regularly but they are shortfall of authentic information or followed the old traditions of mythological motivation or parrot reading. The same old arguments and counter arguments are given ending with nothing. If, someone would be interested to do research work, logical explanations of facts or analytical study in India, one would generally be discouraged. There has been history of killings of persons who speaks the truth in India (Chisti: 2016). No peer groups, nor the civil society nor the family members nor the affluent persons of the community and the state are interested in research work. “The truth makes some people furious. Henceforth, don’t speak the truth, Taslima” (Taslima Nasrin: 2016: 114). Getting a fund for a serious researcher to complete his research project becomes a distant dream in our society. Many writings which are available with us in regional languages are either written emotionally or with biasness or in prejudice without following any research techniques or systematically raising the issue in writing. Very often, state governments arrange writers to write on admiring their own governments and pressurize the writer to not to write anything that goes against them. In such situation of despise, a writer, a researcher and an academic fail miserably to pursue his dream of doing something new and meaningful for his society. Of course, the researcher will resort to English language for this kind of a shortcoming. “English as the language of research” (Balan: 2021). Thus, for doing research work, reaching out to a larger audience and easy availability of texts in English language, one is bound to do his academic works in English in India. There are always dearth of dependable research works or information or good books, journals, periodicals or newspaper available in any regional languages for students and teachers as well. It is almost impossible to find a good book or an article in modern science, technology, medicines or information and communication subjects in any other language except in English.

English is the Language of Judiciary:

The English language is the official language of Judiciary right from the time of commencement of the Constitution of India. The “Court language is English, says Supreme Court.” (The Economic Times: 2015). All the judicial dealings are done in the English language only in India. The English language is accepted and dealt as the only acceptable language in court circle and judiciary. In the Supreme Court and the High Courts of India all the notifications, bulletins, petition, judgments, judicial orders, compensations, sentencing and letter writings and drafting are done through the English language. “All proceedings in the Supreme Court and in every High Court shall be in English language” (The Department of Justice: Ministry of Law and Justice: 2022). The legal issues, questions and answers are given in English language in Judiciary. But several Hindi speaking states such as UP, MP, Bihar and Rajasthan have adopted Hindi language in district and sub-divisional courts along with English.

English Language and Globalization:

In the age of privatization, economic liberalization and Globalization many middle class and lower middle classes are thinking that their wards be educated in English language and language proficiency. In a phase of privatization and globalization, market state and company-customer relations, the common reaction shall have to be accordingly. The common citizens can never be in a position to take the chance or risk especially when it comes to the education of their wards. The people shall have to be choosy and rational in a world of competition even at the cost of their culture or language a fact that cannot be sidetracked. The reality of human survival precedes human development is evident here. In modern India, many migrant workers, professionals, house wives and artists, engineers and medical practitioners are moving from one place to another place for jobs and economic reasons.

So, if they would be strict to their local language, they would never be able to get jobs of their choice and there is a possibility that they may suffer from unemployment forever. The emergence of Globalization has created opportunities in employment sectors which is invariably and unconditionally linked to English language. Interviews take place in English, Appointment letter is given in English, official works happen in English, letters sending and receiving are done in English so also retirement is done with a letter again in English. Top officials both in private sector and in government sector see their impact on subordinates by communicating with them in English. The English language has not only been powerful from the stand point of social prestige in India today but also has been significant from the stand point of spread of modern knowledge system. Had English not been there in India, all sorts of blind beliefs, superstitions, manipulation, falsehood and confusions would have built their homes in India leaving common men in ignorance forever. In the age of privatization, economic liberalization and Globalization many middle class and lower middle classes are thinking seriously about survival and economic security more than anything because the time has changed drastically. They have known this fact correctly that all the politicians, business men, professionals, rich men, well-to-do people and elites are made it sure to give their children English education in prestigious institutions and foreign countries. Why should the poor and neglected people be barred from getting education in English? Why should they be asked to study in regional languages?

English Language as Modern Means of Communication:

The modern means of communications and development in science and technology have made people to learn English Language compulsorily. It is just not possible on the part of the people to leave English language for the reason that it is globalized language and many countries understand it. It is free from prejudices and biasness so far as the modern knowledge is concern. When the entire world is teaching their children on modern developed science and

technology so that they can be able to do well in their life in future but many responsible position holders are saying against it in India. They are vehemently discouraging children from learning English or increasing the amount of school fees so that children from poor background cannot study it. The nefarious idea is to keep the poor and marginalized people at bay from logical and scientific knowledge, evil minds are hell-bent to snatch the basic right of modern information and communication from the hand of the sober citizens. Recently, the NCERT conducted a study on in which around 27% students were unable to attend online classes due to lack of Internet and Smart Phones (The Economic Times: 2020). Modern means of communications and development in science and technology have made people to learn English Language compulsorily. While, urban India is insisting on English language learning from the Pre-schooling stage of their children but the rural India has also understood this key to success. In the age of massive digitalization, the bank accounts, Adhar Card, Voters Cards, Identity Cards, Pan Cards and all other documents are in English language. They should be able to read it, know it without any restriction by any person or organization.

Imparting Modern Knowledge:

All the great writers and enchanting authors of modern India such as Jyotiba Phule, Rabindranath Tagore, Sir V.S. Nepal, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdi, Vikram Seth, Khushwant Singh and R.K. Narayan, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and others have stressed on the English education in India. From the stand point of education and imparting modern knowledge, English is considered as the best language in India. People living in urban areas of towns and cities are enthusiastic to learn English so also people living in rural areas of villages. It is because of a large number of books, journal articles, periodicals and newspapers are available to people, they prefer reading in English than any other language. Most notable authors have written their works in English language even though, they have their regional or local language. Apart from foreign authors, a good number of writers and authors

have written in English only. In other words, Indian people also have given more importance to English than any other language. Reading, writing and speaking in English is viewed by most people as one of their huge achievements. “Learning to speak and write in English is important” (The Hindu: 2013). Right from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Jyotiba Phule were all supporters of English Education in India. On Ram Mohan Roy it has been said that “His interest and inquiries ranged from the rights of women and freedom of the press to English education” (Maheshwari: 2002: 74). Although, the idea of Independence Movement of India was to get free from the British rules but Mr. Gandhi who was the leader of independence moment was in support of English language. He pleaded for English language in India (Varshney: 2014). Mr. Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India had written his books in English and Dr. Ambedkar the author of the Constitution of India had written the Constitution of India in English. All the writings by him are in English. The English language has not only been the most sought after language of emancipation of masses as a social thinker has said rightly, “the British came to India too late and left from India too quickly” (Prasad: 2004). but also has been the language of knowing and eradicating all kinds of superstitions, illogical connotations, unscientific and irrational assumptions, blind beliefs, bigotry, anti-social elements and rotten thinking which had made home in the country for a long time. It is a language of reformation, awareness and scientific way of accepting or rejecting a belief or phenomenon.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be concluded that majority Indian people might not be bothered about their language but they do not adopt a language emotionally or out of pressure from power system. They are aware about the fact of practicability of the language. Whether it is good on their part to speak, read and write in a language or not they understand well. Which language is good for them and which language is not for them they know it very well. There is absolutely no need to entice them or imposing another language on them. They understand the real

intention behind such exercise and propaganda in the name of cultural nationalism. “Freedom of expression is an essential ingredient of democracy” (Prasad: 2004). India undoubtedly fought against the British Imperialism but certainly not against the English language. This has not only been evident in most chosen language of Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Nehru and Dr. Ambedkar who wrote extensively in English only. Norman Lewis spoke on English in America that “The Human Engineering Laboratory found that the *only* common characteristics of successful people in this country is an unusual grasp of the meanings of words” (Lewis: 2015: 17). Today, the fact is that English is being used in the official purposes, academic works, court matters and so also in regular life of citizens of India. No matter what comes, all the rich men, poor men and middle class people are sending their wards to English medium schools, colleges and universities unfailingly. The impact of English learning is felt increasingly day by day among the common men. Thus, English language is significant not only from the stand point of a medium of instruction in the class room or because of absence of an alternative language or research point of view or globalization or a means of communication but it is also highly essential from the stand point of imparting modern knowledge system. All the neglected, marginalized and historically deprived castes and communities are looking up to the English language for their emancipation. The English language is seen by all the people as a language of their personal and social emancipation and a language of freedom from feudalism and spiritualism. In fact, the language has been so lovely that they have started calling it a deity, “An English goddess for India’s down trodden” (Pandey: 2011). Thus, promotion of English language is highly essential to the survival of democratic tradition, world view of the people, brotherhood, critical thinking and socio-economic progress of India today is a fact, which can hardly be denied.

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