

HISTORY OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN INDIA

Dr. K. Padmavathi, Assistant Professor of English
Anjalai Ammal - Mahalingam Engineering College,
Kovilvanni, Thiruvarur.

Abstract :

English Language Teaching (ELT) in India occupies a unique historical and sociolinguistic space. This paper traces the trajectory of English instruction in India from its early mercantile and missionary origins in the 17th century to its contemporary status as a core global and domestic lingua franca. The study investigates how political imperatives, educational policies, and pedagogical frameworks have transformed over three distinct periods: the pre-colonial/colonial era, the post-independence nation-building phase, and the modern skill-driven digital age.

Index Terms— English Language Teaching (ELT), Macaulay's Minute, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Multilingualism, History of Education in India.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a multi-lingual country and so English in India is not only used for communicating with foreign countries but also for inter-state and intra state communication. As there is a great linguistic and cultural diversity in India, English functions as a link language. English is the most commonly spoken language in India. English symbolises education and intelligence.

English has been taught in India for around two hundred and sixty years since 1759 with the arrival of English. English came to India in the 16th century when the East India Company started its trading. Subsequently numerous Christian mission schools which heralded the beginning of English teaching in India were established by the early eighteenth century.

Before the entry of British, the priests, gurus and pandits were the authorities of education and they imparted education to people in 'Padasalas' and 'Gurukulas'. State system of education in India under the British rule began in the year 1813 when the East India Company accepted the responsibility for the education of the Indians. At that time, two groups emerged among the officials of the company. One group comprised the orientalists who supported the use of classical Indian languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. The other group was of Anglicists who claimed that English should be the medium of education.

II. IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

Thomas Babington Macaulay was a great essayist, historian, linguist, orator and politician. He was an important literary personality of his times. He was a member in the British parliament and he came to India when Lord William Bentinck was the Governor General. He was appointed as the law member of the executive council of the Governor General. On February 2, 1835, Macaulay wrote his famous 'minute'. Through this, the national system of education was prescribed for India. The acceptance of 'minutes' led to the formulation of a policy on which all the educational programmes during the British period were based.

Meanwhile Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer who was called, 'The father of modern India' started some movements and supported the introduction of western scientific education through English. He also wanted to replace Sanskrit and Persian. This was the first conscious attempt of implementing teaching of English language in India. Raja Rao writes in the foreword of Kanthapura, "We shall have English language with us and amongst us, and not as a guest or friend but as one of our own, of our castes, our creed, our sect and of our tradition." (Rao 1978.p-420). Macaulay's intention was to create "----- a class of people, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect-----". Macaulay's idea was a success and consequently English became the language of government and education. It was seen as a symbol of aristocracy and self-improvement.

Indian education started having English as the first language. Indians with English knowledge gained recognition and respect. The British laws, prescribed English to be the language of instruction at university level and so Indians started preferring schools that emphasized English. From the words of A.P.R. Howatt, "The state was set for the first 'big moment' in the imperial history of English language teaching".

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIVERSITIES

In 1853, the East India Company decided to open up its appointments in civil service to Indians. Indians were allowed to appear for the competitive examination set up for the purpose. Consequently, three universities at different cities- Bombay, Calcutta and Madras which are now called Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai – were established and following this one university at Lahore and one at Allahabad were started. As the centres imparting education in English increased in number, the importance of English also gained momentum.

The Indians didn't have any choice to think and they were forced to learn English. In 1882, the Indian Education Commission opposed the use of English as the medium of education. In 1902, the Indian universities commission expressed its dissatisfaction at the neglect of regional languages. It insisted on the use of regional languages.

Following all these, the Calcutta University Commission recommended the use of regional languages, "we are emphatically of the opinion that there is something unsound in a system of education which leaves a young man, at the conclusion of his course, unable to speak or write his own mother tongue fluently and correctly. It is thus beyond controversy that a systematic effort must henceforth be made to promote the serious study of the vernaculars in secondary schools, intermediate colleges and in the university."

Following the recommendation, from 1920 onwards, English was used as the medium of instruction only in colleges and universities. Another landmark in the history of Indian education system was the Wardha Scheme of Education in 1936. Mahatma Gandhi formulated the scheme and according to this 'all instruction were to be imparted in the scholar's mother tongue and not in any foreign language at the school level' (Gupta). This scheme didn't attain success because of the outbreak of the Second World War, as it resulted in the resignation of the congress ministers in 1939.

In 1944, the Central Advisory Board of education prepared a scheme for education in India with Sargent as the Education Advisor. The scheme came to be known as the Sargent scheme. It had many features of the Wardha scheme of education. As per the scheme, provision was made for free and compulsory education to all the citizens up to the age of 14. English was made as one of the compulsory subjects and students were allowed to use their vernacular language. English was administered as the medium of instruction at the university level. Since India got independence in 1947, the commissions and leaders of public interest started scrutinizing the use and value of English. Many debates and arguments broke out with regard to the use of languages.

C.Rajagopalachari and others like him supported the continuance of English language but there were persons who were very particular that English should go with the English. They felt that English could not suit the culture and environment of India. It was believed that students could learn and express ideas comfortably and clearly only in their mother tongues.

Gandhiji was totally against the continuances of English. He didn't want the people to be divided into two sectors based on their ability to use English. He said, "We are traitors to our mother tongue by remaining under such system - a gulf has been created between the educated class and the uneducated class". In an interview to BBC, he said, "Let the whole world know that I do not know English". In spite of his strong opinion and speeches, English was recognized as the official language of administration and the most preferred academic language in India in the 20th century.

Gandhiji totally opposed the authoritative presence of English and stood against the situation by saying, "of all the superstitions that affect India, none is so great as that a knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty, and developing accuracy of thought". Nehru believed that English would play an important role in free India but he clearly stated that English should reach the people of all the sectors. He said, 'However good, however important English may be, we cannot tolerate that there should be an English-knowing elite and a large mass of our people not knowing English' (CAD, 1946-1950:1416).

IV. THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA

In 1950, the constitution of India decided that Hindi would be the official language of India. Hindi was expected to develop and replace English. But, it did not happen and the language controversy continued in India. In 1956, an attempt was made to settle this controversy when the central advisory board of education adopted a three language formula. The formula was presented in the conference of chief ministers in 1961 and approved.

It recommended the teaching of:

1. The regional language and the mother tongue when the mother tongue is different from the regional language.
2. Hindi or in Hindi speaking area, another Indian languages and
3. English or any modern European language.

This three language formula was able to give a solution only to the political condition and it was not able to make English lose its importance and popularity. Many commissions were formed to improve the standard of English in schools and colleges. Commissions emphasized and talked in favour of the importance of English. Many academicians and scientists were not ready to sacrifice the advantages gained through the study of English.

In Hyderabad, the central Institute of English was started in 1958. Though many regional institutes were also established in Bangalore and Chandigarh, the literature based system of English teaching didn't change as English was studied for education and administration. In 1963, the parliament of India passed a bill declaring English as the associate official language of India till an indefinite period of time. Later, due to amazing developments in various fields like science, technology, trade, travel, communications and entertainment, English started playing a new role as the international language of communication.

V. ENGLISH – A NEW DIALECT

Indian English has been recognized as an important dialect of English. Professor David Crystal, author of the Cambridge encyclopaedia of the English language (1996) feels that Indians will use "English as a tool to conquer the world". According to him, the English spoken by the Indians will turn out to be the most widely spoken version in the

world. He says, “If 100 million Indians pronounce an English word in a certain way, this is more than Britain’s population____”. Our country India is of great diversity. From The Hindu Kolkata July 22, 2013 _ there are over 780 languages and 66 different scripts in India. There are 122 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people. PLSI is a right based movement for carrying out a nation-wide survey of Indian languages. Dr. G.N.Devy, the President of PLSI said, “As per the 2011 census, there are about 122 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people. Of them 22 are the scheduled languages. Other than the 122 languages the survey has come up with languages that are spoken by less than 10,000 people many from tribal areas, nomadic communities and from the interiors of north-eastern part of the country”. This is why India needs a unique link language and it is none other than English which can serve the purpose.

Nowadays, people have started feeling humiliated if they can’t speak English. The society and the government have become aware of the importance of learning English. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, “English is our major window on the world”. Only through English, we can have a glimpse of various developments that take place in the world. He has also rightly remarked, “All regional languages must be developed and promoted but that did not mean that English should be discarded. To do that will amount to closing a window on the world of technology. Foreign languages served as window on it and to suppose that translation could take their place was a mistake. It was no use getting into an intellectual prison after achieving political independence”.

VI. CONCLUSION

Though English teaching has remained unchanged for nearly 150 years, new developments are made globally in the methods of teaching English. These developments have an impact on teaching of English in India also. In the past, the English syllabus was based on literature but at present, the syllabus is skill based. The academicians have started to understand the importance of English. There is also interest amidst all the students to learn English not only for the purpose of examination but also for communication. English teaching keeps on gaining its importance day by day.

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