

# A Brief History of English Language Teaching in India

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**Abstract-** English is a widely spoken language today. It has often been referred to as 'global language', the lingua franca of the modern era and currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world. English in India is used not only for communicating with the outside world, but also for inter-state and intrastate communication. Because of the great ethnic and linguistic diversity found within our nation, English acts as an indispensable 'link' language. With the Information Technology revolution and most software and operating systems being developed in the English language, a new utility for written and oral communication in the English language has emerged. English is said to be the world's most important language having communicative and educative value. English is used all over the world not out of any imposition but because of the realization that it has certain advantages.

**Index Terms-** ELT in India, ELT in pre-colonial period, colonial period, post colonial period.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language which has been considered man's most remarkable achievement, is so much a part of our lives, like the air we breathe, that very often we take it for granted and as often are not aware of its characteristic features. Language is a system. English has a status of associate language, but in fact it is the most important language of India. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language in India. English in India is used not only for communicating with the outside world, but also for inter-state and intrastate communication. English symbolizes in Indians' minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversation. It is also usual among Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who speak different languages. English is very important in some systems – legal, financial, educational and business in India.

## II. ENGLISH IN INDIA

Officially English has a status of assistant language, but in fact it is the most important language of India. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language in India. Indians who know English will always try to show that they know English. English symbolizes in Indians minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with

Indian languages in their conversations. It is also usual among Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who speak different language. English is very important in some systems – legal, financial, educational, business – in India. Until the beginning of 1990s, foreign movies in India weren't translated or dubbed in Indian languages, but were broadcast in English and were meant for English speakers only. The reason Indians give such importance to English is related to the fact that India was a British colony. When the British started ruling India, they searched for Indian mediators who could help them to administer India. The British turned to high caste Indians to work for them. Many high caste Indians, especially the Brahmans worked for them. The British policy was to create an Indian class who should think like the British, or as it was said then in Britain "Indians in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions and morals and intellect". The British also established in India universities based on British models with emphasis on English. These Indians also got their education in British universities. The English Christian missionaries came to India from 1813 and they also built schools at primary level for Indians in which the language of instruction was local language. Later on the missionaries built high schools with English as the language of instruction which obliged the Indians who wanted to study to have a good knowledge of English. The British rulers began building their universities in India from 1857. English became the first language in Indian education. The 'modern' leaders of that era in India also supported English language and claimed it to be the main key towards success. Indians who knew good English were seen as the new elite of India. Many new schools were established in which the language of instruction was English. According to the British laws the language of instruction at university level was English and therefore schools that emphasized English were preferred by ambitious Indians. Even after India's independence, English remained the main language of India. Officially it was given a status of an assistant language and was supposed to terminate officially after 15 years of India's independence, but it still remains the important language of India.

## III. PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The English language came to India in the 17th century with the East India Company. It was formed to conduct trade with India and other countries in the east. Initially the Britishers tried to learn Indian languages to communicate with Indians. They started special colleges for this purpose. They also took the help of the translators. But when their political powers increased, they created the British Indian provinces like Bengal, Madras and Bombay. So the English traders gave more importance to English

rather than to Indian languages. Some missionary institutions taught English to Indians.

The East India Company took the responsibility of the educations of the Indians. The Indians were also realizing the importance of the English language. As A.P.R. Howatt notes:

By the 1830s the Indian middle classes were becoming very demanding. They realized that English was the language required for a secure future in a government job, so why was English not taught in the secondary school? Private schools offering this service were already doing good business, particularly in Calcutta. The state was set for the first 'big moment' in the imperial history of English language teaching.

Meanwhile some movements were started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy to introduce western scientific education through English. He wanted to replace traditional Sanskrit and Persian teaching. To take a decision on the issue, a committee was formed. Lord Macaulay was the chairman of this committee. He advocated English as the medium of instruction in the place of Sanskrit and Persian.

Lord Macaulay wanted to make the people Indian in blood and colour but English in taste and opinion. He thought the members of this class would spread their knowledge through English. Macaulay's purposes were: i) to create the dominance of British culture over the Indians and to have the control over the minds of the Indian people through English. ii) to train Indians and make them fit for the employment. The British Government gave preference in jobs to the Indians who had the knowledge of English.

A number of Indian students found poetry, drama and other writings difficult to get their degrees. Meanwhile many new colleges and universities were formed. The system of English education founded on English literature continued till the independence.

#### IV. COLONIAL PERIOD

India got the independence and the Indian government had to decide its policy towards English. They decided to make Hindi the official language. Regional languages were given the status of national languages. Certain states insisted to make English the associate official language. Universities and schools were increasing rapidly in India. Some of the people from the neglected society also came forward to learn English. English was not limited to a few elite schools and colleges. But there were complaints about the standards of English. The government appointed many commissions to improve the standard of English in schools and colleges. All these would cut us off from the living stream of our growing knowledge.

The Secondary Education Commission emphasized the same in a similar tone:

Commissions reaffirmed the importance of English. For instance, University Education Commission says:

English, however, must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature – humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up English, it

The present position of India in the international sphere is partly due to the command that educated Indians have acquired over English. Many eminent educationists and scientists have

therefore, expressed the opinion that under no circumstances should we sacrifice the many advantages that we have gained by the study of English.

In 1958 The Central Institute of English was started in Hyderabad. Regional institutes were established in Bangalore and Chandigarh. But nobody tried to change the literature based system of English. English was studied mainly for education and administration. But because of the revolutionary developments in science, technology, travel, trade, communications and entertainment, English got a new role as the international language of communication. Nowadays it is necessary to learn all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English. English teaching has remained unchanged for nearly 150 years, new developments are taking place worldwide in the methods of teaching and learning English. These developments have affected the English language teaching in India also. Previously, English was taught from fifth standard in the non-English medium schools of Maharashtra. Now it is taught from the first standard even in the non-English medium schools. In the past the syllabus was literature based but now it is skill-based. Earlier the evaluation system centred on the written skill only, from the year 2006-07 the oral test is introduced in the secondary and higher secondary schools. People are aware of the importance of English. They are interested in learning the spoken English.

As a result, various courses are developed for teaching spoken English. The use of Language Laboratory and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has created new changes in the teaching of English. The audio cassettes and CDs are being used on a large scale to learn the spoken language. Various software of English teaching are developed and used by a growing number of people. There are many private institutions that run the courses of spoken English. Especially in big cities the language trainers are helping the learners to acquire the required proficiency over the communicative skills in general and the spoken skills in particular. Now Television channels are also working towards improving spoken English. NDTV Imagine is running a programme 'Angrezi Mein Kehte Hain'. All of them cannot be termed as cheap. Dr. Deepti Gupta rightly says:

The irony of situation is that while academicians label these learning centres 'shops' or 'commercial institutes' it is these establishments that are a major influence behind the changing face of the ELT paradigm in India.

#### V. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN POST COLONIAL PERIOD

Teaching English as a tool for communicating the story of Jesus has a long history. Missionaries have vehemently differed from one another about its usefulness as a tool for this purpose. Even as English contains excellent Christian literature, it also is home for secular literature. Secular Humanism found its way in many lands through the learning of English language and literature. Its "ennobling" characteristic as a tool and purveyor of culture, the scientific knowledge it opens up for those who learn it, the ease with which one could transact business using it, all have more or less overshadowed the deep Christian foundation upon which the language, literature and culture is built.

Aided by the influence of secularism, many Christian teachers of English have more or less abandoned the Christian

program while teaching English. Ethics and morals portrayed in literature were interpreted not as emerging from the Christian base but from universal humanism. English is still pregnant with Christian metaphors, idioms and set phrases, which cannot be wholly understood and used without a grasp of the underlying Christian message.

Perhaps because of the reason last mentioned, most nations have embarked upon a process of textbook contextualization when it comes to teaching English. The original pieces of writing by the native speakers of English are sought to be replaced by the writings of the nationals who are masters of English prose and poetry. In their creative writing, metaphors, idioms, and set phrases from the national languages, which imply local culture and religion, are more freely used. Translations from the local tales are more frequently substituted for tales from Europe. In addition, government-inspired documents on ideology become part of the textbook. Nations (and individuals) want to appropriate English as a language minus the culture and religion it represents and communicates.

Even as the goals of English teaching and learning are being continually redefined, you should remember that English would not be taught solely by the native speakers of English in many nations. Some countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and several African nations have provided for the teaching of English mainly through their nationals. Some countries like Japan and China open their doors to more number of native speakers of English to teach English.

## VI. ENGLISH IN EDUCATION

English is the state language of two states in Eastern India, Meghalaya and Nagaland. It is the main medium of instruction at the post graduate level, and it is taught as a second language at every stage of education in all states of India.

In India, as in other linguistically and culturally pluralistic societies, the position of English is determined by various political, cultural and social considerations (Kachru, 1986b p.15: 11-30) sees primarily three questions which continue to be discussed. The first question concerns the position of English in early and in higher education. The second question is concerned with the roles of the regional language Hindi and English. The third question deals with the model of English presented to Indian learners, and how that presentation can be made uniformly and effectively. The government of India has primarily been concerned with the first two questions, which are directly related to language planning at both the national and state levels. There are, as yet, no acceptable answers to any of those questions (Kachru, 1986b p. 15:11-30.)

The three language formula was developed for the educational load to be fairer, to promote national integration, and, to provide wider language choice in the school curriculum (Srivastava, 1990 p.37-53) according to the formula; people from non-Hindi areas study their regional language Hindi and English and another language. Although the formula sounds fine in theory, practically it has proved to be a failure in India as a whole, since it has not been followed in practice. Hindi states didn't enforce the curriculum, and the anti-Hindi DMK government in madras removed all teaching of Hindi from schools in Tamilnadu. Thus in India, there is a great number of

sociolinguistic pressures influencing the development of language education, Spolsky (1978 p. 87-136) has stated that the language policy of the school system is both a result of the pressures and a source of pressure itself. He, too claims education to be the strongest weapon for enforcing language policy, listening the following pressures to have an effect on language planning in a society, family, religion, ethnicity, political pressures, cultural pressures, economic pressures, legal pressures (lack of the official language can often become the basis for discrimination), military pressure (desirability to use one common language) (Spolskey, 1978).

Effective learning takes place only when the learner is able to communicate fluently both in writing and speaking and is able to use English for library purposes. In this context, Mahajiteswar Das holds a different view saying that teaching English as a 'library language' was not beneficial in terms of providing job opportunities because the students who learn to use English only as a 'library language' are less competent than the students who acquire competence in all the four skills of English language. Therefore, according to Mahajiteswar Das, it is necessary to develop all the language skills in order to improve communication skills (Indira, M.2003:4).

Mark Tully (1997: 51(2) 157-164) points out that "the elitist status of English in India creates problems for the economic development because that means that the education of the mass of people will be ignored. He argues that the solution for the situation would be that the spread of English throughout India would be encouraged. So that it would become a genuine link language of the country, not just, as it is at present, the link language of the elite.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Therefore, English has been considered as a major foreign language in India since independence. As the world is getting globalized, there has also been a sense of English as a global language, not just a language of the USA or the UK. Although English was considered as a major foreign language in India, Indians in different contexts are more likely to have witnessed, or experienced benefits of having more competence than before. These changes in the functions and benefits have brought about change in the status of English from that of a foreign language to a global language. In the of field English language teaching is growing day by day in India because of good and dedicated researchers have contributed something to English language teaching and moreover number of linguists have made footprint in the field of applied linguistics.

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