

The Future of English in India

English is one of the most widely spoken languages. It is probably the only languages which is spoken in all the continents of the world. Most educated Indians are well versed in the language. It is extensively used in the Government office, by the media-both electronic and print, in educational institutions of higher learning and in the legal world. It is also used for social interaction and in the business spheres.

In India, English was first introduced by Governor-General William Bentinck (1828-35) in the nineteenth century. It was supported by many eminent personalities and social reformers including Raja Rammohan Roy. In pre-Independence era, Indian leaders used English for spreading the message of national struggle. Through the medium of English, they could speak about the Indian struggle for freedom to an international audience.

Some people from the Hindi-speaking areas are against the usage of English language primarily due to its being a symbol of British imperialism. At the same time, the importance of English is undeniable. English has made an invaluable contribution towards the unification of the country. Although India is a multi-lingual country having 22 official languages, English remains an associate official language. English acts as the link-language in our country. It is easy to find people in every part of the country who know English. Thus, a south Indian can communicate easily with a north Indian, if both of them are well versed in English. Most educated Indians today are bilingual.

In the media also, English has an important place. English newspapers are published and read in almost all Indian states. There are several popular English news channels on the television as well.

India is the third largest English book producing country after the USA and the UK. Creative writing in English has been an integral part of the Indian literary tradition for many years. Writers like Bankim Chandra chatterjee, Raja Rammohan Roy, Taro Dutta, Michel Madhusudan Data, Saionji Naidu, etc. Wrote in the English language. Today also Indian writers have successfully used the language to create rich literature. Indo-Anglian literature is now well-developed and Internationally recognised. Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa lahiri, Anita Desai, Upamanyu chatterjee, Arvind Adiga, Amitav Ghosh, Chetan Bhagat, etc. are some of the important names in this field.

In the educational system of India, English is the premier language. Most of the public school and colleges prefer to have English as their medium of the instruction. It is taught in public as well as in government schools.

English is an international language. If we want to remain in touch with the outside world, we will have to retain English. English is a must for the Indians aspiring for higher education or seeking better job opportunities abroad. English is an important working language of the United Nations. Many Indians who have excellent communication skills are in international agencies under the United Nations.

English is important for every field of knowledge. Careers, in any area of business or commerce and in science and technology, require the knowledge of English. Moreover, most of the latest literature in science and technology, space research, nuclear technology, medicine, engineering, etc. is available in English only.

It is found that those who go to English medium schools have a high percentage of intercaste marriages, as opposed to those who study in regional medium. It is also found that higher numbers of those educated in English migrate from their own state. Thus English not only weakens caste ties, but also helps in the migration of skilled manpower, which is good for the country.

English is used for correspondence between different departments of the Union and the State Government, between the Centre and the States, between the States and the States. Most of the business houses in the country use English language. With the increased use of computers in small and large offices, the English language has got a further boost.

After the independence, the States of our country were reorganizing on the basis of language spoken and Hindi was declared as the national language. But the imposition of Hindi as national language was opposed tooth and nail by the Southern States of India. These States were assured by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, that Hindi would not be imposed on them. On the other hand, some people of the Hindi speaking areas in India are against the usage of English. But we cannot ignore the importance of the English language and its utility in binding people of different States, mostly the Southern States which account for over 60 percent of the students enrolled in English medium schools. English medium also accounts for over 90 percent of the enrolment in the North Eastern States.

The English language has taken deep roots in the country. It has acquired its own identity and character. English plays an important part in maintaining professional relationship between India and foreign investors, who flock to India. The upsurge of multinational companies and BPOs {Business Process Outsourcing} in India is due to this proficiency of Indians in English.

All said and done the fact is that English language has a very bright future in our country and the Centre and States can ill afford to neglect its study.

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1857 witnessed two great events, which greatly influenced the course of history in this country: the outbreak of the Great Revolt and the founding of universities at Calcutta, Mumbai and Chennai. If the Great Revolt marked the end of one phase of the struggle for Independence, the birth of universities marked the beginning of another because those who came out of these universities, picked up the torch of freedom lit in 1857.

The birth of the three universities in 1857 marked the consolidation of Western education introduced at the beginning of the century. Raja Rammohan Roy who strongly advocated the introduction of English education dreamt of “India speaking English” and “India possibly independent.”

On 7th March, 1835, William Bentinck the governor-general announced the education policy: “The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; aid all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education should employed on English education alone.”

It was in pursuance of this policy that A.O. Hume had opened hundreds of schools in Etawah District of the United Provinces. While Hume, like other ‘Englishmen, had fought Indians to put down the 1857 revolt, he was determined to give them education, which would one day empower them to rule themselves. Over the past few years, foreign universities and educational institutions have come to play an important role in the Indian education scene. And, Indian students are increasingly looking at these institutions, as being the one-stop destination for quality education. Moreover, foreign institutions too have been wooing these very students through education fairs, seminars and counselling sessions. It’s not only educational institutions from the US and the UK that make

the Indian tour but those from France, Ireland and Australia too have entered the scene to attract Indian students in a big way.

The number of educational institutions from different countries targeting Indian students has grown manifold but the US still remains the favourite destination for Indian students. A total of 66,836 Indian students were studying in the US in 2001-02 up from 54,664 in 2000-01. Moreover, the interest among the US students for India has increased and this can be gauged from the fact, that India this year was the second-most preferred destination after Germany for US scholars applying for Fulbright fellowships to study, do research or teach overseas. Recent years have witnessed Indo-US cooperation in the education sector in a big way.

Not far behind is the UK, which has probably emerged as the second-most important educational destination after the US. The British High Commissioner to India Sir Rob Young remarked, "Education institutions in the UK have always been held in high esteem and this can be observed from 10,000 Indian students who are pursuing undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) programmes there. The number of Indian students going to Cariada has gone up by 86 per cent from 1999 to November 2002. India's detractors argue that While English is still an elitist language taught in certain schools, China is making it a national priority for people to learn English! The results, they say will certainly be a tilt towards China in the near future. And who knows? China may emerge as the country with the largest number of English-speaking persons then! Ironically, though India has been the butt of most anti-outsourcing anger, it is not even the largest outsourcing destination for the US. Ireland is. It is true that offshore wages in India are going up thanks to higher salaries and fresh hiring brought about by the booming state of the Indian BPO industry. Over the years, India's greatest attraction for outsourcing companies, its cost advantage, is bound to come down. Slowly wages in India will go up and that in the West will come down. But even then, there is bound to be enough difference between the two extremes for the outsourcing balance to remain with India.

Thus, the future of English is bright in India. It has acted as a boon to the Indian populace by which it is fast making its impact on global business scenario.