



GLOBALISED INDIA AND ITS ENGLISH LANDSCAPE

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Change has been the one constant in the development of the human race since the beginning. Today globalization has indeed brought about, or is bringing about, a situational change which happens to be a living reality. It has surfaced in the wake of limitations that characterized the perceptions of the world and the international order. But never has change been so immense that one feels a nuclear chain has been triggered on or has set forth unending series of rapid social, cultural, technological and even language transformations at all levels.

In the above content, however, the respective foci have acted to marginalize and exclude substantively significant world trends notably the socio cultural dimensions, the gripping impact of IT as well as the epistemological challenges of post structuralism, post modernism and post-colonialism.(1) Globalization as it appears today presents before us a complex scenario of newer possibilities and severe incompatibilities. Robertson stresses that this global consciousness has heightened as international systems have become more fluid, the prospects for humanity is more hazardous on a global scale and with the increasing consolidation of global communications and the global media”(2) The concern of change gets duly depicted in the following poetic extraction from Shakespeare’s 60th Sonnet:

Each changing place with that which goes before,

In sequent toil all forwards do contend”(3)



Today India has become a globalised society and it is worth mentioning that globalization has brought about paradigm shifts, where change has become a norm rather than exception. The message or challenge is quite clear for Indian languages. Either we have to adopt the new paradigm of Global English or stick to the old one which has been rendered quite irrelevant. It is rightly said “as every wave drives other forth and that which comes behind both thrusteth and is thrust itself , even so the times by kind do fly and follow both at once, and evermore renew; For that was before is left, and straight there doth ensue another that was never erst”, so has English emerged as a global language. Today, English has over 500 million speakers but a language to be global does not merely depend on the number of people who speak it, rather it depends on economic and social mobility all over the world. English has usurped the global throne of languages with the growth of economic, military, cultural and technological dominance.

In India, English is regarded not only a pre-requisite in job market but also the cause of education inequality. Stromquist and Monkman have pointed out: ‘English is emerging as the global language, and social /economic transactions are being formulated within what Castells call the “network society”’.⁽⁴⁾

In the era of triumphalism of science, of technocracy, of international finance and mass- market media, language is observed to be the principal mediator of cultural, economic and political encounters integrating the global world. Hence, English has become such an international force and it has become a sort of common denominator in inter transitional affairs as it has the ability to accept change, an open ended philosophy that has certainly served it well. In Indian subcontinent, a land of multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic population, English has now become lingua franca of the world and has attained an unrivalled position amidst the plethora of world languages. Today, we find that there is a huge cultural uptake of English, with dozens of variations in various nations where the speakers are specifically culture-bound.



Globalization is neither a ‘novelty’ for mankind nor an ‘accident’ of history. Historically, languages have transcended themselves time and again in order to reap the fruits of inter-societal relations. These endeavors have gifted those treasures of vocabulary and a global medium of communication. Once Sanskrit which was considered a language of educated class in our Vedic civilization was slowly simplified by North Indians as Prakrit, a language of common man and it was in turn, replaced by Apabhramsha. The succinct stages of the evolution of new forms of language have led to a simultaneous growth of the country. India, a land of varied languages has clear cut demarcations of the domains Kashmiri in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjabi in Punjab, Hindi in UP/MP/Rajasthan and its adjoining areas, Bengali in Bengal etc.

However, globalization and with it the impact of English, seems to be leading to a situation where it appears that every Indian language is steadily losing its domains and English is occupying more and more of space. There are, of course several reasons in the immediate background. Education served the purpose of preparing the different groups of people to perform their socially ascribed roles in the past and the choice of language to be taught was the one needed for those roles. (5) Today English has become a useful qualification for a better advancement of individuals and nations. In the past few decades the increased demands in English proficiency amongst university students is based on the idea of career consciousness and personal advancement. This changing demography of English speakers illustrates the tendency from professionals and students seeking higher education to pursue a bilingual or multilingual teaching and learning environment where people adopt English as equally important as the language of home. At the inception of the first global century, most speakers of English as non native or second-language speakers.(6) Today, the majority of the worlds’ speakers of English were no longer monolingual but bilingual or multilingual. Their English proficiency equals to that of English native speakers.(7) The reality of English language classrooms in global cities consistently tends towards multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Now the moot question which arises is: What should the national policy towards English be, whether we should merely retain it as one of the seventeen languages recognized by the



constitution(8) or give it the most prominent position. This is an issue which has been often discussed sentimentally overenthusiastically but seldom realistically. English reached our shores and prospered as a part of historical process under British masters. The sentiment nationalism, which led us to freedom, was not based on language, geography or ethnicity. We did not have a single platform to stand on but for the patriotic urge to oust common enemy – the Englishman. Ironically, both English and English education played a significant role in throwing up the leadership that can overcome the pluralism, a characteristic of India, and unite the country in a common pursuit. It would be wrong to say that English united the masses. It was only a link between the leaders of various regions while the regional languages were the instruments of nationalist prose, poetry and speech, which inspired the people to make great sacrifices.(Kachru,1994) While the wheels of a cart are essentials, an axle is still needed to facilitate cohesive moment and during our days of slavery English did play the role of the axle and aided the nationalist movement.

Today, the constitution recognizes 17 languages while in reality there are thirty five languages, each spoken by over a million people. Languages have their own scripts, grammatical structure and cultural assumptions.(Kachru,1983) There is so much diversity in physical appearance, dress, food, social customs, language and political beliefs that it is a wonder what holds us together as a nation. Perhaps we are held together by an idea, the idea of a great land with a venerable past and a rich culture.It appears to defy the mathematical notion that the whole is greater than the sum total of its parts. The legacy of our past and culture are still visible in those sparks which bring credit to this nation irrespective of where an Indian is from- a Raman or Chandrashekher is contributing to physics, a Tagore or Arundhati Roy achieving international acclaim, a Kalpana Chawla is being selcted for a space mission or all those beauty queens who have conquered the world. The past lives in the dedication, the ability to adopt the desire to be among the best. The acceptance of diversity and freedom of thought have had more to do with India's greatness than the existence of a common binding national language.



Although English had to be learnt for historical reasons, it spread throughout the country amongst the elite, who mattered in diverse fields of human endeavor. Thus, despite a small proportion of the population being well-versed in the language, its influence is much wider in reality. The language has a purely functional use in that it is a flexible, convenient and practical medium of communication, which could serve a link language. Its claim for acceptance is based on the argument that it does not involve any discrimination and bias towards any language or region of the country and imposes equality on all the regions. If one observes the situation objectively, English happens to be tool of interaction between different regions of the country. The argument that the common man in any region does not understand this global language doesn't stand because he is illiterate and he has no interaction with people of other regions.(9)

Analysis of the situation reveals that we are envied by the Chinese, Russians and South East Asians who are struggling to learn English. In the West Indies, we are recognized as a people whose knowledge of English is commendable. In context of trade and international commerce the influx of foreign investments in our country, knowledge of English as an Economic Administration and Financial Management skill is valued. Had it been Dutch or Portuguese, we would have thrown it overboard along with the erstwhile colonial masters and the situation would have been far different. Here we are looking at an international language which has access to a larger part of the world. Instead of recognizing the advantages of knowledge of English , most politicians have been harping on false and self destructive emotionalism and fanning the fire of hatred which has resulted in to hypocritical and contradictory policies as regards to English. States which had introduced measures to discourage the learning of English have found by experience that their citizens were at a disadvantage as compared to those from states where such self-defeating measures had not been introduced. English for us is a historical legacy rather than a sign of shame and servitude. The argument to the contrary should have been valid hundred years ago.(10)



A strange argument is often put forward that any attention given to English would affect regional language adversely and that their process would be retarded. No one questions now as to the process of language depends upon the number of people speaking it. The real process of the language is due to a few gifted people and their contribution has only aesthetic value appreciated by a slightly larger number. What apparently worries the people is that government patronage may be lost or that the chance of making some easy money due to increased and captive readership would not materialize.(11) This only amounts to vested interest and similar argument to be put forward given to prevent construction of new temples as revenue of old ones would be affected. With the spread of literacy, media and cinema, regional languages are bound to flourish and English would only be a window to the outside world which today has shrunk greatly due to the impact of technology.

Further, English today is no longer the preserve of the elite as it once was. Even the moderately educated make use of English as a language of communication. Its importance in the fields of science, technology and medicine cannot be over emphasized. Though it is true that things are better understood in one's mother tongue, this is because of one's greater exposure to the native language. It does not mean that one cannot train oneself to understand another language, including English which is a foreign language . The people point out the example of Japan and China to illustrate how a country could prosper even though they stick to their own language.(12) English as a means of communication is good at incorporating the 'other' into its own language as can be seen with many words and phrases originally from other languages that most people would now consider authentically English. The strength of the English language is that it accepts these variations and integrates them into itself effectively.

Globalisation ,the phenomena of the 'local' turning into the 'global', or the coming together of different aspects of the world into a single and identifiable state. The term globalisation may have at first been strictly applied to the international financial marketplace and its deregulation, what it means for many today has as much to do with cultural and political realities as economic



ones. Globalization, both as universalization of the West and glocalization of the world, has affected a major shift in the arena of international trade and commerce. English has made the consumeristic globalization west-centric and also trans-Atlantic-cum-Euro-centric. Globalization entered smoothly into Indian markets through English as a communicative tool. What was indigenous has become global. English too has gone global in spite political decolonization and liquidation of world economy.



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