

Language plays an essential part in human life. Everyone from birth to death makes use of it. Besides, it is a means of communication and social control. According to *O. Jespersen*, "Language is a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings." *Bloch* and *Trager* have defined language as, "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates." English is also a language used to give expression to thoughts and feelings of a social group. But it is a foreign language for Indians. So, it becomes necessary to think about its place in school-curriculum. For this, one must know :

- (i) What was its place before Independence ?
- (ii) What was its place just after Independence ?
- (iii) What is its place at present ?
- (iv) Why an important place should be given to English ?
- (v) What should be its place ?

Place of English before Independence

The history of English in India goes back to pre-independence days when our country was ruled over-by the Britishers. At that time, this language enjoyed a royal and an important place because :

- (1) It was the official language of courts and administration.
- (2) It was the medium of instruction in colleges.
- (3) It was the medium of examination.
- (4) It was a compulsory subject.

Place of English after Independence

After Independence, drastic changes came regarding the place of English in India. Since, it was a language of the rulers who had exercised cruelties over Indians, the first reaction was to dethrone English from its exalted position. As a consequence :

First, Hindi in Devnagri script was declared the official language of the Union by Indian constitution. In order to give Hindi sufficient time to replace English as an official language, English was declared to continue as an associate language, English for a period of 15 years, that is, till 1965. *secondary (516)*

Second, English did not remain the medium of instruction.

Third, Regional languages¹ became the medium of examinations.

Fourth, English ceased to be a compulsory subject.

Fifth, The State Governments started using regional languages in administration.

It is obvious that English did not have the same place after independence which it had in days before independence.

Agitation for English

Soon after the fury of dethroning English was over, it was realized that English might be the language of rulers but it was the language of masses. It was clear by the opposition which erupted in many parts of India, especially in South India just after the declaration of Hindi as an official language. The opposition was so strong that in South, some people were ready for self-immolation. Therefore, the Parliament had to pass an act in 1963 for making English an associate official language for an indefinite period. This agitation indicated that English was of immense importance for us and could not be dispensed with.

The Place of English in Present Days

These days English is taught as a second language as well as a foreign language. Now English is :

(1) It is no more the medium of instruction and examination. There are some public schools and convents where the medium of instruction and examination is still English.

(2) In lower primary stage, it is not being taught except in public schools.

(3) Regarding its place in lower secondary stage, there is no uniform policy. In Punjab and Haryana, teaching of English starts from the 6th class, in Himachal Pradesh, from 4th class and in Gujarat, from 8th class.

¹ Regional language is that language which is spoken by a majority of people in a State.

(4) There is also no uniform policy about its place in the higher secondary level in different States. English is compulsory for some students at this level and optional for some.

(5) It is not a compulsory subject at the graduation level.

The place of English in present days clearly indicates the lack of uniform policy about its place. A quick step must be taken to give an appropriate and important place to this language in school-curriculum.

Why an Important Place to English ?

Soon an adequate and important place should be assigned to English in our school-curriculum because :

(1) **English : A Link Language.** The census of India (1971) revealed that 380 languages or dialects are spoken in India. These can be grouped in 14 languages (given in the schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution). Hindi occupies the first place because it is spoken by nearly 30% of the population. Next to it are Bengali, Telugu, Marathi and Tamil. English is the only language which is commonly known to the educated people all over the country. Therefore, for having inter-state links on the following matters, we need the knowledge of English :

(i) Trade, (ii) Administration and Management, (iii) Social affairs and (iv) Cultural and educational exchanges.

(2) **English : An International Language.** English is the first language of England, U. S. A., Australia and Canada. It is the second language of many countries like Russia, France, Germany, India, Pakistan etc. One in ten persons in the world knows English. 50% of the world's newspapers, scientific and technical periodicals, 60% of the world's radio broadcasts and 75% of the world's mail are in English. The U. N. O. has given English the status of being an official language. So, *F. G. French's* following statement seems quite apt :

"No language, ancient or modern can be compared with English in the number of geographical distributions of the homes, factories and offices in which the language is spoken, written and read."

These days, every country needs other countries' help in political, social, economical and cultural matters. For this, English comes as a rescue. This prompted *U. K. Gatak* to say :

"It would be rash to cut ourselves off from the English language which keeps us in continuous contact with the latest thoughts in Europe, in every field of life and culture."

In fact, in the words of Pt. J. L. Nehru, "English is our major window to the modern world."

(3) English : A Library Language. For maintaining the standard of education and getting higher knowledge, the graduate students and research scholars need to consult libraries. Good reference books are available only in English especially on science subjects. Therefore, a good knowledge of English is imperative.

(4) English : For Enrichment of Regional Languages. There is no doubt that English literature is a treasure of rare ideas and high thinking and translation of this literature from English into Hindi or other regional languages will surely enrich these Languages. For translating standard works from English into Hindi or other regional languages, a good knowledge of English is required. Similarly, if one wants to translate standard works of India from Hindi or regional language, into English, he definitely needs the knowledge of English.

(5) English : In Commissions and Conferences. The various commissions and conferences set and held in India from time to time, have also emphasised the importance of English. Long ago in 1940, University Education Commission had observed :

"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, we will cut ourselves off from the living stream of over growing knowledge."

The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) sheds light on the importance of English in this way :

"Our youth should acquire knowledge from all sources and contribute their share to its expansion and development. In the attainment of this objective, study of English is bound to play an important part....."

The *Chief Minister's Conference* (1961) concluded,

"English should be taught along with Hindi in order to get 'outside affairs' for All India Services, for engineering, medical and forest departments."

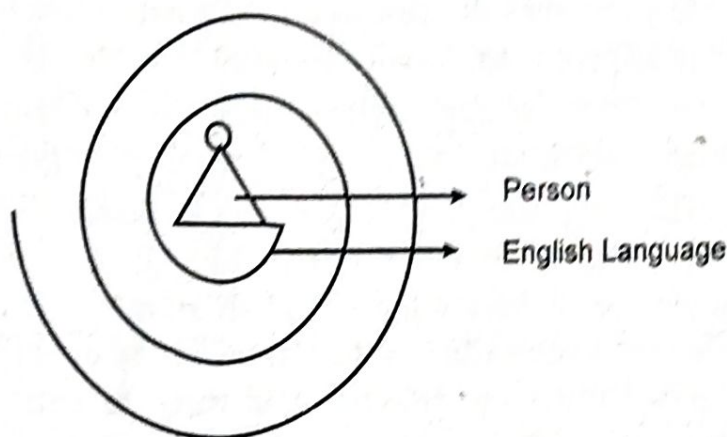
The Indian Education Commission of 1966 also recognised the importance of English through this statement :

".....English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window to the world."

In the Conference of Vice Chancellors in New Delhi (1969), Sri. V. K. R. V. Rao, the then Education Minister of India, expressed his opinion as :

“Far from abolishing English, University students, in future will have to acquire an adequate command over English to read and understand English books in their chosen subjects and use English as their library language.”

In short, the development of personality is tied to English language which circulates around the person like concentric circles :



What Should be the Place of English ?

Keeping in view of the importance of English, a deserving place should be assigned to this language in our school-curriculum. In this connection, the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission (Kothari Commission) can be reviewed :

(a) “Only one language which will be the regional language, will be taught during lower primary classes, *i.e.*, from I to IV class.

(b) From V to VII class, two languages will be taught. One of them will be the regional language. The other can be either Hindi or English. A third language can be studied as an optional subject.

(c) From class VIII to X, three languages will be taught. One of these will be regional. For non-Hindi speaking students, it can be Hindi. The third will be foreign language, *i.e.*, English.

(d) After X class, language study will be optional.

This three language formula has the following characteristics :

(i) With the application of this formula, some students can read English for 6 years. That is, from V class onwards and others

can read it for 3 years, that is, from VIII to X. But all students have to study English.

(ii) This formula gives ample scope to those who are interested in this languages, because they can opt it from class V.

(iii) This formula recommends that English should not be taught at elementary stage, that is, from I to IV class. This seems plausible because *Michael West* and many teachers are of the view that second language should be taught after pupils develop a good grounding in their mother-tongue. *Peter Wingard*¹ has also opposed the introduction of English in elementary stage :

“It increases the proportion of wasted teaching to pupils who never get far enough really to be able to use their English.”

(iv) It gives appropriate place to both Hindi and regional languages, without distorting the place of English.”

This three languages formula can be applied in order to place English suitably in school-curriculum. It should be noted that at the lower secondary stage, English should cease to be taught as literature because during this stage, study of English as literature has given unhappy results. For this we can take *H. Kabir's*² suggestion which is :

“We must remodel our courses in English at the secondary stage and recognize that the learning of English is not an end in itself but only that the acquisition of an instrument for adding to our knowledge. The emphasis must, therefore, shift from literature to the simple language of every day.”

At the university stage, its study should aim at literature.

EXERCISE

□ Essay Type Questions

1. Why should we teach English in schools ?
2. What is the rationale of including English in the school curriculum ?

□ Short Answer Type Questions

1. Write a short note on the place of English after independence ?
2. What is the place of English in present days ?

¹ Working paper submitted to the First Common Wealth Conference on 'The Teaching of English as a Second Language', January, 1961.

² H. Kabir : Education in New India.