

Politics of Exclusion through Medium of Instruction in Indian Higher Educational Institutions

Deepak Kumar*

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India

Abstract – Education in India has been a contested terrain. The modern Indian state has made education mandatory as a policy measure. However, systemic constraints still prevail based on economy, language, region, caste and gender. The education sector is not a level-playing field, dotted with government schools with limited resources and specialized schools reserved for a chosen few.

Purpose of this research is to find out how the dominance of one language in the education-system affects the students acquiring knowledge and thought process and their relational aspects with others? Does it only affect the material elements of knowledge-power or the psychological and emotional issues of everyday student's life and their lived experience? Because, Student from the regional background are discriminated upon as against the English medium students their sufferings become multitude and comprises as socially, economically, emotionally, psychologically and intellectually.

Keywords – Linguicism, Higher Education, Knowledge-Power, Exclusion, Caste, Class and Gender

-----X-----

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential part of human life. Through the education human nature will be continually improved and brought to such condition as is worthy of the kind of man. It makes a person rational, intellectual and capable to pay back into the social, economic and political reformation in the society. It gives wealth, prestige, respect in social life, economic and political empowerment and power of decision making at individual and organization as a whole. All of these could be achieved through education, but it can be possible through language. It reflects the relationship between culture and language. Therefore, communication is a fundamental means for human beings to educate themselves. Language is a significant factor in imparting education. It is a known fact that India is a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Thus, every language spoken has its own social, cultural, political and regional value.

In the pre-colonial period, Indian education system was dominated by *Sanskrit* and *Arabic* language. In that period education was functioned through *Pathshalas*[1], *Gurukul*[2] and *Madarsa*[3]. These institutions ran by the upper caste, class community. However, lower caste, class communities were not to allow taking education in these educational institutions. The education system was nationalized in the colonial period by the British government in

India, and they established universities. These universities were providing education in English medium only. So, every section of the society was not able to take education in this medium because of a larger amount of population having their regional vernacular languages.

Even in the contemporary Indian Higher Education Institutions are dominated by the English medium students and teachers. It creates hegemony in these institutions, and upper caste, class and gender are enjoying knowledge production system. An under the garb of modernization and globalization, the hegemony of English-speaking elite' result in usage and undue weight has given to a single language predominance over other languages, thereby excluding and discriminating non-English medium student from the sphere of intelligentsia.

2. MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The ancient period, Sanskrit remained as a dominant language. It remained one of the oldest languages and also known as the language of humankind. At the same time, there were many other languages popularly used by masses in different parts of India. Over a period, two kinds of education system had been developed; the Vedic and the Buddhist. In the former Vedic, whereas in

the latter Buddhist. In the Vedic period, education was not accessible to all Varnas. While critiquing Varna system, B. R. Ambedkar said that knowledge must be made available to all. In the complex world, man lives at his peril, and he must find his way in it without losing his freedom. He further argues that:

Can, under these conditions, be no freedom that is worthwhile unless the mind is trained to use its freedom. (Given this fact) the right of man to education becomes fundamental to his freedom. Deprive a man of knowledge, and you will make him inevitably the slave of those more fortunate than himself..... deprivation of knowledge is a denial of the power to use liberty for great ends. An ignorant man may be free.... (But) he cannot employ his freedom so as to give him assurance of happiness.[4]

Therefore, it is necessary to give an equal education to all. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit for educational or religious activities. Nevertheless, it was accessible hierarchically and successively to the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The women and Shudras had no right to acquire education. According to *Manusmriti* they did not have the right to hear or to listen to the Veda. Only Brahmins had access to Vedas. Ambedkar critically engaged with Manusmriti in his work *Philosophy of Hinduism* as:

If the Shudra intentionally listens for committing to memory the Veda, then his ears should be filled with (molten) lead and lac; if he utters the Veda, then his tongue should be cut off; if he has mastered the Veda his body should be cut to pieces.[5]

It is assumed that Sanskrit is the language of god; therefore, only Brahmins have the right to use this language for education and religious activities. Sheldon I. Pollock argues that:

The presumed concomitance between Sanskrit and Brahmanism on the one hand and vernacularly and non-Brahmanism on the other does not hold for much of the period under discussion. The vision of Sanskrit as a sacred language "jealously preserved by the Brahmins in their schools" may not be the pure illusion of the colonial officer who gave it expression, yet it is undoubtedly something that developed late in this history of the language, when, for reasons very likely having to do with vernacularization itself, language options shrank for many communities and Brahmanical society reasserted its archaic monopolization over the language (the Catholic Church's eventual monopolization of Latin is an instructive parallel both historically and structurally).[6]

In the Medieval period, there was no regular department for imparting education to the public, though Mughal rulers were very much interested in education. In short, education was not a concern of the state in this period. In contrast, the Muslim rulers

displayed immense interest in education and establishing educational institutes. They also initiated libraries and create a literary society.[7]

For Britishers' it must be remembered that employing Englishmen at multiple levels of the administration was both expensive and difficult. Therefore, the need for low ranked English knowing Indian clerks was one of the foremost reasons that prompted the government to take steps to spread English education. Moreover, employing educated Indians was necessary because of the need to expand and consolidate the British Empire. The idea was to create a class which was supposed to be Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect. Besides, Western education was expected to reconcile the people of India to British rule, particularly as it glorified British rule.[8]

The medium of instruction is one of the major components for quality of education, which is the controversial issue in the higher education system since colonial period in India. Traditionally *Sanskrit* and *Arabic* languages were being used by the educational institutions in pre-colonial period. Two kind of educational institutions i.e. *Gurukuls* or *Pathshalas* for Hindu, headed by *Brahmin pundits*, where Sanskrit has been used as a medium of instruction and second, was *Madarsas* for Muslims, headed by *Maulvis* where *Arabic* and *Persian* have been used as a medium of instruction.[9] In the medieval period, some village-level primary schools were also run with the help of villagers, where medium of instruction was in the vernacular and was not religious. Under the reins of British, English language became predominant after 1818, while the vernacular medium education undominated. It had replaced all the vernaculars even India's dominant language Hindi from the higher educational institutions. From the year of 1817 Britishers established three universities with English as a medium of instruction i.e. Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai) and Bombay (Mumbai) universities. In that period there were huge debate on medium of instruction between *Orientalists*[10] and *Anglicists*. [11]

Until India attained independence in 1947, it was directly or indirectly dominated by a colonial power. The predominant English language remained language of the ruling power and of its civil and military administration was conducted in English.[12] The British rulers had no intention to encourage the Indian life style or to promote the Indian intellectuals, but they wanted to create and efficient group of administrative staff at their disposal. The reason was that it was expensive for the British to bring highly educated and trained people to India and hence they introduced English education system in India to

educate and train the natives here. From colonial period till the contemporary period, it is the English educated people who have held excessive pride and enjoyed elite status in the society.

Indian reformists and philosophers like B. R. Ambedkar, Swami Dayananda, and M. K. Gandhi advocated employing vernacular medium of education from elementary to higher level. Swami Dayananda in his educational philosophy condemned the use of foreign language as a medium of instruction.[13] Interestingly, while opposing the foreign language, he did not endorse that Indians should not go abroad in pursuit of knowledge. Instead, he advocated the people to grab understanding from all the corners of the world. Gandhian philosophy advocates that mother tongue should be the medium of education and be given the first place amongst the languages to be taught in the school.[14] Ambedkar was educated in both English and vernacular languages at Indian and foreign Universities. He says that the spread of education should be a proper function of the University. But this cannot be achieved unless the University adopts vernacular as the medium of instruction, which in the present circumstances is a far cry.[15] His argument is very important reasoning that there is already a big chasm between educational institutions and poor people and English as a language is far from masses of the Indians. Therefore, he holds the very strong affirmative view on the use of vernacular as a medium of instruction.[16]

Since the nature of Indian Society is multilingual and multicultural, hence we do not need to follow unified language for getting knowledge. Vivekananda believed that consciousness resides within the individual himself. Thus, the duties of educational institutes were to promote and facilitate the vernacular as a medium of education. Bh. Krishnamurti articulated that "a language besides being a vehicle of communication is also a cultural institution which is an integral part of the social, emotional and intellectual life of its speakers. Living languages with centuries-old literary traditions cannot easily be relegated to a secondary status by other languages in a given society." [17]

Language is not only a means of communication or expression, but it is also a means of controlling the human psychology. Thus, the contemporary educational system is fully controlled by the English medium. It also gives special status to the individual in the society, which further becomes a means of power (social, economic, political, psychological and as source knowledge). Consequences of such language were visible as everyone is pushing themselves towards English Factory.[18] Hence, gradually, it is becoming a 'hegemonic language' in the linguistic sphere in the Indian education systems.

3. HEGEMONY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Language must be an essential mode of getting education either through verbal, visual or touch. But, in the era of globalization and modernization English has gradually encompassed the medium of instruction. Because it is assumed that English will easily connect the people of one state to another state. However, traditionally, people are sharing their thoughts and ideas through their mother tongue or native language predominantly. But, in the changing scenario under the umbrella of globalization, it becomes a language of 'elite' and 'intellectual'. M. Vijayalakshmi and Dr. Manchi Sarat Babu argued that "Indians who know English will always try to show that they know English. English symbolizes in Indians minds as better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who can speak and understand the English language mingle it with Indian languages in their conversations." [19]

Education and language debate are centred on the relationship between communicative competence and educational achievements of the students coming from regional medium backgrounds in the post-colonial countries. In these countries' issues are very complex which are related to language, identity and culture as well as literacy. Along with these issues, linguistic concern influences the accessibility of knowledge as well as social and economic developments. Importance of language in education has extended because of the impact of globalization and modernization. Now priority of education is not merely gaining knowledge but also about getting employment and career settlement. Globalization and modernization facilitated people from moving from one place to another because of livelihood settlement. But they retain their own language identity and culture. Such contradictions are causing tensions and conflict between the local and global language, i.e. English.

Education and language are two intimate concepts because education is dispersed through language. Liketso Dube and Bhekezakhe Ncube argued that both education and language depend on each other. If education is to be attained, language has to be used, and for language to endure, survive and be respected, it has to be taught in schools.[20] Nevertheless, Ekkehard Wolf said that language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education.[21] Education and language had an indestructible affiliation. They need each other for continuities to achieve good knowledge. The educational institutions and state have to see to it that regional languages i.e. Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and other recognised languages etc. are incorporated into the educational systems.

English is still simultaneously sought after and suspected. The motives, generally, are not only

social-political but academic too. While the demand increases, on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state-run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture. The divide between urban and rural is further exacerbated by the increasing tendency to use English as a medium of instruction. The paradox of such demand and suspicion is reflected through the mystery of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC):

There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, barely more than one per cent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language ... But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society.[22]

The National Focus Group on Teaching of English has adopted a strong position in addressing the 'English language question': In contemporary India, English is a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international offices. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to high education now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current state of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena.[23]

Language discrimination affected students' academic performance in many ways i.e. getting less marks, losing academic confidence, lack of job opportunity, promoting to research domains etc. For Paulo Freire, education is a key instrument to enacting social justice; education provides venues for students to achieve freedom, both intellectual and physical – the "indispensable condition for the quest for human completion." [24] But the contemporary education system is not able to ensure and promote social justice. He believes that school is a social space but, if students are not getting qualitatively equal education, then, how it signifies as democratic space. A democratic place is where every student receives knowledge without experiencing any discriminatory practices.

The role of a teacher in educational institutions is crucial. They have control over the curriculum and classroom. They are the primary source of extending knowledge in the school where they also have control over the mental faculty of the students. Their degree of engagement with students determines student's *emotional and psychological obstruction of communication* and involvement in the classroom. Students' confidence for academic engagement and performance, knowledge development, personality

development and interest in the subject depends on the teacher. The academic social identity of teacher and students is also a significant factor in the classroom.

4. CONCLUSION

Language works as a medium between *Knowledge* and *Power*, through which *Truth* is being established. Language is a powerful and essential tool for learning. Through language, human beings can share their idea and thoughts to others. Those students are coming from the regional background are hardly able to cope up with English medium culture of education because of their linguistic belongingness. Most of the time, these students are dropping out at the initial stage of higher education. The nexus between Language, Knowledge and Power are prevalent in the Higher Educational Institutions in India and responsible for this politics of exclusion from the domain of knowledge production. Along with other institutional mechanisms, the role of a teacher in this scenario is more important and imperative to reduce the level of discrimination and exclusion from inside classroom to outside the educational spheres. The teachers are knowing their native or mother tongue but do not want to give their lecture or speech in that language because they had mechanised the hegemony of English as medium of instruction. The relationship between the teacher and student should be cordial, and the teacher should be able to guide and sort out any problems of a student

NOTES

1. This was a school system that operated in India, which was run before Britishers came here. It was held at the village under a tree, and it was also held at the guru's house. Teaching system was only oral. The fee was dependent on the parent's income. The classes were taken only in Sanskrit medium. In the Pathshalas, there was no provision to make pupils stay at the guru's place.
2. It was a residential school in the Ancient and medieval period where pupils (Shishya) were living with their Guru (Teacher) in India. There was no fee structure like modern educational institutions. The pupils depended on Guru for their livelihood, and the Guru collected all the necessary things from the society by sending their pupils to each house for collection. And it was the responsibility of the society as well. In the Gurukuls, education was provided only in Sanskrit.

3. It was run by and for the Muslim religion, where classes were taken in Urdu or Arabic language. The curriculum centred on the Quran and Maulvis head it.
4. B. R. Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, comp. Vasant Moon, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 39. Also see https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_03.pdf
5. Ibid., 43.
6. Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 28-29. Also see http://www.columbia.edu/cu/mesaas/faculty/directory/pollock_pub/Introduction,%20Language%20of%20the%20Gods.pdf
7. Krishnalal Ray, *Education in Medieval India* (Delhi: B. R. Pub., 1984), 9-10.
8. Hareet Kumar Meena, Dr., "Educational Structure and the Process of Colonization in Colonial India," *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 11, No. 1 (2015): 87, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://iasir.net/AIJRHASSpapers/AIJRHASS15-541.pdf>.
9. Rajani Hegiste, "A Sociological Study of the Vocational Education of Girl Students in Mumbai" (Ph.D. thesis, SNDT Womens University, 2011), September 06, 2012, 21, accessed February 05, 2017, http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/46117/07_chapter%201.pdf
10. Orientalists argued that government funds should be used to support colleges for the teaching of Arabic and Sanskrit, to pay stipends to the students at these colleges, and to translate works into Arabic and Sanskrit, much as they had been used since 1813. (See <http://undergraduatelibrary.org/system/files/843.pdf> also Deborah Dutta, "Anglicists-Orientalist Controversy in India," *Academia.edu*, accessed July 11, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/4336610/Anglicist-Orientalist_Controversy_in_India.)
11. The Anglicists on the other hand emerged in the 1820s, maintained that these government funds should be spent on teaching English, with no stipends or translations at all. This position was noticeably influenced by Evangelical and utilitarian beliefs: James Mill, while employed by the East India Company, was among the first (and most fervent) believers that the aim of government-sponsored education was not to impart "Hindoo learning" but "useful" (in other words, Western) learning, an expression used repeatedly by Macaulay, Trevelyan and other Anglicists. (<http://undergraduatelibrary.org/system/files/843.pdf> also Deborah Dutta, "Anglicist-Orientalist Controversy in India," *Academia.edu*, accessed July 11, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/4336610/Anglicist-Orientalist_Controversy_in_India.)
12. Thomas Benedikter, *Language Policy and Linguistic Minorities in India: An Appraisal of the Linguistic Right of Minorities in India* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2009), 13.
13. S. P. Chaube, *Educational Philosophies in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House Pvt Ltd., 1993), 40.
14. Ibid., 136.
15. B. R. Ambedkar and Vasant Moon, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2 (Mumbai: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Sources Material Publication Committee, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003), 312.
16. Ibid.
17. Bh. Krishnamurti, "The Regional Language Vis-a-vis English as the Medium of Instruction in Higher Education: The Indian Dilemma," in *Multilingualism in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2007), 15.
18. YouTube, May 10, 2014, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://youtu.be/Be2nz975Cww>.
19. M. Vijayalkshmi and Manchi Sarat Babu, Dr., "A Brief History of English Language Teaching in India," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publication* 4, No. 5 (May 2014): accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0514/ijsrp-p29121.pdf>.
20. Liketso Dube and Bhekezakhe Ncube, "Language Policy and Linguistic Rights in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe: The Case of IsiNdebele," *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 3, No. 5 (2013): 250, accessed March 2, 2017, Doi: 10.15580/gjss.2013.5.030413511.
21. Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz, *Optimising Learning, Education and*

Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor (Hambur: UNESCO, 2011), 92.

22. Government of India, "National Knowledge Commission Report to the Nation 2009," [Http://knowledgecommissionarchive.nic.in](http://knowledgecommissionarchive.nic.in), 2009, 27, accessed on January 2, 2017.
23. National Council of Education Research and Training, "National Focus Group Position Papers-NCERT," [Http://www.ncert.nic.in](http://www.ncert.nic.in), March 2006, 01, accessed on January 5, 2017.
24. Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, "A Pedagogy of Social Justice Education: Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality, and Empowerment," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 30, No. 4 (2013): 413, Doi:10.1002/crq.21072.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambedkar, B. R. (2014). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Vol. 3. New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches. Vol. 2. Mumbai: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003.

Benedikter, Thomas (2009). *Language Policy and Linguistic Minorities in India: An Appraisal of the Linguistic Right of Minorities in India*. Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster.

Chaubé, S. P. (1993). *Educational Philosophies in India*. New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House Pvt Ltd.

Dube, Liketso, and Bhekezakhe Ncube (2017). "Language Policy and Linguistic Rights in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe: The Case of IsiNdebele." *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2013): 249-55. Accessed March 2, 2017. Doi:10.15580/gjss.2013.5.030413511.

Government of India (2017). "National Knowledge Commission Report to the Nation 2009..." [Http://knowledgecommissionarchive.nic.in](http://knowledgecommissionarchive.nic.in). 2009. Accessed January 2, 2017.

Hegiste, Rajani (2012). "A Sociological Study of the Vocational Education of Girl Students in Mumbai." Ph.D. thesis, SNDT Women's University, 2011. September 06, 2012. Accessed February 05, 2017. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/46117/07_chapter%201.pdf.

Krishnamurti, B.H. (2007). "The Regional Language Vis-a-vis English as the Medium of Instruction in Higher Education: The Indian Dilemma." In *Multilingualism in India*, pp. 15-24. New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited.

Meena, Hareet Kumar, Dr. (2015). "Educational Structure and the Process of Colonization in Colonial India." *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Science* 11, No. 1: pp. 85-91. Accessed October 15, 2016. <http://iasir.net/AIJRHASSpapers/AIJRHASS15-541.pdf>.

National Council of Educational Research and Training. "National Focus Group Position Papers - National Council of ..." [Http://www.ncert.nic.in](http://www.ncert.nic.in). March 2006. Accessed January 5, 2017.

Ouane, Adama, and Christine Glanz (2011). *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor: A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Hamburg: UNESCO.

Pollock, Sheldon I. (2006). *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ray, Krishnala (1984). *Education in Medieval India*. Delhi: B. R. Publication.

Tapper, Aaron J. Hahn (2013). "A Pedagogy of Social Justice Education: Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality, and Empowerment." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 30, No. 4: pp. 411-45. doi:10.1002/crq.21072.

YouTube. May 10, 2014. Accessed April 19, 2017. <https://youtu.be/Be2nz975Cww>

Corresponding Author

Deepak Kumar*

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India

deepak.du@outlook.com