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Scandals in the decline of English - II The universal language

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14 APR 1988

become a change in attitude not only in which unprecedented job opportunities for them because the British rulers found it expedient to shift their patronage to them in order to implement successfully their unabashedly Machiavellian policy of "Divide and Rule."

The educated Hindu community by the close of 19th and beginning of the 20th century had become too politically conscious for the comfort of the colonial rulers. So there was a major shift in policy which greatly favoured the Muslims to get preferential treatment in getting jobs.

That helped them a great deal to recover at least some of the ground they lost through self-imposed isolation.

As soon as they started giving Western education in increasing numbers became acutely aware of almost irreparable damage caused to the active interest of their community, they needed no further persuasion or motivation. With education not only social consciousness but also political consciousness.

is helped them to their political rights position particularly in the early decades of the century in such a way that they could no longer be seen as a political force. colonial rulers were to realize its importance. So they decided to give them as a political weight to the Hindu Congress ultimately led to the polarization of sub-national politics on the religion and the division of the Indian sub-continent into two states.

India and Pakistan in August 1947.

It is apparent, therefore, from the above quick review of our political history that we as a community owe much to western education or for that matter English education for our political, economic and social resurgence. Without it can we think of any other language or medium which could better fit into that role of bridging that yawning gap that undoubtedly existed between Western culture, thoughts and ideas and those of ours?

The so-called 'culture lag' could not have been so easily surmounted if English had not been there as the medium of communication.

What about our Bengali literature? In its present form we are justifiably proud of it for its richness and variety, depth and quality. But it is a fact that most of its literary forms owe their origin either to English literature or other European literatures.

This, of course, does not imply we have nothing of our own as our literary heritage.

The development of Bengali language in its modern form also owes a considerable debt to the Christian missionaries of Sree Rampur and other places. We know it was an Englishman Halhead, who first wrote and published Bengali Grammar.

Bengali prose for day-to-day use gradually underwent radical transformation from heavily Sanskritized vocabulary to much simpler words under the influence of English. The publication of different journals and newspapers in Bengali in the 19th century also substantially contributed to the development of Bengali prose. It was mainly due to the

sincere and dedicated efforts of the founding members of the Asiatic Society that a subject called Indology developed. Painstaking research and endeavours of theirs and their successors have generated a body of scholarly works in different fields of study which revealed the richness of Indian Culture and Civilization to the Western society.

So far as our great poets and writers are concerned, a great many of them were good scholars of English in their own right. From Michael Modhusudan Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore, who himself translated his 'Gitanjali' into English and became the first Asian to win a Nobel prize for literature as early as 1913, Vishnu Dey, Sudhin Dutt and Jibananda Das we have a series of illustrious names who owned much to English language and literature for their literary and poetic excellence and intellectual depth.

With such a rich heritage of English and well-established system of English teaching and learning one wonders how we could degenerate or dwindle into such doldrums. The reasons are not far to seek and we will come to them after discussing the international perspective.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

"I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan, English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven"--These were prophetic words and vision of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the great American philosopher.

That sea envisioned by Emerson has indeed become an all-pervasive, globe-girdling ocean where

tributaries come from all directions-east and west, north and south.

In a special series of articles published in Life magazine in the early 60s, Lincoln Barnett wrote, "The current, extraordinary spread of the English language around the world would never have begun, despite all the forces of history and all the facilities for its propagation, were English a difficult language to learn. To the advanced practitioner--the poet, novelist, essayist--it poses great difficulties by virtue of its lush vocabulary of more than half a million words and the flexibility with which they can be employed....."

It (English) excels by reason of its basically simple rudiments, a hard core of perhaps 1000 energetic words which fill all needs of ordinary communication, a few tolerant rules governing their use and a logical underlying skeletal structure which can be taught and learned more quickly than is possible in any other language spoken on earth today.

During World War II when foreign flyers were brought to the U.S. for training it was found that a good working knowledge of English could be imparted in about 60 hours of concentrated instruction.

These assets which make English so useful as an international language, derive from its cosmopolitan antecedents. Because of its variegated background, the English vocabulary presents a familiar countenance to students born to other tongues.

Through the centuries it has borrowed so profusely from all other languages that today only professional scholars are aware of the

origins of many daily use." Quoted in magazine, Vol 32, 6, 1962.

establishing the essentials of English international language foregoing long it us now moved to explore its essentialities as a

that we have once again on an a Newsweek English English dated 1982. It ran the sun sets the Union Jack never on the page. It was British colonial boost from and it was by the corporation or curse it, closest thing inca around roughly 700 speak it-an in the last total of that than one world's s replaced world of German in . It is the age of, nics and gy, of, nness and radio, n. Says editor of h Dict- terate. the face ed if he r". ates of we find of two made and es of a man's ously or- cated



Students taking first lessons

man can say I am immune from its direct or indirect influence.

Another apt quotation, this time from 'The Economist' of December 20 1986 will make the international perspective even clearer. The article entitled 'The New English Empire' had this to say:

"English is the first truly universal language wider in its scope than Latin was or Arabic and Spanish are. The worldwide spread of English is remarkable. There has been nothing like it in history. Spanish and French, Arabic and Turkish, Greek and Latin have served their turns as international languages... But none come near to rivalling English.

Four hundred years ago English was the mother tongue of 7 million speakers tucked away on a foggy island in Western Europe. Today, about 330 m people throughout the world speak it as a mother tongue.

But in international diffusion and acceptance, English is in a class of its own. Add to its 330 m mother tongue speakers the same number using English as a second language (ESL) and the same number again with reasonable competence in English as foreign language (EFL) and you approach one billion English speakers.

As an 'official language', English serves more than forty countries; French serves 27; Arabic 21 and Spanish 20. English is the language of international shipping and air travel. It is one of the two working languages of the United Nations (French is the other).

And it has become the language of both international youth culture and science (two thirds of all scientific papers are published in English).

advancement in the civil or diplomatic service almost anywhere will be aided by good grasp of English; half of all foreign language courses in the Soviet Union are English courses; and a quarter of China's 1 billion people is engaged in studying English, in one way or other.

English, then, is a world language. What befits it for that role? It is chiefly, of course, thanks to the power of Britain in the nineteenth century and America in the twentieth.

But English has spread far beyond its sphere of political influence in a way that French and Spanish have not. Luckily, English fits its role well, thanks to the structure of the language.

English, in short, is easy to speak badly and that is all that is required of a world language, if what you mean by a world language is an attenuated code, a means of transmitting, and receiving simple information.

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