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English as a Medium of Primary Education in J&K: Impact on Young Writers and English Scholarship

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Abstract:

This paper studies the impact generated by the introduction of English as the medium of instruction at the primary level in Jammu and Kashmir. As the constitution of India, in Article 350(A) emphasizes that ‘the primary education to children should be imparted in their mother tongue’. In case of J&K, this particular provision was never implemented. Earlier the medium of instruction was Urdu, however post-year 2000 AD, the medium of instruction has been changed to English. Text books at primary languages have also been introduced in English. This exercise did generate criticism of all sorts and from all quarters, particularly from cultural theorists. However, in case of language development and general scholarship, this particular exercise has proved fruitful. The exposure to classic texts written or translated in English language has left a lasting mark on the young minds in J&K. Over the last five years, we are seeing more and more Kashmiri students writing for newspapers, both national and global. We are seeing more writers emerge and express their experiences through the blogs and novels. There have emerged writers, who have been globally acclaimed for writings, such as Basharat Peer for Curfewed Nights, Shahnaz Bashir for Half mother, Mirza Waheed for The Collaborator and list goes on...

This paper contests the post-colonial notion of nativism, and tries to bring in the brighter side of the picture, which mostly does not find mention in academia. It tries to project English as a bridge, where by Kashmiris are becoming the part of broader cosmopolitan framework, thereby sharing their experience, influencing others and getting influenced themselves as well

Keywords: English, medium, primary, education, exposure, J&K

Introduction

The greatest advantage of being a Human being (Homo sapiens) has been the ability to articulate through a medium called ‘language’. Language is meant for communication, and communication almost always takes place within some sort of social context. Therefore it could be argued, effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it. Somewhere at the root of renaissance and the emergence of Modern Nation States, particularly in Europe, Language has played critical role. The very

existence of Nation state or the very understanding of the nation was defined by the language; the people of a definite territory spoke. At the very heart of imperialist rivalry, the urge to project one's culture and language superior was always there. European states, particularly, France, Portugal, Spain and Netherlands managed to colonize Africa and North America; they did manage to establish their writ there. As England had successfully colonized the large parts of Asia and Africa, Its language by default became the language of the time and Its traditions became the common sense of the age. In India, from 1813 the English East India Company set aside some money for education of the Indians in English. After the charter Act of 1833 English became the official language. In 1844 Lord Hardinge announced that English-educated Indians would be given preference for government appointments. Since then, there has been rise in English speaking, as second language among Indian people.

The same continued in post-independence era. English achieved the position of global language, and in the globalized world, the need to introduce English and medium of instruction was felt, however due to certain contradictions, this thing could not get materialized

The objectives of the study: There has emerged a band of scholars and statesmen, who advocated English education at all levels. They have had to face a lot of resistance and at times found themselves at loggerheads with the local populace or a section of it, who mostly believe in nativism, and the upliftment of local cultures. This paper critiques the nativist/post-colonial/subaltern positions and comes up with alternatives that are essential in reducing the demonization created around English language. It articulates certain positives, that early introduction (primary school level) to English text has brought within the context of Jammu and Kashmir State.

Methodology: The study has been undertaken in undertaken in Jammu & Kashmir. It has mostly banked on secondary sources, apart from certain interviews. This paper is more theoretical than the normal survey style paper. It has brought the theoretical critique of nativist and post-colonial scholarship through certain texts that emerged partly as a result of early introduction of wards to English language.

History of English Teaching in India: A Background

Looking at the history of English in the India, it gained access in India with the emergence of the East India Company. Following East India Company, certain schools (through their missionaries) started functioning in the early 1800s. In 1835, Lord Macaulay came up with his famous 'Macaulay's Minutes' on Indian Education, which advocated the use of English. It was established that 'Indians cannot be educated by means of their mother tongue. English is the language (Dutta 01). He further visualized English as "the language that would provide the basis for commerce, politics and judiciary" (Dutta 01).

The NCERT report suggests that, "English in India is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible



indicator of this presence of English is that today its teaching being demanded by many to be taught at the very initial stage of schooling, the mushrooming of private English medium schools and the early introduction of English in State schools” (Dutta 02) . It further states, “The NCF 2005 stresses the use of child's mother tongue as a medium of learning at the primary level. The English teaching profession has consistently recommended a relatively late introduction of English and this is reflected in spirit in policy documents” (Dutta 03). The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of State policy to respond to people's aspirations, making almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction.

The constitution of India; the largest and comprehensive of all existing constitutions has laid down certain provisions related to governance and enactment of laws.

Article 350A: This article relates to facilities for instruction in mother tongue at primary stage.

Article 350B: It provides for a special offer for linguistic minorities.

Article 351: This article relates to the development and promotion of the Hindi language.

English is taught as a subject in class I in many States. In quite a few states, however it is introduced in class III and even at class V level in some states. There have been many apprehensions laid down by scholars who argue that children with poor English skills are less likely to succeed in school and beyond. Models for teaching English learner children are often characterized as either English immersion (instruction only in English) or bilingual education (instruction occurs both in English and in the students' native language), although each type includes several broad categories (Barrow 159). The prevalence of English ability in India-based on the 1991 census, 11% of the Indian population reported some English ability (Azam 335).

Education has been a major instrument for change and social and cultural development and has since played an important role in empowering the children, particularly the marginalized sections of the society (Suri 12).

Progress in education holds central position in the cause for the economic development of any nation. There are certain marginalized castes and other classes in India, which are yet to figure at global index of education and development.

English Education in J&K

Education in Jammu and Kashmir remained modeled on the pattern of the British education system, probably due to the effects of colonization. There emerged a movement that called people towards the western mode of education and hence marginalized the age old religious institutions, and also left a certain degree of modernizing effect on the populace which was educated through western values. The first western and modern school in Kashmir was “founded in 1880 by Reverend J Hinton Knowles’ in the premises of Missionary Hospital in Srinagar, founded as the ‘Church Mission Society Boys School’ it is now called the ‘Tyndale Biscoe

School' named after 'Cecil Earle Tyndale Biscoe' a British missionary who became the school's principal in 1891. Biscoe is often attributed with founding the modern education system in Kashmir, through western modernization and rejection of local traditions" (Ganie 83). The valley of Kashmir has its own ancient history and a unique civilization. As Tyndale Biscoe in his book, stated "Kashmir fortunately possesses an ancient history and a civilization more ancient than our own" (Biscoe 67).

Apart from these few institutions, the medium of instruction remained Urdu, particularly in valley, while in Jammu Hindi dominated the scene. Even the constitutional provisions of, primary education in 'mother tongue (Art 350 A), did not materialize in J&K. Apart from conflict, what often contributed to the relatively poor performance of government schools remained the modus operandi under which these institutions were run. Urdu as a medium of instruction, relatively less problematized approach to text and no or least introduction to classics at young age contributed to the downfall of education sector. The argument here is not to demean Urdu or for that matter any other language, it simply stresses the lack of translated stuff in Urdu.

From 2000 A.D onwards, English was introduced as a medium of instruction from primary classes, and more vehement approach of teaching was started. The board results began to improve; even recent trends suggest students of government schools top the board exams at both matriculation and intermediate level examinations.

Post-colonial critique

The fact that English has achieved the status of universal language seems to be far-fetched, however it has retained its value as a language, which is widely read, taught and understood. Post-colonial scholars like Edward said (Orientalism, 1979), Ngugui wo Thiongo (Globalectics, 2014), Chinua Achebe (Home and Exile, 2013), Gayatri Sipwak ,and even to some extent existentialist thinkers like Jean Paul Satre have vehemently opposed the notion of English being the language universalist. Ngugui wo Thiongo criticises this notion as being the legacy of colonialism, given the exclusive authority it provides to 'English'. He argues, if ever there arises a need for universal language and culture why can't that be African (Globalectics, 2014). Furthering this argument, Chinua Achebe uses famous African proverb, "until lions have their own historians, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter" (Achebe 76). He argues about the existential threat that these native languages are faced with.

Conclusion

There has been an upsurge in the writers as far as English language is concerned. The trend that started with Agha Shahid Ali and carried forward by writers like Basharat Peer (Curfewed



Night.), Mirza Waheed (The Collaborator), Shahnaz Bashir (Scattered Souls,) (The Half mother) , Mir Khalid (Jaffna Street,) has garnered audience worldwide. Even teenagers like Taufeeq Wani (The Graveyard,.) Jahangeer Majazi (And the Sun never rose again,) have established their writ in the literary circles. It has also provided women the agency through which they could express their agonies and tales. Essar Batool and four other women wrote a book on infamous Kunan-poshpora mass rape (Do you Remember Kunan Poshpora,). It has highlighted the issue as well as made other women think in terms of possibility of narrating certain tales to the world, that were exclusively limited to audience speaking certain language and coming from that reality only.

Apart from fiction, a large number of students have entered academia, and have qualified certain tests that would otherwise be almost impossible for non-English speaking students. Europe has now become the backyard, as far as Kashmiri students are concerned. The introduction to classic texts and integration into the broader literary world has provided budding Kashmiri scholars hope out of despair. It has provided them the literary alternative, where by dissent could be expressed and at the same time, contribution to the knowledge building could also be made. Apart from certain Eurocentric biases, English remains the medium of hope for the large unheard voices of the world.

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