

# DOVETAILING CULTURAL VALUES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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*Abstract: One of the aftermaths of colonial rule in India has been the legacy of English language and literature. Even in this postcolonial phase of renewed interest in national literature, English continues to be the lingua franca in this multi-lingual and multi-racial nation. Yet, this paper argues, there is perceptible change sweeping the English curriculum in Indian universities. The change in the content of ELT has been effected with a view to introduce Indian cultural values in the place of heavy alien western content. The General English course which is common to all the undergraduate students now includes value-based culture-centered essays and speeches by Indian cultural exponents like Vivekananda, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Nehru. The English major paper, too includes works of well-known Indian English writers and translations of regional writings. The paper addresses the continued need for English in the national and international arena, but demonstrates that the content of the English curriculum is increasingly becoming national which is in tune with the postcolonial fighting phase outlined by Franz Fanon. It argues, with illustrations, that ELT with native cultural content would make English more acceptable to the Indian psyche and promote a changed vista of aesthetic-semantic nature and texture of language against the background of native experience and imagination.*

*Key words: India, postcolonial, aestheti- semantic nature*

## INTRODUCTION

The paper discusses the postcolonial Indian scenario with reference to the changes that are taking place in the teaching of English. It interrogates the

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cultural legacy of English studies in India and highlights the need for a viable strategy that will foster the development of national culture and languages and at the same facilitate global communication.

Education in general and English teaching in particular is as much a political as a pedagogic act, shaped by a complex mix of historical, social, economic, cultural, political and demographic forces. While the universal use of English as a second language is promoted in many countries, the nature, scope and function of English in relation to indigenous languages have not been specified. This has led to the distortion of language policies and marginalization of indigenous languages. Hence, the postcolonial period has further strengthened the colonial policies and the empire of English. The changing role of English makes a reassessment imperative if teaching of English is serious about responding to the emerging present-day needs. The role of English has changed - from a language of an ex-colonial power learnt by the native elite to take jobs in the beaurocracy - to an international language of science, medicine, technology, aviation, business, scholarship and modernization.

The question of English and its relation to the production of culture and knowledge in post-colonial India acquires great urgency and significance in the context of cultural politics of today. We are witnessing a resurgence of various forms of indigenism that draws from the past. The centralizing imperativeness of the state requires the construction of a culture where various cultural forms are pressed into service for the display of national culture and tradition.

However, English has become an international commodity and more than a quarter of the world's people use it. The factors in favor of English are modernization, mobility and projection:

1. English has become the means to latest information. It is an exploding language in a world of exploding information - be it in agriculture, economics, political science, computer technology or space technology.
2. English is needed for mobility and social and economic success. It is the language of opportunities.
3. English is necessary to talk about one's identity, language, literature, culture and values.

The popularity of English worldwide raises certain theoretical issues. Cooke (1988) describes English as a 'Trojan Horse' arguing that it is a language of imperialism and of particular class interest. Both he and Judd (1983) draw attention to the moral and political implications of English teaching around the

globe in terms of the threat it poses to indigenous languages and the role it plays as a gatekeeper to better jobs in many societies. In many instances it poses a direct threat to the very existence of other languages. Day (1985) calls this 'linguistic genocide'. Further this might result in a far more widespread danger of linguistic curtailment. When English becomes the first choice as a second language, in which so much is written and much of the visual media occur, it is constantly pushing other languages out of the way, curtailing their usage in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

It is necessary for the academics engaged in the teaching at universities to understand the problem of English. There is a growing sense of dislocation within the discipline that impels us to enquire into the historical presence that constitutes the formation of English studies in the colonial period and their continuance and expansion in the period after independence. While old fashioned scholars like Quirk and Widdowson (1985) declared that English is "the language on which the Sun does not set, whose users never sleep," this kind of imperialism is no longer palatable to non-native users of English. In the present post-colonial period there is a growing awareness to rearrange the priorities and to shed the dependency role. The focus should be on an analysis of the role of English in the present day cultural formation. This is important not only for our academic activity but also for an understanding of the present moment. Postcolonial culture is a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European cultural system and an indigenous ontology with its impulse to recreate an independent local identity.

## **THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE**

Standing at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with drastic social, political, economic and environmental changes around the globe, it is necessary to reassess the need for English in India. English is used as the *lingua franca* in India. There is an ever-increasing demand for English education. Educational system in India shows a strong dialectical relation between language, power and linguistic capital on the one hand and socio-economic relations of power and control on the other. Both tend to reproduce and legitimize them. It is the language of the intellectual discourse that dominates Indian culture at present. It is also the language through which India communicates with the rest of the world. The presence of transnational corporations and India's increasing integration into the world market, the state's dependence on global technology ensure continued presence of English.

## EDUCATION

In India the earliest English education was through the Christian missionaries and therefore it was equated with Christianity. Subsequently, English came to be taught officially to Indians to help create an administrative cadre needed to run the British Empire. English was used as an instrument to establish, enhance and sustain their political, intellectual and cultural supremacy over the natives. The English Education Act of 1835 which followed the famous Minute by Macaulay clearly outlined the purpose of English education in the India of colonial days. Macaulay in his Minute frankly acknowledged the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England. The statement of Macaulay that a single shelf of European books worth the whole literature of India and Persia was made in ignorance of either literature and betrayed the intentions behind the policy change which lay strictly in material and political interests.

However, the imperial attitude in the long run served to strengthen western cultural hegemony. English education became the prime site for the development of a notion of 'culture' for the intelligentsia. The term English literature included the entire field of writing – history, moral philosophy, political economy as well as creative and imaginative writing. This conceptual apparatus introduced, through the polarization of colonialism, a polarization between a superior civilization and barbarity and therefore a site for cultural differentiation. Indian Culture was gradually marginalized and was converted into a culture sans values.

Within the western literary tradition only certain canonical texts were recognized to be capable of training, cultivating and equipping the imagination. The basic academic design was either inherited or borrowed. The early English Departments in India were modelled after their counterparts in the British universities. This replication gained acceptance in the Indian departments. Of the three components of the curricula namely language, linguistics and literature, the one that has unjustifiably received primary focus is the literature component. In fact a syllabus is considered lacking if it does not include ample coverage of English literature with courses on different periods, genres and major writers. A typical syllabus included Medieval literature, English poetry from Chaucer to Milton, Shakespeare, Metaphysical poetry, Victorian literature, Romantics, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, Contemporary American literature etc. It included classical authors like Chaucer, Bacon, Milton, Addison, Steele, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley etc. Such an approach has proved unsuccessful

and has raised a number of relevant theoretical issues. Certain pertinent questions raised at present are - Is it necessary to load the syllabus with the cultural content which is alien to the learners? Is it necessary to perpetuate the myth that a single shelf of good European library is still worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia? With the dismantling of the paradigm of literary study via an internal critique, a reworking of the idea of literary value is in order. "The very idea of English literature as a study which occludes its own specific national cultural and political grounding and offers itself as a new system for development of universal human values, is exploded by the existence of the postcolonial literature" (Ashcroft 1989).

Each nation has its own destiny and this cannot be fulfilled without a self-discovery. It necessitates a discovery of the group, the nation, the race, its pressures and aspirations which alone can give a nation its identity. Culture is inevitably an argument about reality. It is important to understand the duality in the nature of culture. There is a sense in which the nature of culture is conservative. It seeks to articulate and crystalize the current social consciousness. It reflects and reinforces the prevailing power balance. It may also be eloquent of the silences, evasions and repressions.

The humanities are only the academic end of this wider process of culture. The departments of English form an important part of education. There is an increasing urge to resite the discipline through a politically and culturally conscious engagement. There is an attempt:

1. to redefine the goals of English teaching
2. to evolve alternate materials, methods and evaluation systems
3. to evolve suitable courses based on the Indian culture and need.

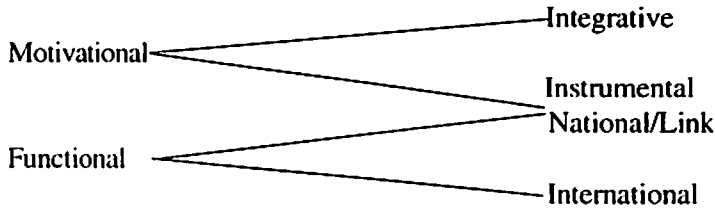
Putting these into practice in the classroom situation implies certain drastic changes. The focus in teaching English Literature should shift "from the literary to the social, the political and the discursive" (Ahmad 1995:259). Concrete steps are being taken to put this into practice. For instance, the Madras University offers a Foundation Course at the undergraduate level to all the arts and science students. The text includes essays by prominent Indian and English writers. A text entitled "Touchstone : Synergy of Values" is an initiative taken by the Board of Studies, Madras University to promote cultural values among young learners. Four areas namely Value Education, Personality Development, Human Rights, Gender Issues and Environment Awareness have

been identified. The collection includes extracts from essays by Swami Vivekananda on "What is Ethics?", Prof. Ignacimuthu's "Kinds of Values", Vimala Patil's "Can women truly change India?" and also essays by Norman Vincent Peale on "Building self-confidence", Anthony Robbins' "Living Excellence", etc. Such a collection is different from the traditional English prose text consisting of essays only by English writers. Moreover here the aim is to promote values through English language. Such an effort enables us to make sense of the concern for the propagation of good values.

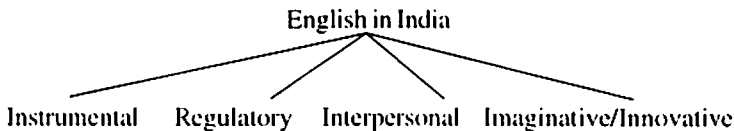
Value education helps us to preserve the good aspect of our culture and encourages us to question, explore and understand our values, attitudes and beliefs. It also broadens our outlook in understanding people with different value systems. Proper education fulfills the meaning of our life. In tradition oriented societies, ethics or moral code of conduct is an accepted way of life. All societies have some standards of ethical conduct. It is necessary that the young learners of a nation become aware of their social and cultural values. For instance, teachers in the western Indian state of Maharashtra gathered in the city of Pune in May 2000, to learn about the new system which emphasizes Indian culture and Indian usage in the teaching of English. Instead of "Mary had a little lamb", students in Maharashtra will be learning about "Mira", whose white cat follows her to school one day. Old Macdonald becomes a turbaned village elder, and his farm is actually a herd of cattle owned in common. And the children's poem "Rain, rain, go away", usually recited to lift spirits on a gloomy wet day in Britain or America, is now a poetic plea for a downpour where drought strikes often.

### **E.L.T.**

Discussing the relevance inherent in the teaching of English literature to foreign learners, Mukherjee (1982:35) asserts that English literature student gets so accustomed to reading books that relate to another society and another culture with very little exposure to literature that relates to his own world that gradually the verbal world begins to seem more real than the extensional world. This might obscure the means through which a student might relate to his own environment and his own culture. Hence, there should be an awareness of the main function of English in the national context. One might consider different functions depending upon its use -geographically, linguistically and culturally.



In countries like India, the aim of ELT is instrumental and not integrative. Here, English is not taught as a vehicle to introduce British or American culture but as a means of access to education, technology and global communication. In the context of the non-native population, English will be taught mostly by non-native speakers to communicate mainly with non-native speakers. In the teaching of literature, if the learner's motivation is integrative, then the aim is to identify with the members of the other linguistic cultural group. Hence the learner should be willing to take on very subtle aspects of their language or even their style of speech. On the other hand, the instrumental approach is basically utilitarian. A language then is acquired as a linguistic tool, not as an instrument of cultural integration. Terms such as Library Language, Auxiliary language, Link Language, English for Special Purposes are essentially utilitarian concepts in which language is seen as a restricted code for a specific goal. In the Indian context, English is widely used by different sections for different purposes.



With this end as aim the teaching of English should be revamped in India as follows:

1. Interactive relationship with English as well as other regional languages should be fostered. What is required is a long term strategy for cultivating the assimilative capacity by adapting, and transferring which should culminate in the development of English as the library language and the regional language becomes the medium of use in all domains of life.
2. ELT should be reorganized against the backdrop of the multiplicity of languages in India. It should be grounded in comparative framework within which English studies can provide a sustained production of

systematic knowledge about Indian literature. Linguistic diversity in multilingual developing nations is not only inherently valuable but also creatively functional in relation to the cultural complexity characteristic of multilingual ethos. A good step towards this will be to develop a mutually enriching relationship among all Indian languages. Each language must develop its own model depending on its own reality, expressive vitality, the needs, the aspirations and the world-view of its own community and its interactive relationship with English as well as other Indian languages. It is only by submitting the teaching of English to a more crucial and comparatist discipline of historical and cultural studies and by connecting the knowledge of that literature with literatures of our own that we can begin to break that colonial grind to liberate the teacher of English from a colonially determined subordinate and parasitic existence.

3. Using more of the literature written by native authors may help to ensure that the content is acceptable to the student and relevant to his experience. The novels of R.K.Narayan would be much more readily comprehensible to Indian students than those of Sir Walter Scott or Charles Dickens. This trend is clearly seen in the formulation of the current syllabus in various universities. In the Madras University, the General English Course for the Second year undergraduates has a textbook entitled *World's Great Speeches*. This includes a number of speeches by eminent Indian leaders and thinkers. It includes speeches by Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahathma Gandhi, Dr.Radhakrishan, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subash Chandra Bose and Indra Gandhi. These speeches introduce the young Indian learners to the cultural heritage and ethos of our country. They give an insight into their minds, their vision of life and the real spirit that motivated them to rise above the common and lift human civilization to great heights. Such a collection dovetails cultural values to the teaching of English. Further a number of creative writers have started writing in English which has come to be known as the Indian Writing in English. These often find their way into the English syllabus in Indian universities. There seems to be an acceptance of Indian English literature as one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others. It is now claimed that Indian writing represents a new form of Indian culture. It has become assimilated and is today a dynamic element of the culture.



4. A place must be found in the college curriculum for the study of Indian literature in English translation or of Indian English literature. In a multilingual nation like India translation brings different Indian languages close to each other. If India has to retain its specificity and integrity, all languages must develop as the cultural expression of people speaking the language. The interest of the Indian translators is to explore the ways in which the English language can be stretched to contain "authentic Indian expressions". In view of the Indian tradition of multiculturalism and multilingualism, translation has become an important instrument for negotiating social tensions, language conflicts and social transitions and also for understanding the remarkable unity underlying them.

It is necessary to evolve alternative materials, methods and modes of testing in the area of English studies. Though Macaulay branded the Indian systems of medicine as 'false', there has been a growing interest in Ayurveda, Nature Cure and Siddha and Yoga systems as alternatives to the allopathic system of medicine. Similarly in the field of English teaching, alternate materials in tune with the changing realities and postcolonial objects have to be evolved. The colonial style conventional prose and poetry anthologies are to be replaced with a non-conventional approach which should look into the classroom and beyond the text book. Ideally speaking only skills and abilities are to be specified at the school/college level. At present a number of Communicative English courses are offered throughout the country.

However, change may be slow paced because a whole generation of old timers running the institutions may feel more secure with the established patterns. It is time for those to realize that the application of old, stereotyped procedures to existing syllabuses is not likely to lead to meaningful or beneficial solutions if only because older procedures have been suspended by procedures which relate directly to present-day needs. 'It is the widespread use of English which makes it an international language. This does not mean, however, that soon everyone will be speaking English, wearing jeans and dancing to a disco beat. The spread of English is not a homogenizing factor which causes cultural differences to disappear'(Smith 1983). Therefore the model must be chosen on pragmatic bases keeping in view local conditions and needs. Both Bhatia (1975) and Strevens (1978) aver that the pedagogical model selected to teach English in a country must reflect local or regional cultures and at the same time be mutually intelligible with all other neutral and international forms of English.

In a country like India, apart from purely scholastic reason the need for English is interlingual. This need can be very easily addressed by the institutionalized native variety. However acceptance to this variety, as outlined by Franz Fanon, has gone through various stages:

1. Non-recognition of the local variety and conscious identification with native speakers of English. Known as the Brown Sahibs, the supporters of this group identified with the White Sahibs in manners, speech and attitude. At this stage there was an imitative model which was elitist and was associated with the colonizer.
2. This was followed by a period of diffusion of bilingualism. The local model was still low in attitudinal scale though it was widely used. The British variety which was held as the norm was unrealistic and unavailable. Though in performance typical Indian English is used, to be dubbed as the user of Indian English is an insult.
3. Non-Native variety was slowly being accepted as the norm.
4. In the present final stage of recognition there is an awareness of linguistic realism and attitudinal identification with the Non-native variety. This is seen in the effort to contextualize the teaching materials in the native, socio-lingual milieu. It is at this point of development that one recognizes the national uses of English and considers the international uses only marginally.

## **INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE**

The world has become a global village. English as the international language is emerging as an instrument of globalization and not as an imperial agent. Increase in the knowledge of English can contribute directly to greater understanding among nations. It is also increasingly believed that it can also be the means of assuring access to man's knowledge about himself, about his political experiments, his philosophies and his human needs. Quirk (1985) rightly points out that the world needs an international auxiliary language and argues that the only viable possibility is a) to adopt or b) to adapt an existing (national) language. The use of English as an international language and the teaching of English in different parts of the world should not end up in linguistic pluralism and cultural colonialism but must result in better human relationships and international harmony. Without losing their identities, nations want harmony; without losing their valuable values and cultural heritage, people want better relationships. They want to be Indians/ Indonesians/ Arabs/ Japanese/

Taiwanese and at the same time international. Hence, what is to be addressed is - how far can English as an international language promote trans-national and trans-cultural education?

Preserving the indigenous identity and accepting the need for globalization is one way of coping with the changes taking place in the world. This is in line with the Indian concept rendered in Sanskrit - Vasudeva Kudumbam\_ (The whole Universe is a family). The same concept rendered by Mahatma Gandhi "I do not want my house to be walled in all the sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet anyway".

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, English should function as an agent of change and produce a class of citizens who are natives in blood and colour but post-colonial in opinion, taste and attitude. In India there is no identity other than the multilingual and multicultural. Hence it is likely that English will continue to be the necessary Other. Perceiving it as the Other will help us to steer clear of the confusion regarding its use and function and contribute to the growth of indigenous languages and to globalization at large. The great task of social reconstruction in the East is to renew and adapt the old and essential national impulses and habits to the emerging complex and enlarged needs. This calls for a renewal rather than a break with the past. A good strategy consists in adopting a holistic perspective towards ELT and develops native languages with firm commitment and a sense of the future.

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