

India and Bharata: A Study of the English Language

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Abstract

This paper examines interconnection between the English language and historical, social and linguistic backgrounds of India. It focuses on the socioeconomic divide as well as some other barriers responsible for confining English language to the elite and upper middle class and leaving the major population of the country away from proper English education. It also sheds light on the growth of urban-rural divide where the English speakers living in urban areas seek and enjoy lucrative jobs and businesses, and the poor people living in rural areas are unable to get English education and feel helpless. Comparison between private English schools and government schools has been made in terms of quality of education particularly in Hindi speaking states. It brings to light what India and Bharata connote to the people in context of English language teaching.

Keywords: Bharata, India, social-division, discrimination, enslavement, English language teaching

1. Introduction

India is called by a number of names in different ancient texts as Jambudvipa, Nabhivarsa, Aryavarta, Meluha, Bharata, Bharatvarsh, Hindustan, Hind, etc. (Roychoudhury, 2020; Patel, 2017; Dhananjayan, 2014; Kutty, 2023; Mark, 2012). The name 'India' is not used in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and in any other ancient scriptures. It is of the late origin. Dhananjayan (2014) writes, "The invaders of Bharat who came up to the river Sindhu somehow managed to pronounce Sindhu as Hindu, and then Indus. And finally India is stuck on us for centuries now" (<https://www.thehindu.com>). Among all the names, India and Bharata (though officially spelled Bharat) are used in modern times. Each of these names signifies something different but implies the same land. The first part of *The Constitution* of India begins with the statement, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States." (2007, p. 2) This statement suggests a pluralistic approach as connected with one of the oldest concepts of India often used in discourse, "*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*" (The whole world is one family.). All the scriptures of India talk about the whole mankind, not about a single nation or religion. This philosophy of oneness is the hallmark of Indian culture and religion that makes the citizens proud. But equality and social justice have been missing everywhere that divided the nation into two perceptions that are India and Bharata. The word 'India' represents the rich, aristocratic and educated people who live in cities and speak English, whereas Bharata represents those who are kept away from good education, and other facilities that they deserve constitutionally and democratically but do not speak English. This gap has deepened steadily that raises many questions about inequality and "ever-increasing disintegration" in a democratic nation (Macdonell, 1914, p. 230). Jishnu Das and Tristan Zajonc (2008) in their Policy Research Working Paper "India Shining and Bharat Drowning" bring to light increasing inequality in India (Open Knowledge Repository). Debroy and Bhandari (2007) find that India has recently seen a dramatic increase in inequality. Parthapratim Pal and Jayati Ghosh (2007) too present broader pictures of inequality in India. Bharti et al. (2024) in their Working Paper call the present decade a "Billionaire Raj" and argue that "the integrity of various key institutions in India appears to have been compromised in recent years" and inequality is worse than that of the British Colonial Raj (p. 34). No strong political will is observed to fill this gap. Instead recently intensified social division and religious hatred, including mob lynching, all for the purpose of reaping political fruits, have changed the identity of the country (Gupta, 2019; Daniyal, 2019; Saldanha, et al., 2018; CSSS Team, 2018; NDTV).

2. Historical Background

The geography of India made it “an invader’s paradise” (*Geographia*). “In about 1,500 BC the Aryans, a nomadic, pastoral people, migrated into India, perhaps from Persia. They gradually settled over northern India, sometimes conquering the existing inhabitants, and sometimes assimilating more peacefully” (*The National Archives*). Referring to Max Muller, Romila Thapar (2002) writes, “The Aryans” “had invaded in large numbers and subordinated the indigenous population of northern India in the second millennium BC. They had introduced the Indo-Aryan language” and divided the society into “separate castes” (p. 13). Though this theory has remained a matter of debate; but the theory of “common origin” of the Indo- European languages in the east, perhaps the north of the Black and Caspian seas, and migration, invasion, and similarity between several languages of this parent group in Asia and Europe validate the point. McIntosh in his book, *The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives* (2008), advances this theory:

The speakers of Indo-European languages came to be regarded as a single race, the Aryans, seen by many as culturally superior and, pervertedly, by the Nazis as a master race; and the wide distribution of the Indo-European languages brought to the fore theories of migration as the principal explanation for cultural change and development (p. 27).

F. T. Wood (1941) emphasises that the ancient “nomadic tribes” used the parent language, Indo-European, “about 3000-3500 B.C.” and gradually they travelled to different parts of Asia and Europe and got separated from their groups giving scope for formation of several “different dialects of the one original language” (p. 11). The Indo-European family of languages has the largest number of speakers and English is the only language of its parent group that is used in almost all countries either as a mother tongue, a second language, or a foreign language. As most of the families of languages originated in Asia, many researchers associate them with the oldest civilization (Indus Valley Civilization, which is considered to be one of the earliest ones of urban culture about 2500-1700 BCE). Ernst Horowitz in *A Short History of Indian Literature* (1907) writes that “Indo-European seems a happier expression than Indo-German, because Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, the languages of Iran and Erin, Teutonic and Slavonic, were distributed from India to Europe since prehistoric times” (p. 186).

In the introduction to the same book Prof. T. W. Rhys Davids writes that “we study the ancient literature of India, the work of men who were intellectually akin to ourselves” (xxi). The theory of Aryans does not stop here. There was a relationship between the Vedic Aryans and the Indus civilization. There is also an argument that “Indus civilization had possessed a non-Vedic culture, that its cities had been destroyed by the Vedic Aryans, but that Indus religion survived this destruction and underlay much of later Indian beliefs and practices” (McIntosh, 2008, p. 31).

After the Aryans, around 500 BC the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius cast their eyes to India to extend their empire eastward conquering “a number of principalities living to the south of the Hindukush mountains” to the Indus Valley (Lal, 2002, p. 120). They ruled the region for about 150 years but did not impact the Indian culture so much as compared to the Aryans.

The third invader was Alexander the Great (327 BC) who defeated the Persians and Porus (“the ruler of a kingdom between the Jhelum and the Chenab”) but he advanced only to the river Beas because of rebellion of his soldiers (326 BC). One of the reasons of the retreat of Alexander, as believed by the Greek writers, was due to “the fear inspired by the mighty empire of the Nandas which lay beyond the river” (Lal, 2002, p. 122). But the route followed by Alexander continued for the trade. Later Hun, Arab, Turk, Mongol, Mughal, Europeans, and British invaded India. Economic prosperity, political weakness, and social inequality were some of the reasons of foreign invasions. Amartya Sen (2006) succinctly writes, “India has a terrible record in social asymmetry, of which the caste system is only one reflection.” (p. 34)

The last two major invasions of Mughal and British are in the minds of every Indian as they are part of the curriculum even at the school level. It cannot be said that India lost everything. It gained too. Art and architecture of Mughals and education system of the British are some of the arguable examples. But what condition the people saw those days of enslavement that has not ended even today. We have travelled a long way from Bharata to India and to modern India but economically, culturally and linguistically people are still far away from basic needs in order to be counted with the mainstream society. Max Muller (1883) also points out about two Indias,

Let me therefore explain at once to my friends who may have lived in India for years, as civil servants, or officers, or missionaries, or merchants, ... that we are speaking of two very different Indias. I am thinking chiefly of India such as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago; they think of the India of to-day. And again, when thinking of the India of to-day, they

remember chiefly the India of Calcutta, Bombay, or Madras, the India of the towns. I look to the India of the village communities, the true India of the Indians. (p. 25)

3. English Language and Discrimination

Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, presents a clear picture of “State-Wise Percentage of Population Below Poverty Line by Social Groups, 2004- 05” and “Sector-wise detailed information” (<https://socialjustice.gov.in/common/76672>). Among all the states, Odisha has 46.4% BPL families (rural and urban combined) followed by Bihar 41.4%, Chhattisgarh 40.9%, Jharkhand, 40.3%, Uttarakhand 39.6%, Madhya Pradesh 38.3%, Uttar Pradesh 32.8%, and Maharashtra 30.7%. These states add significant population to the country. Other states have less than 30% BPL families as shown in the government data. Even after more than seven decades of freedom from the British rule, poverty peeps through a significant rural and urban population. The poverty trap is clearly visible in all quarters of the country and more in the above mentioned states. The reason behind it is lack of access to modern education. Lack of knowledge of and exposure to the English language major chunk of students is unable to get higher education and good jobs. They are unable to move to cities for higher studies and jobs, and if they move for jobs, they work as labourers. Discrimination and suppression at all levels have dug a deep gulf between the English speakers living in urban areas seeking and enjoying lucrative jobs and businesses and the poor people unable to get English education and feeling helpless. This is the result of discrimination in education system. It has become so deplorable that the students who are unable to speak English they get postgraduate degree and even PhD and apply for the job of peons (*The Economic Times*, 2018; NDTV, 2022; *Dainik Bhaskar*).

Most of the students living in villages go to government schools where the environment of teaching and learning English is not up to the mark. The quality of teaching is very poor. The School Education Quality Index (SEI) provided by the Niti Aayog and its interpretation need attention of all stake holders (Nandini, 2019). Teaching does not take place effectively and regularly. Even the English teachers are unable to teach English in a way that the time demands. There is no tough recruitment process for teachers. There is no proper in-service training imparted to them. There are no infrastructure, teaching aids and required facilities available in government schools. Teachers are often deputed on a number of administrative assignments. On the other hand, students of private English schools and colleges of urban areas enjoy all facilities. Most of the popular private schools and colleges have good infrastructure and modern teaching aids and language laboratories. Besides getting a better environment of teaching and learning and required amenities, extracurricular activities also shape their future. But the students of government schools in rural areas lack most of these opportunities to shape their future. Interestingly, in competitive examinations both students sit together and consequently, the students of government schools fall behind them. If some of them try to overcome their barriers, due to lack of English language skills they face many challenges. There are no strong efforts made by the governments to bridge these gaps.

The majority of people living in villages “are unable to read the label of the medicine” that they have to give to their children. They are unable to read “the menu at a local restaurant or even the warning signs of the road”. They “are unable to comprehend the government document” (Aula, *Forbes*, 6 Nov. 2014). The reality is that “the elite prefer English. This discrimination has become so systemic that the elite and middle classes send their children to English private schools while the vast poor send theirs to the government schools of their mother tongue.” (Aula) This is the difference between India of the rich and Bharata of the poor.

The picture of teaching English language at government schools “looks bleak and rather unfortunate” (Kathuria, *Edu4Sure*). The lower middle class wants to follow the footprints of the upper middle class but being unable to afford high fees at popular English schools they send their children to small private English schools in rural areas where the condition of teaching and learning English is very pitiable.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the status of English in India in context of urban-rural divide along with historical, social and linguistic backgrounds of this land. It has evidently argued inequality in the present “Billionaire Raj” and implications of ineffective English language teaching at government schools in rural areas and absence of quality education. It has explored the plight of students studying at the government schools particularly in Hindi speaking states where they lack well-trained English teachers, required infrastructure, teaching aids, and modern amenities that have made them helpless and distanced them from the mainstream education system that is available for the students belonging to rich families living in urban areas. The paper has tried to substantiate what India and Bharata mean to the people in context of English language teaching.

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