

### **Chapter III**

## **HISTORY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN POST-COLONIAL INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEST BENGAL**

As India got her long awaited freedom from the shackle of the British on 15<sup>th</sup> August in 1947, voices rose from different corners of the country for the abolition of English from the administration and new educational system. Even some eminent personalities voiced against the retention of English in the new set-up of education in India. They reasoned that students waste much time and energy to learn this foreign language, which, in fact, hinders their overall progress in studies. They strongly argued that young learners can express themselves in their mother tongue quite easily. On the contrary, many scientists and the then renowned educationists of our country advocated that it would be utterly unwise to uproot English from the new educational system. This would, no-doubt, deprive Indians of many advantages in different walks of national, social, cultural and political life so long enjoyed by them by the study of English. In fact, during the colonial rule the intimate attachment to and use of the English language had made it an integral part of our educational system and national life as well. In consequence, ultimately it was not possible to abolish English from the newly constructed educational system.

### **3.1. Several Education Commissions and Committees**

Several commissions and committees were formed to examine the advantages and disadvantages of education and the chief object of all these commissions was to decide the place of English in the then educational system. In addition, all these commissions and committees laid emphasis and importance on the study of mother tongue as the medium of instruction and the study of English as a subject. It is noteworthy that recommendations made by different commissions in free India were surprisingly found similar to

those made in dependent India.

The following table (Table-3.1) shows the committees, commissions, and events worth mentioning for having a significant role in the re-orientation of English in India.

**CHRONOLOGICAL REPORT OF DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL  
COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS**

The University Education Commission or The Radhakrishnan Commission	1948-1949
Primary Education Committee	1951
The Mudaliar Commission or The Secondary Education Commission	1952-1953
The Official Language Commission	1956
All India Language Conference	1958
Chief Ministers' Conference & National Integration Conference	1961
The Official Language Act	1963
The Kothari Commission or The Education Commission	1964-1966
National Policy on Education	1968

The Gokak Committee Report	1969-1971
National Education Policy and Programme of Action (NEP and POA)	1986
Curriculum Development Centre (UGC)	1987-89
Acharya Ramamurti Commission	1990

Table- 3.1.

### **3.1.1. The University Education Commission or The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49)**

In the year 1948, after independence of India, The University Education Commission was appointed. The great educationist and philosopher Dr. Sarbapally Radhakrishnan was the Chairman of this Commission comprising some other distinguished intellectuals and educationalists. Dr. Radhakrishnan emphasized on idealistic education. The goal was set on developing wisdom and values, training of human souls in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue.

The University Education Commission Report delineated the bright aspects of English education. In the report, the Commission advocated that it was English language, which appeared to be a chief factor in developing unity among the Indians and aroused the sense and sentiment of nationalism. Absence of English was likely to reverse the old separation and disintegration among the mass. Besides, English being the international language was

unavoidable in order to meet the practical situations i.e. to communicate and keeping contact with the outside world. Modern science, civilization and philosophy could not be thought of without English. The Commission firmly discarded the idea of maximum use of English and noted:

English cannot continue to occupy the place of state language as in the past. Use of English as such divides the people into two nations, the few who govern and the many who are governed, the one unable to talk the language of other, and mutually uncomprehending. This is negation of democracy.

(Report: 276)

However, at the same time the commission recommended:

English, however, must continue to be studied. It is a language, which is rich in literature-humanistic, scientific, and technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge. Unable to have access to this knowledge, our standards of scholarship would fast deteriorate and our participation in the world movements of thought would become negligible. Its effects would be disastrous for our practical life, for living nations must move with the times and must respond quickly to the challenge of their surroundings. English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world, and we will act unwisely if we, allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark 284 curtain of ignorance. Our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to a university or to a

vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge, and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with facility and understanding works of English authors. We must take into account our Yugadharma.

(Report: 283-84)

In relation to the medium of instruction for higher education, the Commission suggested the replacement of English as early as possible by some other Indian language. It also recommended that at higher secondary and university level the learners must be familiar with the three languages – the regional language, the federal language and English. English was recommended to be studied in high schools and in the universities in order to keep in touch with the living stream of ever-growing knowledge.

The University Education Commission Report laid emphasis on the fact that during prolonged reign of the British, English had inserted its root so deep in our national life that it could not be thrown off over night. The Commission thus disapproved English but admitted its supremacy in the national life of Indians.

### **3.1.2. Primary Education Committee (1951)**

Next to the University Education Commission was appointed the Primary Education Committee in 1951. The then Chief Minister of Bombay Mr. B.G. Kher was its Chairman. The committee dealt with administrative activities and establishment of new schools and was aloof from academic aspects.

### **3.1.2. The Mudaliar Commission or The Secondary Education**

#### **Commission (1952-53)**

The Union Government appointed the Secondary Education Commission in 1952 under the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar who was the Vice-Chancellor of Madras University at that period. After a through scrutiny of the previous University Education Commission Report and the prevailing education system, the report of Commission was submitted in 1953. The chief focus of the Commission was laid on the school level education i.e. secondary education. The principal recommendations of the Commission were as follows:

- a) Higher Secondary Education system with diversified courses
- b) Emphasis on character building education aiming at the development of social and moral values
- c) Emphasis on vocational education
- d) Improvement of examination and evaluation system
- e) Improvement of teaching staff and teaching methods
- f) Development of personality
- g) Establishment of rural schools
- h) Emphasis on physical education in order to build sound body to have sound mind

As regards the study of languages, the Commission recommended (1953) the following three-language formula:

- a) The mother tongue or the regional language should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the Secondary School stage, subject to the provision that special facilities should be made available for linguistic

minorities on the lines suggested by the Central Advisory Board of Education.

b) During the Middle School stage, every child should be taught at least two languages. English and Hindi should be introduced at the end of the Junior Basic stage, subject to the principle that no two languages should be introduced in the same year. At the High and Higher Secondary stage, at least two languages should be studied, one of which being the mother tongue or the regional language. Medium of instruction should be the mother tongue or the regional language.

c) At the end of the middle school stage, pupils should be allowed to choose to continue the study of Hindi or English at the high or higher secondary level, depending on the nature of the course they wish to pursue.

The report of the Mudaliar Commission, of course, was subjected to criticism by some of the then educationists and they exhibited some defects in it.

#### **3.1.4. Acharya Narendra Dev Committee Report (1953)**

Under the Chairmanship of Acharya Narendra Dev, the Vice-Chancellor of Benaras Hindu University, a committee was appointed in 1953 in order to assess the status and progress of Higher Secondary Education in Uttar Pradesh.

After a thorough scrutiny and study, the committee placed a report to Govt. in May 1953. The report displayed the drawbacks of the Secondary scheme of education and chiefly made suggestions regarding syllabus, textbooks, examinations, attendance of students, technical education, aptitude and guidance of students, working days and hours, religious and moral education, discipline and good manners etc.

### 3.1.5. The Official Language Commission (1956)

The Report of Official Language Commission was submitted in 1956 and accepted in 1958. In the Report, English was recommended to be replaced by Hindi after 1965 and English would remain as a supplementary subject. Based on the report, a Presidential Order was issued in 1960 for the implementation of the recommendations. According to the order:

- a) Hindi would be admitted as an alternative to the Union Public Service Commission's recruitment
- b) The language of the Supreme Court would be the language of all the High Courts in the states.

As soon as this order was issued, it was subjected to bitter public criticism and subsequently voice rose against it in the Non-Hindi areas. Under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari an All India Language Conference was arranged and representative of different provinces took part in it. They argued Hindi was almost a foreign language to the non-Hindi speaking people and hence, English could not be replaced by Hindi and English would continue as the union language so long its requirement would be felt. In this connection, it may be mentioned that on 2 September 1956 a meeting of the State Education Ministers was held in New Delhi. In the meeting Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, (qtd. in Patel, ELTJ: 1958) expressed his view on the importance of English:

English is being taught to more and more people in the countries like the Soviet Union and China. We are naturally driven to it principally we know it a great deal, we have people who can teach it, and because it is the most important language in the

world today.

Thus, it became obvious that the English language penetrated its root into the system of education deeper and deeper and craze for learning English got prominent day by day. Political de-colonization could not bring in the de-colonization of mind. Humayun Kabir (1956:116), the Minister in charge of Education, wrote, "It may appear a little surprising but it is nevertheless a fact that there has been an increase in the demand for the study of English since independence."

In this connection, it should be mentioned that anti-Hindi riots in the southern parts of India headed by several regional and national leaders in 1965. Concurrently "Angrezi Hatao" movement started in some parts India. Thus, the contradiction took shape of a sentimental issue and was likely to cause riots at any moment. So Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Honourable Prime Minister of India, intervened and declared that paying honour to Pandit Nehru's vow he liked English to be continued so long Indian people would like it to be used. In this regard, his assurances were as follows:

- a) Every province in the country would enjoy the liberty to conduct its business using English or any other regional language of its choice.
- b) A state could communicate with another state in English.
- c) All the non-Hindi states could correspond with the central government in English.
- d) Even the central government could carry on business in using English language.
- e) English would continue to be used for the conduct of Indian Civil Service Examination.

Henceforth, English was continued as the official, associate language.

### **3.1.6. The Education Commission or the Kothari Commission (1964-66)**

The Education Commission was appointed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1964 under the leadership of Professor D.S. Kothari and hence it was named Kothari Commission. Different fields of education like education and national integration, education and life, education and productivity, education, and secularism were examined by this commission. The commission chiefly recommended on 10+2+3 pattern of education. Keeping an eye to the complicated educational situation in India the commission discussed on the language problem. It is mention worthy that the commission did not suggest any one language as the medium of instruction for the whole country. The report (Govt. of India, Report: 14) said:

It has been sometimes argued that there should be a single medium of education at the university stage – English for the time being, to be ultimately substituted by Hindi – on the grounds that it would promote mobility of teachers and students from one part of the country to another, provide for easy communication between academic men and administrators, further intellectual co-operation among the universities and help in other ways in developing a corporate intellectual life in the country. We are inclined to think, on the balance of considerations, that this solution is not feasible.

Concerning education at the primary stage The Education Commission (Report: 195) reported:

At the primary stage, language learning can be a big burden on a child if it is imposed; and such imposition can vitiate his entire attitude towards his studies and may generate hostility to the school itself. This would indeed be a tragedy at a time when our chief objective is to win the masses over to education.

The commission (Report: 636) firmly held that,

The teaching of English should ordinarily not begin earlier than class V after adequate command has been acquired over the mother tongue. The introduction of the study of English earlier than class V is educationally unsound!

The commission recommended the use and development of regional languages at the higher levels too. At the same time, continuation of English as the medium of instruction was recommended for all-India institutions and Hindi was suggested to be developed side by side. The report also recommended continuation of English as a library language.

### **3.1.7. National Policy on Education (1968)**

Role and study of languages remained a debatable subject in the country. Therefore, the Government of India formed a committee with the Members of the Parliament in 1967 in order to design a statement on the national policy of education. One of the chief objectives of the committee was to frame a uniform educational structure like the 10+2+3 pattern throughout the country. In fact, the recommendations of the Kothari Commission were followed and the National Policy was aimed to cater to the needs of the State Governments regarding educational guidance as well as preparing and implementing educational plans. The first statement drafted by

the committee was submitted in 1968 and it is known as National Policy on Education or NPE.

The Policy statement actually reiterated what was recommended in different earlier reports. On the development of languages, the recommendations of the National Policy of Education are remarkable.

About the use of regional language, it was noted that the development of Indian language and literature was essential for the development in the arena of education and culture. Without it standard of education would not improve, knowledge would not spread to the people in general and the distance between the wise and the general mass would not diminish. Regional language should be used as the medium of education not only at the primary and secondary level but also at the university stage.

The Three Language Formula was especially emphasized. The National Education Policy stated (Govt. of India, NPE: 1968):

At the secondary stage, the State Governments should adopt, and vigorously implement the three-language formula, which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the Non-Hindi speaking States.

Hindi was paid due importance. In the words of the National Policy of Education (NPE: 1968):

Every effort should be made to promote the development of Hindi. In developing Hindi as the link language, due care should be taken to ensure that it will serve, as provided for in Article 351

of the Constitution, as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

Regarding the study of international languages, the document said (NPE: 1968):

Special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English and other international languages. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened.

### **3.1.8. The Gokak Committee Report (1969-71)**

The Study Group on English was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Youth Services, Government of India in March in the year of 1969. The Chairman of the Group was the then Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University and former Director of Central Institute of English Professor V. K. Gokak. Therefore, the committee was known as Gokak Committee. The committee was entrusted with job of preparing a working paper outlining a practical programme of action for the improvement of the teaching of English at both school and university level. The report placed by the said committee in 1971 was the most comprehensive and detailed one. The report comprised a general survey of the position of teaching English, teaching methods, teaching materials and courses of study and furnished valuable suggestions courses of study, spoken English etc. that would cater to the needs of students of different standards at different stages.

### 3.1.9. National Policy on Education (1986)

National Policy on Education and Programme of Action (POA) was adopted by the Parliament of India in 1986 and undoubtedly, it was another remarkable step in the history of English education in India. It was formulated with an objective of promoting the unique socio-cultural identity of India and meeting the challenges of the times. According to the NPE (1986:2), as noted in the 'Introductory':

The country has reached a stage in its economic and technical development when a major effort must be made to derive the maximum benefit from the assets already created and to ensure that the fruits of change reach all sections. Education is the highway to that goal.

With this aim in view, the Government of India announced in January 1985 that a new Education Policy would be formulated for the country. A comprehensive appraisal of the existing educational scene was made followed by a countrywide debate. The views and suggestions received from different quarters were carefully studied.

In this connection, the Policy (1986:3) mentioned:

Perhaps the most notable development has been the acceptance of a common structure of education throughout the Country and the introduction of the 10+2+3 system by most States. In the school curricula, in addition to laying down a common scheme of studies for boys and girls, science and mathematics were incorporated as compulsory subjects and work experience assigned a place of importance.

The Policy (NPE, 1986:27), of course, merely reiterates the National Policy on Education of 1968 and noted:

The Education Policy of 1968 had examined the question of the development of languages in great detail; its essential provisions can hardly be improved upon and are as relevant today as before. The implementation of this part of the 1968 policy has, however, been uneven. The Policy should be implemented more energetically and purposefully.

Programme of Action (POA) recommended the establishment of schools, colleges and universities in rural areas of the country with the purpose of idealizing and promoting excellence among the learners.

### **3.1.10. Curriculum Development Centre (1989)**

The report of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) constituted by the University Grant Commission in 1987 is mention worthy about the place of English education in the postcolonial era. The recommendations of CDC were submitted in 1989. Some directions were given to the CDCs that were formed in different subjects at different universities. In the Introduction to the Report of the CDC (UGC: 1989) it is said:

Greater emphasis should be placed on the student's motivation to learn than on the teacher's ability to lecture. Further, the curriculum should be so designed that it would make the education more meaningful to the needs and aspirations of its beneficiaries as well as to make it socially relevant.

Concerning English education the Curriculum Development Centre Report (UGC: 1989) says:

If education was viewed as an instrument of human resource development then, it was argued, why an M.A. Programme in English literature (and that too, chiefly British literature) only.

It was felt that we should introduce a multiplicity of M.A. courses in English such as M.A. in British Literature, M.A. in American Literature, M.A. in Comparative Literature, M.A. in Creative Writing in English, M.A. in Modern English Language, M.A. in English Language Teaching and so on, as several universities in Britain and America currently do.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that no commission or committee has investigated the actual demand or preference of students regarding their courses, the content of courses, methods of learning, procedure of evaluation and so on. 'Learner centred teaching' is a very popular theoretical term but in practice, the situation goes to the opposite direction.

### **3.1.11. Acharya Ramamurti Commission (1990)**

The Government of India constituted a committee to review the 1986 National Policy on Education and Programme of Action and make necessary recommendations. The Committee was set up under the headship of Acharya Ramamurti in May 1990 and after a thorough observation the committee submitted its report in December 1990. Acharya Ramamurti being the Chairman of the committee, it was named Acharya Ramamurti Commission.

As regards the learning of English and Hindi the Commission laid emphasis not on the years of study but on the hours of study and degree of success. On the burning question of the language of instruction for higher

studies Acharya Ramamurti Commission flatly recommended for publication of university level books in Indian Languages and scope for writing in Indian regional languages in different examinations.

### **3.1.12. Modified National Policy on Education (1992)**

The Parliament of India adopted National Education Policy in May, 1986 and Programme of Action was adopted in August, 1986. The Policy, of course, was implemented and continued for about three years by the Janata Governments under the leadership of Shri V.P. Singh and Shri Chandra Sekhar. Then a Review Committee known as Acharya Ramamurti Commission was appointed in May 1990. The Report of this Commission was submitted on December 1990 and it was laid before the Central Advisory Board of Education on March 1991. A Committee under the chair of Shri Janardan Reddy, the then Chief Minister and Education Minister of Andhra Pradesh, was constituted to review the National Education Policy and the recommendations of the Ramamurti Commission. The Committee, however, made some modifications in the NPE 1986 a final report with the modifications was placed in the Parliament in May 1992.

### **3.2. Brief Note on the History of English Education in West Bengal**

After independence a Committee headed by the then Education Minister of West Bengal Shri Harendranath Roy Chowdhury was appointed by the Government of West Bengal in the year 1949 for the 'Reorganisation of School Education'. The Commission also comprised a good number of renowned educationists.

### 3.2.1. English at the primary stage

A universal and free primary education was aimed at by the Committee. The Committee recommended that English should not be taught in the primary classes (Class I-V). Accordingly, the teaching of English was absolutely ruled out from the curriculum of Primary Education in West Bengal from the year 1950 to 1963. In this connection, it should be mentioned that the teaching of English was continued as usual in most of the provinces of India. In fact, in West Bengal, an attempt was made to abolish English from the primary stage but a large section of people opposed the view and voiced against such decision. Ultimately, owing to the pressure of parents English was again allowed to be taught from class III of primary schools in 1964. In fact, in those days the status of a primary school was measured by the standard of English in a school. The teaching of English as compulsory second language from class III continued until 1983.

It is noteworthy that in some of the states in India English was eliminated from the primary stage when the report of The Kothari Commission came out. In West Bengal too, English was again abolished from the primary level in 1984 and the study of English started from class VI at the secondary level. The West Bengal Government eliminated English from the primary level and made adjustment of the load of syllabus by increasing load at the secondary level. The aim of teaching English at the secondary level was to acquire just working knowledge of the language.

The decision, of course, was subjected to bitter public criticism with the allegation that it was attempt of reducing the due importance of English in the field of education without taking into consideration its importance in the

social and economic sphere. Mass movement throughout the state with the demand of reintroduction of English education from the primary stage was seen. In spite of such criticism and mass grievance, education without English at the primary stage went on for fourteen years.

Against this backdrop, the Ashok Mitra Commission was instituted in 1992 to consider the issue and recommended that the teaching of English at the primary stage in Government and non-Government schools should commence from class V at the secondary stage. The State Government, of course, did not admit the recommendation. Then a one-man committee known as Pabitra Sarkar Committee was appointed in 1998 to settle the class at which the study of English should commence. The Pabitra Sarkar Committee suggested that English should be introduced in class II in the primary schools and accordingly the Government of West Bengal again changed their decision and introduced English at the second level i.e. class II of primary education in 1999. But at the advent of the globalization of world trade and commerce, the West Bengal Government pondered over the issue again and introduced English as compulsory second language in class I from 2004.

### **3.2.2. English at the secondary and higher secondary stage**

English education at the secondary and higher schools underwent hindrances and subsequent alterations concerning school courses, teaching methods and policy implementations.

Since 1994, the Structural Approach was pursued for teaching English as second language in the secondary schools in west Bengal. The very name 'Structural Approach' itself hints at the fundamental base of this method.

Obviously, the Approach aimed at teaching sentence structures through repeated practice. The Structural Approach emphasised the acquisition of selected and graded structures of the language. But owing to some limitations of the Approach it did not continue for a long period.

In the year 1984, the Structural Approach was replaced by a new approach known as The Structural-Functional Approach or The Functional Communicative Approach. This new Approach took the linguistic materials from the previous Structural Approach and arranged those in accordance with their functions in natural situations. A series of text books 'Learning English' was designed according to the new approach for different classes i.e. for different levels. The essential characteristics of The Functional Communicative Approach are as follows:

- a) The Approach was chiefly based on the principle 'minimum teaching, maximum learning'. Learners' self-activity was highly emphasized.
- b) The Approach was learner centered. The focus was laid on the learners' self-activities, and group works.
- c) The role of a teacher in a classroom was to supervise and guide the students when necessary.
- d) The learners were active while the teachers helped them in a passive way.
- e) Due importance was laid on the learners' communicative skill.

Of course, there are contradictions whether the Approach is effective in the present scenario of West Bengal. However, with some modifications in syllabus for different classes The Functional Communicative Approach is continuing in this state at present.

Till 2006 West Bengal Higher Secondary Council followed an integrated curriculum for class XI and XII and the final Higher Secondary examination was conducted out of 200 (two hundred) marks (Paper I- 100, Paper II- 100 marks).

However, the syllabus was revised with effect from 2005-2006. In the preface to the revised Curriculum and Syllabus, The West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education mentioned, “Higher Secondary Education acts as a bridge between the general educations provided at the secondary stage and more specialized education and professional training later at higher levels.”

With this view, West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education designed the new syllabus of English as second language for Higher Secondary level. In the revised syllabus class, XI and class XII got separate entity and the final Higher Secondary is now conducted out of 100 marks. The question pattern and distribution of marks are given in Appendix IV.