



Globalized Contexts, Language policy, Education commissions of India & National Education Policy 2020: A Perspective

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Abstract

Higher education system exhibits a direct and dynamic relationship with social well being and economic development of a country. It is a direct relationship, because the positive or negative changes in the Higher education system can cause corresponding positive or negative impact on social and economical development of a society. This relationship is dynamic, because the changes in Higher education system can bring the changes in socio-economic conditions and the changes in socio –economic situations can also have their impact on the higher education system. Higher education system of India has been reviewed by many education commissions in post and pre-independent history of modern India. The paper tries to analyze those recommendations of Educations commissions on the language policy and its socio economic relevance towards creating and shaping India as a knowledge society and to analyze the language policy in National education policy 2020 in relation to globalization challenges and aspirations.

Key words:

Language policy, Higher education, knowledge society, Education commissions

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Introduction

Higher education system exhibits a direct and dynamic relationship with social well being and economic development of a country. It is a direct relationship, because the positive or negative changes in the Higher education system can cause corresponding positive or negative impact on social and economical development of a society. This relationship is dynamic, because the changes in higher education system can bring the changes in socio-economic conditions and the changes in socio –economic situations can also have their impact on the higher education system. Higher education system of India has been reviewed by education commissions in post and pre-independent history of modern India. Access, creation, and dissemination of knowledge which in turn shall improve the socio-economic wellbeing of the country have remained the major vision of those commissions except NEP 2020. Along with the knowledge creation, to transform India into knowledge superpower, NEP 2020 also envisages to inculcate deep rooted Indian pride and belongingness through Education. Shall these objectives potentially make higher education a cultural

project and create impediments for the knowledge creation vision? Or it is conducive for the knowledge creation? . The paper tries to analyze those recommendations of Education commissions on the language policy and its socio economic relevance towards creating and shaping India as a knowledge society and to analyze the language policy in National education policy 2020 in relation to globalization challenges and aspirations.

Modern Higher Education system in India

With the establishment of three universities in erstwhile Calcutta, Bombay and Madras by the colonial British government for the dissemination of modern western knowledge to Indian subjects, university based Higher education system came into existence in India. By Adopting English as the only medium of instruction, oriental knowledge systems represented through Sanskrit and Arabic languages were vehemently discarded.

“We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.”
(Minutes of Macaulay 1835)

Looking back at Macaulay’s language policy today, it may sound to be fallacious, illogical, ill-intended and even ridiculous, but, ironically, those predictions turned out to be true. English remains to be the most coveted and the most popular medium of education in urban India. The hegemony of English language continues today globally and is directly linked with the forces of globalization and polarization of powers – both military and monetary. As far as India is concerned, English happens to be the passport for securing gainful employment in both private and public sector (Maheshwari, 2012). The key insight that Macaulay had, which eventually enabled the spread of English in India, was to create a market demand for the language in governance, in business and in sciences, which acted as the pull factor for the language spread than push factors like stipends, scholarships etc., which were offered for Sanskrit and Arabic students of the time. Though the Macaulay acted in favor of British colonial interests, looking back from a globalization perspective, it becomes clearer that, it was an appropriate choice, because the British Empire was the major globalizing force at the time. On the other side such an imperial, forceful and unilateral economic integration with the British Empire has worsened the socio economic situation of the Indian subjects considerably.

Post independence India Higher education system has grown tremendously in size and stands third in the world after USA and China. In 1947, the number of higher education institutions stood at 20 universities, 500 colleges enrolling about 2,30,000 students. It has increased to 659 Universities and 33023 colleges up to December 2011-12(Sheikh Ahmad 2017,p.40).Currently as reported by the All India Survey of Higher Education 2020-21, there are a total of 1,113 Universities, 43,796 Colleges and 11,296 Stand Alone Institutions in India (AISHE Report 2020-21, p.i).

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) also shows similar trends. GER in higher education has been gradually increasing. From 24.9% in 2018-19, increased to 25.6% in 2019-20. As of 2020-21, GER in higher education (for the age group 18-23) is 27.3%. As on 2020-21, about 4.1 crore students were enrolled in higher education (2.1crore male, and 2 crore female). However, there are disparities in GER across states. States with relatively high GER include Tamil Nadu (45.4%),Uttarakhand (42.8%), and Manipur (36.9%).

States with relatively low GER include Jharkhand (12.4%), Nagaland (15.4%), and Chhattisgarh (14.1%). Enrolment rates also vary across social groups. Enrolment rates for people belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are lower than the all-India GER. However, GER has been increasing for all groups over time (PRS legislative Research 2023,p.7). In a comparison with 3012 universities in China and 4000 universities of USA, and many of them are considered under the Top 100 universities, Indian Higher education system needs faster growth both in quantity and quality.

Language policy in modern India

In 1835 Macaulay's challenge was to identify a language as a medium of instruction in Indian education institutions and the options were also limited to either Sanskrit or Arabic. Both these language were used for instructions: Sanskrit mostly in gurukuls and ashrams and Arabic in maktabas and madrasas. Generally these institutions inclined to teach the texts related to religious theology and philosophy along with classical literature of the time. Macaulay decides for a language which does not have any sacred status, to teach natural sciences and medicine. 120 years later in post independent India, the challenge was to identify a language which can replace English from its pan- Indian status by a language of Indian origin. The English language has been seen as a colonial imposition by the freedom fighters. Post independent India was more worried about national integration than international integration or globalization. Interestingly instead of choosing between or accepting both classical languages like Sanskrit or Arabic, Indian parliament accepts a yet to develop vernacular medium Khadiboli/devhali, renamed as Hindi as official language. Better developed vernacular mediums like Kanauji, Avadi, Magahi, Sindhi with scripts and literature and others like Haryanvi, Maithili and Braj without scripts were easily convinced and committed themselves to accept Hindi as new mother tongue for the sake of national integration. The new born Hindi received its protective clothes and blankets from Sanskrit as Devnagiri scripts. As the infant Hindi opened its eyes and looked around and enjoyed the curious but supportive eyes of super elite brother English and other regional big brothers like Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam etc.. the parliament passed the resolution that till the Hindi grows and reach its adult hood let the elite brother English shall continue to be associate official language. Both English and Hindi shared the equal status and continued to be official languages of India (The Official Language Act 1963). Amidst the debates of national integration and unity, the impact of this decision has set a new direction to the definition of a "Nation". It has not only widened the narrow western definition of nationhood based on one language, one culture, one religion towards "Vasudaiva kudumbakam" or Unity in diversity "as coined by Pandit Nehru as the national integration ideal for India. It is an integration of different cultures, languages and religions and live- together like one family. Once again from globalization point of view, this decision was very practical.

Hindi, English or any other regional language as Indian Lingua Franca

Does a polyglot nation need a compulsory national language? The answer is an emphatic no, because a forceful imposition will be always rejected specially in case of languages. Lenin's quote is worth repeating: "We of course are in favour of every inhabitant of Russia having the opportunity to learn the great Russian language. What we do not want is the element of coercion." In case of Indian context, for Pandit Nehru English would continue to be an associate or alternate language as long as people required it; and a decision on the final replacement of English by Hindi would be left not to the Hindi knowing people but to the non- Hindi knowing people.

"We cannot fix a date and say that from that date English ceases and Hindi comes in. It has to be gradual process. In this gradual transformation, dates have very little significance except to examine the position from time to time to see whether we are going along the right lines". (Nehru, Parliament Speech 1959)

Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who later founded the Jan Sangh (Baratiya Janata Party), said on the subject during the last days of the debate in the Indian Constituent Assembly on this subject.

"If it is claimed by any one that by passing an article in the Constitution of India one language is going to be accepted by all by a process of coercion, I say, Sir, that that will not be possible to achieve. Unity in diversity is India's keynote and must be achieved by a process of understanding and consent." (Syama Prasad Mukherjee, 1949, p. 46)

All those parliament debates and discussions regarding national language made one thing clear that the unilateral imposition of a language as lingua franca is the least wanted in a polyglot nation like India. As a result three language formula was recommended by Kothari Commission and the same has implemented through National Education Policy 1969.

Why Hindi could not develop into a lingua franca and replace English in Indian context has two major dimensions. Strength of English as a pan-indian and ever growing international language for business, science and technology on the one side and inherent weakness of Hindi, arises from its growth trajectory from vernacular medium to a regional, national and international language on the other side. C D Deshmukh has pointed out: "There are three levels at which any language may conveniently be considered in various aspects, viz, the colloquial, the literary and the technical" (Deshmukh 1972, p. 61).. Even at the level of colloquial, Khadiboli was spoken mainly around Delhi region, and others in the Hindi speaking belt continued to speak, Braj, Maithili, Haryanvi etc., The unopposed acceptance of Hindi by non Khadiboli speakers made them strongly to believe that they are Hindi speakers while they continue to speak their vernacular linguistic media. As the Khadiboli did not have any scripts, the chances to have a written literature were almost zero. The poetic and other narratives from Braj, Magahi, Kanauji, Maithili, Bhojpuri and others constituted the literary heritage of Hindi. Specifically in Haryana, Haryanvi continues to be spoken at most of the villages and towns though the Mathrbashadivas (Mothertongue day) in Haryana is celebrated for Hindi. Beyond that Hindi media, Bollywood films allowed the Hindi to grow as a regional language. In relation to science and technology Hindi shares the similar fate of most of other Indian regional languages.

English provides a ready access to both national and international business, science and technology, and became the language of aspirations of average educated Indian, whereas a regional language provides more of an emotional belongingness and regional identity thereby do not function as a language of aspirations. English of course almost guarantee the socio-economic aspirations of an Indian speaker both nationally and internationally. One might not even wonder, if one say that even medical science like Ayurveda whose knowledge base is from Sanskrit and regional languages, in the process of becoming a modern science, it has to come out of the clout of Sanskrit, regional languages and Hindi and has to full heartedly embrace English for the same. Therefore in all the three dimensions of a language English weighs currently better than Hindi in technologically connected, globalized world. The most suitable way or may be the only way for Hindi or any language to that extent to become a national or international lingua franca, solely depends how fast the Hindi speaking belt of north India becomes socially and economically developed to the standards of a developed country. If that happens the Hindi will by default attract many learners across the globe like, German, French, Korean, Japanese and position itself among mostly sought after international language. Currently the situation is not that favourable in relation to the socio-economic development of the aforesaid region. Hindi speaking states like Bihar, Madhyapradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarpradesh is considered to be lagging in socio-economic development even in Indian standards. Economic textbooks call the socio-economic backwardness of these states as *Bimaru* states of India. As a result, there is a general consensus among all the education commissions of India to continue the English as the medium in Higher

education though it might sound to be different in degrees among different commissions. Instead limiting only to English, the choice of language of instruction was given to the jurisdiction of the states in primary and secondary level and in higher education choice was given to the students to decide which language they would like to learn and give exams.

The 'Radhakrishnan Commission'(1949) on university education while acknowledging the harm done to generations of Indians by the predominant position assigned to English as the state language and sole medium of instruction, expressed itself against its abolition for the following reasons :

"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 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 curtain or ignorance".(Ministry of Education 1951, p.325)

It is anticipating all such problems that the Education Commission (1964-66) recommended the retention of English in higher education, and underscored its vital role as a "library language":

"No student should be considered as qualified for a degree, in particular, a Master's degree, unless he has acquired a reasonable proficiency in English (or some other library language). The implications of this are twofold: all teachers in higher education should be essentially bilingual in the sense that they would be able to teach in the regional language and in English, and all students (and, particularly postgraduate students) should be able to follow lectures and use reading materials in the regional language, as well as in English (Ministry of Education 1971, p. 528).

National Knowledge Commission 2009 (NKC) Vs National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

National knowledge Commission 2005-2009 clearly focuses on English language as language of aspiration. "In the current scenario an understanding and command over the English language is a most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. NKC therefore recommends the teaching of the English as language shall be introduced along with the first language, to the child starting from class 1".(NKC Report of the nation p.13) . The vision of NKC strongly focus on access to knowledge, creation of knowledge and application of knowledge, to make India a knowledge society.(NKC Report to the nation, p.11).

The vision statement of NEP 2020 is as follows:

This National Education Policy 2020 envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to

develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.(National Education Policy 2020,p.6)

Conclusion

Transforming India into a knowledge society and knowledge power is a common goal for both of these commissions. To achieve that goal National Knowledge Commission (NKC,2009), strongly recommends English as the optimal medium and the English instruction is seen as essential. Though NEP 2020, does not reject this claim, on the other hand NEP 2020 takes education in general and higher education in particular as cultural project. Instead of transforming oneself into critical democratic citizen of India, in Gramscii's terms public intellectuals, the one who becomes the voice for voiceless, through the access, creation, and dissemination of knowledge, NEP 2020 envisages to create a bonding with the existing culture and to respect the same. The possibility of critically examining and gradually refining the existing culture is not seen as essential. In that sense, Higher education institutions shall eternally perpetuate the existing culture and shall not allow the students to critically assess one's own cultural limitations and the attempt to free oneself from those limitations are almost unwelcomed, and discouraged. Thus NEP 2020 contradict itself among its objectives. It sounds like that a community want to be a knowledge society but do not want that to happen. It is more curious to see that the third objective that NEP 2020, envisages also on the cultural project. Here the aim to inculcate deep rooted Indian pride through the Higher education. Through the knowledge normally one becomes humble and recognizes the limitations of one's own also of the society one belongs. Interestingly the means to reach these objectives of deep rooted Indian pride NEP 2020 develops its language policy. In the B A programmes, Both English and Modern Indian languages are given as Ability Enhancement Courses; Classical languages like Sanskrit, Pali are also included as per the context of the higher education institution. In general it makes an impression that higher education policy in NEP 2020 is more inward looking than global oriented.

What we need at the moment a globally oriented Higher education policy that transforms our students to study, work across the globe and contribute to knowledge creation and wealth creation across the globe. Indian in colour but global in outlook. We need a policy that focuses on knowledge creation and dissemination than pride creation and inward looking. Pawan Aggarwal (2006) argues, "Higher education system in India so far has developed an inward looking approach, concerned primarily to meet the domestic demand for higher education. With the integration of the country with the rest of the world and growing trade, investment and mobility of people there is a need for outward looking approaches in higher education. The Indian higher education should not only be able to meet the domestic demand but also international demand for qualified and trained manpower"(Aggarwal pawan 2006,p.140). On this context, it becomes timely to recall the Altbach's (1993) comment on Indian education policy making. "When all is said, language policy in education in India has been more a matter of political bargain and choice than of academic requirements and practical considerations. For the policy makers, the context of policy making will remain for decades to come as a dilemma between (1) the rational choices with a development objective in long term perspective on the one hand, and (2) an emotional choice with a narrow political objective in short term perspective on the other. Meanwhile, education drifts along,(Philip G Altbach, 1993,p.113).

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