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The English Language as an Instrument of Dalit Emancipation

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Abstract— *This Research paper aims at investigating the English language as an instrument for the Dalit Emancipation and liberation being a passport to Dalit's liberation from ignorance and exploitation. English is regarded as a deity by some Dalits in India since it opened the door of Education for them. It is an instrument to strengthen National Integrity in the Indian Subcontinent. Dr Ambedkar called English as milk of a lioness. One, who drinks it, can roar. In Banka Dalits installed village (UP) of Lakhimpur Kheri district a statue of Goddess English in a single-story temple. As India is facing a unique and historic opportunity of having 700 million people of working age population by 2022, we must capitalise on this demographic shift and empower our youth with the right kind of skills. The world economy will witness a skilled workforce shortage to the extent of 56 million by 2020. Dalits can play a significant role by learning the English language and employability skills to provide global human capital to the world economy.*

Keywords— ***Emancipation, English, Dalit, instrument, Language, Liberation.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the time immemorial, the Dalits in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Burma, Bangladesh, and Srilanka have been suffering considerably due to their birth in the lower strata of society. In the name of Hindu gods and goddesses, they are victims of injustice and social distancing, and most of them are much far from the mainstream of society, being socially, economically, and educationally backwards. It is the mother English that can emancipate the downtrodden in India. The professional world of today is witnessing knowledge revolution, IT revolution, and common lingua franca for the first time in the history of humankind. Very soon, the knowledge-based economy will be facing a skilled worker shortage in the coming decades. India, Pakistan, Burma, Srilanka, and Bangladesh might have the working-age population in surplus and this trend will continue until 2040. This historic opportunity provides India's young population to grab the chance and contribute to the global economy. This demographic dividend can be enjoyed if our young population is trained with professional skills.

Considering the new challenges emerging out of globalisation and unprecedented advancements of science and technology this paper is an effort to envision emancipation of Dalits through the learning of the English language. Due to demographic transition, there is an urgent need of equipping India is working-age population especially Dalits with proficiency in English and essential skills. The English language has no scriptural injunctions like Sanskrit so Dalits can assert their position by learning this language. Nevertheless, the accessibility of English education to Dalits is a big problem. Due to poverty, Dalits cannot afford English medium education of public schools. A. Raman (2012) from Charles Stuart University, Australia, writes in the category of correspondence of the internationally reputed multi-disciplinary journal *Current Science*, about the standard of Indian higher education. In his observation he mentions, Indian learners have no basic knowledge, they lack computational skills, lack reasoning and logical thinking, have no sign of creativity and originality. Finally, he blames them for speaking and writing intolerable English. During the period of British rule, English was used for administration and was spoken among elite Indians. Even after independence, this language continues to rule the life of educated Indians. It is monopolised by government, media, commerce, and industry and corporate. This symbol of modernity and empowerment has international significance. It is one of the major languages of the world, which has influenced the course of history in the largest number of countries and continents. It can rightly be labelled as the 'Numero-Uno' or the number one language of the modern world. It has borrowed words liberally from other languages. It is the only language in which people from the north, east, west, and south can easily communicate with each other. The

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greater one's command over English the greater one's job prospects are. Only the privileged class has the opportunity to learn this language, poor sections of society cannot afford English education in India. What Prof. Anil Jaydeo Ganvir points out is pertinent:

> Goddess English is a family deity of liberation from poverty, ignorance, and oppression for the Dalits of Banka village in Northern Uttar Pradesh, near Lakhinpur Kheri. The Downtrodden believe that there is nothing possible for them without English, She is the goddess of Hope for equity. There is the temple of Mother English at Banka. All Dalits are the votaries of her, and they worship her every day. Besides Chandrabhan Prasad, a Dalit leader and Ambedkerite thinker says that, after religion, language is the strongest divisive force in the Indian sub-continent. There has been Linguistic Nationalism, and even all the provinces in India are based on languages, as they are Linguistic Provinces. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar once said that there should be one language and one unified culture in India like America, and we should break off all domestic narrow walls. All basic certain cultures based on water to the growing tree of casteism in India. Eliminating all native languages forever, the English language should become the national language of unified India. We must eliminate all native languages. When the downtrodden try to speak the chaste language, they are beaten, laughed, and mocked by Caste Hindus. Indian languages are oppressive and divisive to get rid of casteism, Chandrabhan Prasad has a project of native languages elimination for the future generation, and all Indian languages would be gathered to a museum and the future generation will consider how foolish we were to have so many languages. The English langue is the milk of the tigress and if the Dalit have it, they will roar against injustice imposed upon them in this Indian society. (161)

It is possible to believe that the roots of casteism, social discrimination and social backwardness lies in Indian languages, and all these are a testing ground for social discrimination and casteism. There has been an internal threat to national integration in Burma, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka, Nepal, and India.

II. PRACTICAL WAY OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO ALL DALITS

According to Kancha Ilaiah a political scientist, writer and Dalit activist only ten per cent Dalit children's English education will be sufficient for the time being. He does not ask for reservations but for English education and liberal arts, which will produce ideologues like Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Nehru. In postmodern times, English has been recognised as a powerful weapon to control and define reality. It has opened new realms of ideas and European enlightenment. This common language unites America, a nation of immigrants. It will help Dalits assimilate into their own country. We have an edge over our tough competitor China in the globalisation competition because of our knowledge of English. The government's decision to introduce English from class one in all government schools will help Dalits in getting English education but Dalit children will not be able to compete with convent educated upper caste children. There should be no gap between private English medium schools and government-run schools in terms of teaching strategies and infrastructure. S. Anand (1999) states "One has to acknowledge the fact that (western/colonial) 'modernity' that comes with English is something that is not inaccessible to the untouchable-the Dalits and Bahujans whose marginalisation has been justified over centuries by dominant varieties of Hinduism". English is a democratic language, which can be learnt by anyone, unlike devbhahsa Sanskrit that was kept away from Shudras. English can help a Dalit escape his marginalised status as advised by Om Prakash Valmiki's father in 'Jonathan' a Dalit autobiography. Example of Dr Ambedkar can be taken in this context. As a highly qualified Dalit politician, he framed the Indian constitution and served as Law Minister in independent India. He incorporated western concepts of equality, liberty, and fraternity in the preamble of the constitution.

In Eash Kumar Gangania's words, a teacher and activist, "Had Ambedkar not learnt English, he would not have gone abroad, and had he not gone abroad he would not have become Babasaheb for us". Ganglia gave a surprising message at the end of his speech on foundation laying ceremony for the temple of Goddess English, "if you learn English, you too can scale the heights Babasaheb did." Nevertheless, despite having no restrictions to learn and use this language Dalits are not comfortable in asserting themselves in English. The Dalits who write in English such as Narendra Jadhav, Kancha Ilaiah, P. Shivakami and Meena Kandasami are very few and can be counted on fingers. Most of the Dalit literature is written in regional languages. English translations of these works are more

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popular and accessible than original ones. Meena Kandasami a Chennai based fiction writer, poet, translator and activist is the youngest Dalit who writes in English. 'Though a borrowed language, she says, English earned her recognition'. Therefore, the language of imperial power is now a language of emancipation. In Coimbatore, the second-largest city in Tamil Nadu, a massive English training project is underway. A seven-month-old program designed by the British Council under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a flagship program to put every child in school is training teachers in government-funded schools to teach communicative English in a better way. The real beneficiaries, says Alison Barrett, head of the council's Project English for state partnerships, are children from marginalised sections who attend such schools. "English is a way of accessing socio-economic advancement. English in this country means a language of power and if you don't give them English they cannot access power structures and cause changes in socio-economic policies," says Barrett. Prof. Anil Ganvir aptly suggests:

> The English language should be exposed to all rural Dalits so that they may turn fluent faster in the English Language, and the learning is part of habit formation. All Dalits must use English as their first acquired language. They must speak English a lot. Practice makes one perfect. They should read Ambedkerite literature only in English and learn to employ razor-sharp words used therein as Reading makes a man perfect, and every Dalit must leaf through all the volumes, penned down by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. (161)

All Dalits in the Indian subcontinent might derive an immense inspiration from Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar who is their ideal persona.

III. MOTHER ENGLISH IN DALIT WORLD

English is the mother of the downtrodden in the Indian subcontinent. What Prof. Anil Ganvir points out is pertinent:

> Hinduism closed the door of education to all Indian Dalits and they had no right to take education, But when Macaulay implemented a new English Education system in 1835, first of all, Dalits were given a right to education in India. English liberate them from the bondage of doing menial jobs, and they became liable to earn their bread and butter without depending on the superior caste folk. The English language is the mother of all Dalits. (161)

It is this that, before the introduction of the English Education Act of 1835, schools were conducted in temples and Pathshalas where the Brahmin Priest used to teach in Sanskrit Vedic Maths, Holy Scriptures and other sacred entities. The Shudras were unallowed to enter the place and thus education was out of their ken, because, according to the scriptural injunctions. Even the place was polluted with the touch and shadows of the Untouchables in India, nevertheless, schools for the Muslims were conducted in Madrasas and Maktabs where Dalits were not allowed to go, and therefore the English Education Act of 1835 rendered that right to the Downtrodden of India.

The world of Dalits is a sizeable section of our society, which is still having blood-chilling incidents of cruelty and oppression. Most of them are living below the poverty line even after sixty-six years of political freedom and progress in almost all the spheres of life. The linguistic imbalance between Dalits and other castes is due to poverty and varnashram dharma of Hindus, according to Prof. Marcus Wood of Sussex University (TOI 2010). The British Empire was responsible for the standardisation of English, which paved the way for its emergence as a global language. Now the English language does not belong to the English anymore. Dr Ambedkar rightly compared this language to the milk of a lioness. It helps a person to assert himself. Nevertheless, the most important problem is the teaching of English in government schools where most of the Dalits study. Teacher centric approach and Dalit unfriendly pedagogy produce students who depend on guidebooks to qualify exams. Dalits realise their lack of communication skills when they join college and meet convent educated upper-class students who are well versed in English. Linguistic scholars like Probable Dasgupta (1993) rationalises their faulty or bad English as a form of resistance to the subversion of colonial modernity by the' Bharat' that is not 'India'. He finds political, intellectual, and philosophical meaning in this resistance. In Dasgupta's words "English is still a ticket, but to a job market than to a cultural elite. One learns English in India based on instrumental rather than integrative motivation. This leads to a relatively shallow knowledge of the language. For today's Indians, English is a technical means to personal ends. It is held at arm's length from the mainsprings of their personalities…" He also draws attention towards India based teacher-centric approach of the system.

IV. DR AMBEDKAR'S IDEOLOGY AND DALIT EMANCIPATION

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, committed to the socio-political transformation of the Indian society towards

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greater social inclusion and more egalitarian social practice, is one of the highest personalities of India. His clarion call of Educate, Agitate and Organise led Dalits in the right direction. He gave importance to modern education for the betterment of Dalits. By agitating, he did not mean physical violence of any kind. For him, agitation meant a mental revolution, which will help in being organised. An educated and agitated mind will help in organising a common mission of Dalit solidarity. This order of educating, agitate and organise must be followed by Dalits so that they can achieve outcomes which are beneficial not only for Dalits but also for the society as a whole. Ambedkar (1937) writes, "Hindu society seems to me to require a moral regeneration, which it is dangerous to postpone. Besides, they can determine and control this moral regeneration only those who have undergone an intellectual regeneration and those who are honest enough to have the courage of their convictions born of intellectual emancipation." His great efforts led the country towards modernity in general and democracy of the Indian society in particular. He correctly understood the importance of English as a vital and powerful instrument to free the Dalits from the century-old miseries, sufferings, insults, stigma inflicted on them by the caste system. He fought for Dalits' human rights and got the reservation in educational institutions. Untouchability was abolished due to his untiring efforts. His commandments will raise the educational standards so that they may know their conditions and aspire to raise themselves to the levels of the high caste Hindus and thus be in a position to use political power as a means to that end. When it was being debated as to what should be the national language of India after independence Ambedkar was the only national leader who vociferously batted for English while others were against it.

V. ENGLISH GODDESS

It is essential to consider the reason why the down-trodden in Indian subcontinent worship English. What Prof. Anil Ganvir notes is appropriate:

> Indian Outcastes put faith in English. Dalits are building a temple in the honour of the language, as they believe that it can liberate them from the oppression of the caste system. The legacies that India had inherited from the British Raj are: English and Western Education. Six years on Pro-English campaigns from the two-million strong Dalits from the community of the Oppressed classes of the traditional religions have gone a step further and are erecting a black granite temple dedicated to the Goddess English hailing her as a deity of liberation from poverty, ignorance and Oppression.' She is modelled on the statue of liberty, holding aloft a pen and Indian Constitution and her pedestal is not the usual lotus, but a computer monitor' said an English teacher, Amarchand Jaubar, supervising the temple's construction. (162)

A unique kind of temple dedicated to the goddess English has been erected in Banka village of Lakhim Kheri district (UP), to promote the English language among Dalits. Dalit thinker and author Chandrabhan Prasad declared 25th October as English Day in a ceremony in New Delhi coinciding with the birthday of Lord Macaulay, the British administrator who introduced English education in the country. According to Prasad "Not only is the English language spoken everywhere in the world, respected by the people of all the nations and easily learnt, but the people of the English nations are impartial and unbiased—and to whichever nation they go, they do not indulge in the base acts of casteism or communalism". Statue of Liberty has been the inspiration in designing the statue of goddess English. The idol made of bronze holds a pen in her right hand is dressed well and sports a huge hat— it is a symbol of defiance that she is rejecting the old traditional dress code. In her left hand, she holds the constitution of India, which gave Dalits equal rights. She stands at the top of a computer that means Dalits will use English to rise the ladder and become free forever. She will become the symbol of a renaissance. It is argued that English not only opens job opportunities but also helps ease the caste and power constraints that come with speaking regional languages. English can be the second mother tongue the way it has become the second mother tongue of African Americans who have mastered it so well that the creation of spontaneous poetry is their art form. Financed by well-wishers this temple is emblematic of education and English language. It will be used for Dalits' rituals like birth and wedding ceremonies.

VI. DALITS' ACCESS TO EDUCATION

According to Babasaheb Ambedkar Education is an instrument to cease the poverty and the wretched plight of the Dalit. The poor educational status of Dalits is due to both social and physical factors. The extreme poverty in

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which most Dalits live is another reason why the dropout rate of Dalit children is so high. Many parents simply cannot afford to send their children to school and are dependent on their workforce to ensure the survival of the family. Undoubtedly, discrimination against Dalits in the education system is a widespread problem in caste-affected countries. Alienation, social exclusion, and physical abuse transcend all levels of education from primary to university education. Legislation and measures that have been taken are often inadequately implemented. The forms of structural discrimination, alienation, and abuse that Dalit children face in schools are so stigmatising that they are often forced to drop out of school. A UNICEF report from 2006 points to the fact that the quality of education is so low that children mechanically go through five years of primary education and emerge barely literate. Dalit children face discriminatory attitudes from fellow students and the community as a whole in particular from higher caste members who perceive education for Dalits as a waste and a threat. This is linked to a perception among some higher caste people that educated Dalits pose a threat to village hierarchies and power relations, and that Dalits are generally incapable of being educated. National and local governments should take all necessary measures to ensure equal access to free quality education from primary to a higher level for Dalit students.

VII. CONCLUSION

English is as an instrument of social emancipation had been recognised by social and religious reformers even before Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, in a poem entitled Mother English by Savitribai Fule who the legendry Nineteenth-century educationist, she aptly says:

I such dismal time of ours!

Come Mother English, this is your hour

Throw off the Yoke of redundant belief

Break open the door

Walkout in relief! (qtd. in Ganvir 162)

The lines of the poem will reverberate across the continent: “Learn to read and write, Oh dear one, / opportune times, Mother English has come. Savitribai Fule who was Mahatma Fule’s wife propounded the concept of Mother English for the Oppressed class.

The names such as Babasaheb Ambedkar, Kancha Ilaiah, and Meena Kandasamy are widely known to the people of the Indian sub-continent and to the whole world too, due to their works in English. Education and knowledge of English helped them to climb the ladder of success and fame. Likewise, Dalits can use language as a tool of liberation. The erection of the statue of Goddess English indicates the embracing of English by Dalits, which can free them from the clutches of poverty, illiteracy, thus providing them with a flotilla of opportunities. Dalits who had been bereft of the privileges of the upper-class Hindus can use English as a medium of upliftment from a state of dereliction to a state of prosperity. Hence, Dalits can act as assets to the nation who had long been living in detestable conditions sans hope.

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