
GANDHIJI'S VIEWS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I regard the English language as an open window for peeping into western thought and science'. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi known as the 'Mahatma' or the 'Great Soul' was a most unusual public figure, who came to be associated with the practice of non-violent civil resistance. He was a profound and original thinker who showed a symbiotic relationship between thought and action. Mahatma Gandhi was firmly against English, the language of the colonizer. Gandhi found the English language as an element of obstruction for the development of India towards accomplishing its goal. He felt that a rich country in heritage and traditional culture like India needs the English in national affairs. He considered that English education emasculated the English-educated Indian by putting a severe strain upon the Indians' nervous energy, and has made them imitators. Gandhi reasoned that if English were to be India's national language, it needs to be taught as a compulsory subject in the schools. Gandhiji firmly opined that Language, as a medium of expression, holds much importance in the communication process in our day to day life. It is a phenomenon that absorbs and assimilates words from different cultures, regions and people and thus plays an important role especially in a multicultural society. Thus Gandhi believed that English language has both merits and demerits for the Indians in its use. Gandhi firmly held that language needs to be imbued with spirit of Indians were to become free from foreign rule. English, in his view, could function as the language of international communication but certainly was a blot on the Indian character. Hence the researcher attempts to make a study of Gandhiji's views on a global language like English and the role it played in the well-being of Indians.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Great Soul', original thinker, English Language, colonizer, obstruction, English education, spirit of Indians, foreign rule, international communication

Introduction: Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I regard the English language as an open window for peeping into western thought and science'. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi known as the 'Mahatma' or the 'Great Soul' was a most unusual public figure, who came to be associated with the practice of non-violent civil resistance. He was a profound and original thinker who showed a symbiotic relationship between thought and action. Mahatma Gandhi was firmly against English, the language of the colonizer. Gandhi found the English language as an element of obstruction for the development of India towards accomplishing its goal. He felt that a rich country in heritage and traditional culture like India needs the English in national affairs. He considered that English education emasculated the English-educated Indian by putting a severe strain upon the Indians' nervous energy, and has made them imitators. Gandhi reasoned that if English were to be India's national language, it needs to be taught as a compulsory subject in the schools. Gandhiji firmly opined that Language, as a medium of expression, holds much importance in the communication process in our day to day life. It is a phenomenon that absorbs and assimilates words from different cultures, regions and people and thus plays an important role especially in a multicultural society. Thus Gandhi believed that English language has both merits and demerits for the Indians in its use. Gandhi firmly held that language needs to be imbued with spirit of Indians were to become free from foreign rule. English, in his view, could function as the language of international communication but certainly was a blot on the Indian character.

Gandhi believed that: 'Our language is the reflection of ourselves, and if you tell me that our languages are too poor to express the best thought, then I say that the sooner we are wiped out of existence, the better for us'.

Language as a medium of expression holds prominence in the communication process according to Gandhi. It is a phenomenon that absorbs and assimilates the words from different cultures, regions and people and thus plays an important role especially in a multicultural society. India has been a land of diverse cultures since centuries. The advent of different races and communities from time to time has had a major impact on its culture, enriching it in literature, language and arts and has been an accommodating ground for all. In course of time, several discordant views and opinions have arisen regarding the issue of language and linguistic issues that played a key role, with many of them finding place in the official language status list.

Gandhi's views on the issue of language and his suggestions to overcome the problems based on linguistic matters is to be considered because he rightly acknowledged it as a problem and denied giving it secondary importance. As Peter Brock says, 'Gandhi was primarily a man of action, but he never underestimated the power of words'. Most of his adult life, Gandhi was intensely interested in the development of India's literary languages. These tongues, which had sunk with the onset of the nineteenth century, had then been forced to retreat before the advance of the English language sponsored by India's foreign rulers' (p.129). Gandhi firmly held that language needs to be imbued with spirit if we were to become free from foreign rule. To put it in his words, 'we cannot get the freedom we want through foreign language; for the simple reason that we are not able to use it effectively'.

Gandhi reasoned that if English were to be India's national language, it needs to be taught as a compulsory subject in the schools. Pondering over the issue of English as the national language, Gandhi firmly held that it cannot occupy the status of a national language for the following reasons. The requirements of a national language, as put forward by Gandhi, are as follows: It should be easy to learn for government officials, It should be capable of serving as a medium of religious, economic and political intercourse throughout India, It should be easy to learn for the whole of the country, In choosing this language, considerations of temporary or passing interest should not count.

English cannot and does not match up with the above aspects; Gandhi opined that it is unfit to become the national language of India. Moreover, the religious nuances cannot be taught in any language other than one's own mother-tongue.

English, as Gandhi felt, is not an easy language to learn for the masses who are more conversant and familiar with their mother-tongue. Though superficially English language did find some place in the communication process, Gandhi felt that this status was purely temporary, devoid of long-term usage possibility. Gandhi disapproved the very idea of making English the national language as a 'sign of weakness and betrays ignorance'. He further elaborated on the 'shameful spectacle of congressmen insisting on speaking in English and compelling others to do likewise'. Gandhi found the English language as an element obstructing the progress of India towards her goal, as some of its educated people have thoroughly come under the spell of the language. I am not anti-English, I am not anti-British, I am not anti-any Government, but I am anti-untruth, anti-humbug and anti-injustice.

Those who have studied English will have to teach morality to their progeny through mother tongue and to teach them another Indian language; but when they have grown up, they may learn English, the ultimate aim being that we should not need it. It is my considered opinion that English education in the manner it has been given emasculated the English-educated Indian, it has put a severe strain upon the Indian students' nervous energy, and has made of us imitators.

The process of displacing the vernacular has been one of the saddest chapters in the British connection. Rammohan Roy would have been a greater reformer, and Lokamanya Tilak would have been a greater scholar, if they had not to start with the handicap of having to think in English and transmit their thoughts chiefly in English. Their effect their own people, marvellous as it was, would have been greater if they had been brought up under a less unnatural system. No doubt they both gained from their knowledge of the rich treasures of English literature. But these should have been accessible to them

through their own vernaculars. No country can become a nation by producing a race of imitators. Think of what would have happened to the English if they had not an authorized version of the Bible.

Gandhi did not believe that Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Guru Govindsing, Shivaji, and Pratap were greater men than Rammohan Rai and Tilak. All were equally great in their own way. But judged by the results, the effect of Rammohan and Tilak on the masses is not so permanent or far reaching as that of the others more fortunately born. They were giants, and would have been greater in achieving results. So the knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty, and developing accuracy of thought. It should be remembered that there has been only one system of education before the country for the past fifty years, and only one medium of expression forced on the country. Gandhi did not want his house to be walled in on all sides and windows to be stuffed; he wanted the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible

Gandhi did not want men and women of India to spend less time in the study of English than they are doing now, but his object was not to deprive them of the pleasure which they are getting from it. But he also held that the same pleasure can be obtained at less cost and trouble if people followed a more natural method. The world is full of many a gem of priceless beauty; but then these gems are not all of English setting. Other languages can well boast of productions of similar excellence; all these should be made available for our common people and that can only be done if our own learned men will undertake to translate them for us in our own languages.

Mahatma Gandhi was the first person in India's freedom struggle who raised the question of a language for a nation striving for independence from Colonial rule. Mahatma Gandhi was never opposed to the English education. He himself is a learned lawyer and used to speak fluent English. He believed that educating students with English language is necessary to compete in international level but he also supported the idea of encouraging regional languages too. His concern was to promote Indian culture and unity and he appealed for the same in various conferences and meetings. He could foresee the problems arising out of language issues, views and opinions among different people and earnestly endeavoured to sort them out in the best possible way. Language is one of the major issues among the contemporary problems faced by India. In today's education system, where English language has been playing a prominent role, the vernaculars have been relegated to the background. Gandhi had warned the nation regarding its ills, which is a major hindrance towards achieving 'Swaraj'. Gandhi's views, serve as warning not to perpetuate the problems further and find out harmonious ways to solving them. In conclusion we can say that Gandhi stressed on learning the vernacular languages, so that people can engage in rendering great service to their nation by respecting their mother-tongue. He disapproved of the people learning a foreign language, English at a very young age, or even using the English language learning as a passport for procuring jobs. He advised them to search for the virtuous traits in their own mother-tongue, and not to enslave themselves to the culture and language of a foreign land.

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