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***“Teaching Language to the Tribal and Rural
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Teaching English in Gadchiroli District: Challenges and remedies

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Abstract-

English has been widely accepted as the language of communication by the whole world. The parents are crazy to send their wards in English medium schools. However, in Gadchiroli district, the students do not get enough facilities to acquire quality education, particularly of English. Social circumstances, political indifference towards education sector, lack of motivation, violence, Naxalism, apathetic attitude of teachers in Government schools, poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness about the importance of English are some of the factors that affect education system in the district. Relating the syllabus to the actual life situations and providing maximum scope to the students to use English as a means of communication are the necessary steps that can be taken to popularise it among the students of Gadchiroli district.

English plays a very vital role in the development of human personality. It opens new windows towards the world of knowledge and makes us capable to face the challenges of life in modern technological world. The fact that it has been widely accepted as the language of communication and business throughout the globe is evident enough to convey its importance in everyone's life. The craze for English in the whole world is such that every book of knowledge published in any language today is instantly translated into it so that it may come to the notice of public widely. Knowing English one can deal with any problem and difficulty anywhere. It has been considered to be the sign of civilized life. In fact, every parent today knows the importance of English in life. Accordingly, they admit their wards in the English medium schools although many of them can't afford it.

However, in Gadchiroli district, we come across a different situation. Here the students do not get enough facilities during their school days. So, most of them are compelled to remain satisfied with education they get in vernacular languages in Zilla Parishad and Ashram schools where they do not get proper training to acquire English language. There are various reasons for this sorry state of affairs in this district:

Poverty is the most crucial factor behind high rate of illiteracy in the district. Many of the parents have to fight hard to earn their livelihood. They can neither think of the quality education for their children nor can afford it. They even go to the extent of keeping their children at home as watch guards, elder ones taking care of younger ones.

Apart from this, Naxalism has crippled the progress of the district to a great extent. Naxalites appose almost every social welfare scheme of the government including educational development schemes. They have spread terror among the backward communities living in the remote parts of the district. Every government scheme of development is obstructed by them. The result is even after seventy years of independence many of the villages in the district are in darkness, disconnected from the district headquarters.

One of the most crucial factors affecting the quality of school education in the district is the apathetic attitude of government paid teachers in Marathi medium schools. A large number of these teachers do not feel emotionally connected to their students. They do not bother teaching English to their students effectively nor does their supervising authority have any kind of effective watch on them. Their physical presence in schools is not enough. There are many reasons for this lethargic attitude of teachers, one being that they themselves are not trained enough to teach English properly. Of course, the teacher of English ought naturally to be linguistically minded, and should have received special training in the methods appropriate to the teaching of English. She/he should also have sufficient knowledge of the structure of the language to be taught. Unfortunately, this is not always a case in all the schools, particularly in rural and remote regions of the district. English work is often entrusted to teachers who have no special aptitude or suitable qualifications for it. When such least qualified teachers and those least adept in English are made responsible for the pupil's early years English study, the results are particularly disastrous. We must remember the fact that the best teacher is needed for the class in which the teaching of English begins.

This harsh reality poses many challenges before the University English teachers when they come to teach English language to the students from Gadchiroli district. When the students enter the University education they have no basic knowledge of English language. Many of them even fail to recognize the vowels and consonants in the alphabets. After studying English for twelve years they can't construct small sentences like 'May I come in, Sir'. They fail to introduce themselves in English or to tell about their family or about their likes and dislikes. In the first year of graduation the teachers of English have to start with the very basic aspects of language learning skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing and communicating though this is neither the part of the University syllabus nor does time permit the teachers to spend time on these very important basic aspects.

As we all know, speaking, like walking or running, is not learnt entirely by rule. It is learnt more by practice. The mother tongue was so learnt, and practice is needed for the learning of a second language too. In fact, without prolonged and specific practice in the elements of the language it cannot be acquired. This is due to the fact that in the learning of a second language, the habits formed in connection with the speaking of the mother tongue interfere to a great extent. Greater persistence of effort is needed in the teaching of a second language than is necessary in the case of the mother tongue. Unfortunately, our students never got the opportunity to speak in English either in school or at home. The teachers in schools taught English by using one-way lecture method, by creating a feeling of fear regarding this language as a difficult one, and by explaining things in Marathi in English class. The students do not get the opportunity to speak in English even at home as nobody at home is educated enough to understand the language. This creates a great hindrance for the students in learning language, and a challenge for English teachers at University level. When our students come to the University education, they have already learnt a number of things in their mother tongue, and can talk about them in general. This is-not the case in English. In our schools, words are taught to be used in their general meaning and not with specific meaning. Our students do not know the minute differences between the words of similar meaning. It is perhaps because of the lack of knowledge of their teachers at school level that they fail in finding proper words for particular things.

Wrong habits are also formed in pronunciation and intonation. English words are consequently pronounced in the manner usual in the vernacular, and in continuous speech the voice rises and falls in the manner peculiar to vernacular speech. Therefore, the learning of a second language means the forming of fresh speech habits, and this is no easy task. Greater persistence of effort is therefore needed on the part of both the teacher and the taught in the acquisition of the new language than was necessary in the learning of the mother tongue. Moreover, since by the time the student begins her/his study of a second language the use of the mother tongue has become spontaneous. It has, as it were, to be held at bay while the second language is being acquired, so that the old speech habits may not interfere with the new. But, our school teachers, being unaware of proper phonetic study of the words, fail to correct the pronunciations of their students at the initial stage.

Fear of English among students as a very difficult language is one of the great hindrances in their way of acquiring it. From their initial stage they never studied English as a language to be used in practical and professional life; they studied it as a subject having no actual use in life. This has damaged the very aim of introducing English language from the first standard by the government. The teachers failed in convincing students about the simplicity of English and its utility in their future lives. Students coming to the college education seem to respect the English teachers most, but when they come in English class their faces are expressionless and minds, empty.

English is generally taught in India so that it may be used as a medium of communication in ordinary life. In learning English what the pupil has to acquire on priority basis is the art of expressing herself/himself in this language, whether in speaking or writing, and the art of silent reading. Before the things go beyond our reach, we, the teachers of English, need to take effective steps in teaching English language with specific purposes to the students of this serene and geographically beautiful district.

English in this rural and tribal part of Maharashtra has to be taught with a specific aim. We, as teachers of English, need to understand that our students should not only understand English when it is spoken or written, but also that they should be able to speak or write it as and when needed. A practical and effective command over the language has been stated to be the purpose of instructions and teaching English, as judged by the ability to write in good modern English or any single topic without previous preparation. One more thing we need to keep in our mind is that, apart from their work at college, the learners have many occasions in their lives to speak, correspond, read, or write English at home and outside. For, today, in India, English is used very extensively in public life.

Oral practice is the quickest way of getting started. In order to read the pupil has to learn to interpret visible symbols in sounds, and to connect with each symbol or set of symbols its corresponding sound. In order to write she/he has first to learn how to make written symbols- a laborious process. But in speech she/ he has merely to imitate the words and sentences of others, and she/he soon gets going. This has a valuable psychological effect on the students; it supplies a stimulus and an interest in going ahead, which is lacking or lessened where the sense of progress is not present.

To be able to speak a language makes that language more living and real to the pupil than to be able to read or write it. Moreover, the pupil has been accustomed to use the mother tongue to convey her/his thoughts, feelings, and needs of her/his daily and hourly life. Writing and reading have a minor and occasional place only in communicating with those around. They

are learnt later, and appear to her/him as extras rather than as the essentials of the language. Speaking is the main thing. Thus it comes about that in acquiring a foreign language the pupil feels the language to be real and vital and useful, and therefore interesting, as she/he learns to use it in speaking, and in speaking about things that most often touch her/his life and come into her/his mind.

In order to speak continuously and effectively on any topic the speaker has to acquire the three habits of gathering her/his ideas, arranging them in the best order for communication, and choosing the best language in which to convey her/his meaning. And all this she/he has to learn to do at reasonable speed. Obviously the school pupil has first to speak in the vernacular before she/he may attempt to speak continuously in English; and when she/he begins to speak in English, she/he will do so in the light of the experience gained in speaking the vernacular. In short, a severe training in the use of the mother tongue is not a rival but a necessary preliminary to training in the use of English.

The language teaching should all along connect closely with the pupil's life. This, like the second principle, is a recognition of the need of coordinating whatever we are teaching with other living interests of the pupil. If we wish that whatever we teach to the students should appeal them, we need to relate our teaching to their actual lives. The ideas to be of value must be active, and therefore at work in the pupil's daily life.

The power of expression in a language is a matter of skill rather than of knowledge; it is a power that grows by exercise, not by merely knowing meanings or rules. A pupil, therefore, makes little progress in speaking English by learning the dictionary or by memorizing all the rules of English syntax. If she/he is to make progress in using English correctly and easily, she/he can do so rapidly and effectively by practicing English speaking till it becomes automatic. What she/he has to do, in a word, is to acquire speech habits, to accumulate as soon as possible that particular set of fresh speech habits which will serve her/his ordinary needs best. The new pronunciation and intonation must become so habitual that the pupil uses them rightly without having to think, and so must the common English constructions and a number of words, word-combinations, and sentences. The teacher's earliest and always main concern is to be developing skill- not merely to be imparting bits of information. Indeed, the teaching of rules or of meanings in isolation, apart from practice, may actually retard the pupil's progress, by leading her/him to be constantly referring to rules or meanings in her/his mind when she/he should be uttering English spontaneously. It is habits of unreflective right utterance that have by every means in the teacher's power to be instilled.

In short, extra efforts are needed on the part of the teachers of English in Gadchiroli district so that the students of this area may acquire natural habits of speaking English fluently and learn to use it in their natural course of life. Dedicated services of English teachers at all levels of education are necessary to increase the standards and to fulfill the aspirations of students in this district.

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