

Education through Mother Tongue & Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

Under the leadership of UNESCO and other international organizations, over 150 nations have pledged themselves to provide universal basic education. They have adopted as a specific goal, ...ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality (The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000, Paris, UNESCO, 2000, para 7.)

pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between home and school as small as possible.¹

(UNESCO 1953/1968:691)

In 1990 at a World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, some 1500 participants from 155 nations recognized that

.....traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development.²

(WDEFA, 1990:2)

The delegates proclaimed a World Declaration on Education for All, which declared categorically that Literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage.³

(WDEFA, 1990:6)

Nadine Dutcher “We know that most children who begin their education in their mother tongue make a better start, demonstrate increased self-confidence and continue to perform better than those who start school in a new language. The outlook for successful education is brighter when the school builds on the foundation of the mother tongue in teaching a second and third language. Such is the promise of mother tongue education. But there are perils as well. They include the possibility of ineffective teaching for a number of reasons and lack of support for mother tongue education on the part of teachers, parents and government.”⁴

Rajathurai Nishanthi “Mother tongue is valuable due to several reasons. Mother tongue is vital in framing the thinking and emotions of people. Learning to speak in the mother tongue is very necessary for a child’s comprehensive development. Being fluent in the mother tongue, which is also known as the native language, benefits the child in numerous ways. It associates him to his culture, ensures enhanced cognitive development, and supports in the learning of other languages. A child first comprehends what is around them through the language they hear their mother communicating in from before they are born and thought their lives. Many children across the developing world are learning very little in school, a reality that can be linked to teaching that is in a

¹ UNESCO, 1953. The use of vernacular languages in education: the report of the UNESCO meeting of specialists, 1951, in Fishman, J. A. ed. 1968. Readings in the sociology of language, The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 688-716.

² World Bank, 1990. Primary education: a World Bank policy paper, Washington D. C.: The World Bank.

³ World Conference on Education for All, 1990. World declaration on education for all and framework for action to meet basic learning needs, New York: UNICEF House.

⁴ Promise and perils of mother tongue education, (2003) Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC. USA

language they do not fully understand. It is a practice that leads to limited or non-existent learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills, alienating experiences, and high drop-out and repetition rates. To improve the quality of education, language policies need to take account of mother-tongue learning. Models of education which ignore the mother tongue in the early years can be unproductive, ineffective and have a negative effect on children's learning. Mother-tongue education at least in early years can enable teachers to teach, and learners to learn more effectively.”⁵

The Constitution of India Said,

Section 29(f) of Chapter V under Right to Education Act, 2009 clearly states that, “medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue.”

Education is in the concurrent list of the Constitution and majority of the schools are under the domain of the States/UTs. As envisaged in para 4.11 of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, is to be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible.

The National Education Policy (NEP) approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, says that wherever possible the medium of instruction in schools until Grade V -- preferably until Grade VIII -- should be the mother tongue or the local or regional language. “All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged,” the NEP says.

“This is a tremendous idea. That is how it should be,” said Anil Swarup, former school education secretary in the central government. Using the language, the child is most comfortable with in the early school years improves attendance and learning outcomes, and the ability to learn new languages. Studies from around the world also show that it increases classroom participation, reduces the number of dropouts and grade repetition.

Still, half of all children in low and middle-income countries are not taught in a language they speak, estimated a 2016 report from the Education Commission, a global initiative for inclusive and quality education.

Parents prefer to send their children to ‘English-medium’ schools regardless of the quality of education they offer because of the perception that mastery of the English language ensures success in later life. For example, in 2017-18, about 14% of those who were enrolled in private schools in India's rural areas and 19.3% in urban areas chose a private school because English was the medium of instruction.

The general rule of education is that the student can assimilate the best learning through the medium of his mother tongue. But it is a coincidence that the ideal of education is not always maintained through this mother tongue. Sanskrit was taught in the Vedic system. At that time, the mother tongue or the language of practice was Vedic dialects and Prakrit languages. There were some Sanskrit schools in the Middle Ages. But his medium was not his mother tongue. English was the medium of instruction in the nineteenth century, while the mother tongue of the people was the regional language. The situation where the people of India have to study through English instead of any Indian language was academically strange. But the way to get rid of this was thought by Swami Vivekananda of modern India. He advocated mother tongue as a medium of education.

Swami Vivekananda was not taught to the people in the language of the people and even the Sanskrit language itself was unfamiliar to the people that the situation seemed tragic. In such a

⁵ Understanding of the Importance of Mother Tongue Learning, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India, International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD) Volume 5 Issue 1, November-December 2020 Available Online: www.ijtsrd.com e-ISSN: 2456 – 6470, P. 77

situation, the ideas expressed by this dignitary about education through mother tongue are noteworthy.

Advocates of folk language

Swami Vivekananda is an advocate of education through mother tongue. They aim to make the local language the medium instead of the medium of both Sanskrit as well as English. He says that Sanskrit has been taught in our country since ancient times. So there is a big gap between scholars and the general public. Gautama Buddha, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Ramakrishna Paramahansa kept on preaching to the common people in their own language so that even the common people could find them. Scholarship is an excellent thing. But it should not be represented by artificial and unnatural language. When the best kind of knowledge is to be expressed to the people, the medium can only be folk language. What other language could be more suitable for teaching than the language in which we can naturally express ourselves, the language in which we can express our anger, grief or love? We cannot express our feelings properly in any artificial language. Language is the main medium of progress of the nation and expression of ideas. So it can be more lively and successful if it is expressed in the local language instead of a language like Sanskrit or English.

How deeply familiar and interested he was with the physical and psychological mechanism of production, cognition, and acquisition of linguistic structures can easily be understood by his statements. For example, in Raja Yoga he described the process of speech-sound production. He wonderfully explained the articulatory mechanism involved in the production of Om: 'In making a sound we use the larynx and the palate as a sounding board. ... Om (Aum) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds. The first letter, A, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth.' (1.218–9).

Medium of instruction: Simple local language

He says: 'The greatness of a teacher consists in the simplicity of his language. My ideal of language is my master's language, most colloquial and yet most expressive. 'That is, the greatness of the teacher lies in the simplicity of his language. The ideal of my language is the language of my guru. Which is the most special regional or secular and yet the most special expressive.

He believed that the wonderful knowledge of India had been undermined by the Sanskrit language for centuries. I want to make it popular by translating it into folk language. Sanskrit is our glorious language. But today it has become a hindrance for the common people. That is why they say, 'Therefore the ideas must be taught in the language of the people. Teach the masses in the vernaculars. 'He explains that our nation lives in slums. The villagers do not know Sanskrit or English. We have to deliver education to poor children. This can only be done through the local language. Swamiji is an advocate of public punishment. So naturally the language of the masses is accepted as a medium of education.

Findings:

- Swami Vivekananda is an advocate of public education. At the same time, the mother tongue of the masses is also insistent. People do not know both Sanskrit and English. Both languages are artificial and unnatural for the people of our country to express their feelings.
- They want to spread the knowledge of Indian religion and culture to the people, so they consider the mother tongue as the right medium and emphasize on the teaching of the mother tongue. They consider it a strange situation that the knowledge of Indian religion and culture is imparted through English.
- Swami Vivekananda even considers Sanskrit as an obstacle language for people to acquire knowledge. There is no shortage of English for knowledge of science and technical education.

- Swami Vivekananda has given his world famous lectures in English only. He has articulated Indian religion, culture, philosophy and especially Vedanta in English and has conveyed it to millions of devotees in the country and abroad. Yet they are advocates of the education of the general public. That is why he advocates education in his local Gurbhasha which can be understood by the common people.

References:

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3. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.329.
4. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda], Vol.5, p-263.
5. Ibid, Vol.6, p-187.
6. Sarkar Ratan(2015), Swami Vivekananda's ideas and philosophy of education: a way out to promote imperishable development of the nation. Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University. Quarterly Research Journal vol-I, Issue-4 pp. 45-57. ISSN: 2394-7632(online)2394-7640(print).
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