

The Dilemma of Language and Democratization in Indian Education and Its Institutions

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Abstract:

In the current era, as neoliberal forces and globalization have rapid socio-political influence over people's lives, similarly, cultural and economic exchanges between nations and citizens have increased to a very large extent. In this process, 'education,' an essential precondition for human development, both as an 'practice' and its 'institution,' becomes crucial for some to attain social mobility, while for others, it intensifies their deprivations. Language plays a pivotal role in this dynamic, particularly in India's diverse socio-cultural context. This study highlights education and its related institutional stance in current Indian society and its relation to human development and the issue of language, particularly the medium of instruction (MOI) in education, which always has its own conflicts of interest because of the diversity that exists, thereby weakening the foundation for democratization of education. Analysing education in two key aspects, first, as a practice or activity, and second, in terms of its institutional position within society, this study, using various theoretical and conceptual lenses, reveals that "education as a practice of freedom" remains a distant dream in India. The institutional and policy-driven efforts toward democratizing education and its opportunities are only leading to a trend of massification, in which private market forces play a crucial role. The study advocates that institutional orientation, policy-making, and reforms to address these issues need to have a comprehensive and contextual approach. It also highlights the importance the federal structure and local bodies of the nation hold in such policy-making and also gives importance to understanding the global forces and their influences rather than adopting a simplified and generalised approach, which can be detrimental in India's diverse cultural landscape.

Keywords: Institutions, Globalization, Neoliberalism, democratization & language

Introduction:

Throughout history, from the beginning, human curiosity and the desire to understand the world have been the driving force behind human evolution, with humans and their consciousness leading to improved social conditions. In this process, humans gradually developed a medium, a language of communication, to interact with others and gain a better understanding of each other's thoughts. However, this evolution and this development had their own track and place and were not uniform; rather, they evolved in diverse ways by diverse groups based on

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social conditions which much later were codified and institutionalised. Hence, the emergence of different languages, shaped by space, context, and geographical regions, can be understood as a precondition to attain a voice for human understanding of others and of themselves, similarly, led to human advancement in every sphere.

With the continuous evolution of society and the emergence of the state as the sole governing entity, various institutions were established within society. As a result, an individual's will to actualize, needed to rely on these institutions to act, meaning that for an individual to act according to their will, they must rely on or relate themselves to one of these state institutions based on their choices. These institutions provide conditions and make individuals capable of acting according to their will. Hence, there has been a significant shift from before, when human progress was achieved primarily through humans' actions and their willpower to do better, to the rise of the state and its apparatus, where the state has taken responsibility for taking initiative and creating condition for the people to have a positive change in the society. Similarly with the rise of the institutions, when the knowledge about the world got institutionalized, education as an idea and as a sector emerged as an essential condition and a practice to provide individuals with the opportunity to realize their rational will. The will to purify society by removing social evils and uplifting the society and developing intellectuality in individuals.

Education can be understood and viewed in two ways: first, as an essential practice and medium that helps individuals to be a part of the activity concerning knowledge, and second, in terms of its institutional footing and standing within the society. The former (as an essential practice and medium) helps individuals to self-actualize and realize themselves, and in current society, it helps one individual to attain social mobility and is important for the production of social capital, while the latter is concerned with the policies and decisions made by the institutions for the people to have a better opportunity to be a part of the space that it creates and to participate in the activity. Thus, the language used by the individual who disseminates knowledge and the language used by the institutions in terms of fulfilling the fundamental function of educational institutions in terms of fostering a more conscious society become very important and play a crucial role.

“Education as a practice of freedom,” as propounded by thinkers like Paulo Freire (1973) and Bell Hooks (1994), emphasizes the advancement of critical consciousness and the use of the dialogical method in education, which should not reproduce systems of oppression but instead serve as a means for personal and collective liberation.

This practice of learning cannot be imagined without the use of language, which, as a wheel, keeps the whole process running. Without the language, the driving force and the other factor would lose their meaning.

However, the use of language involves its own form of conflicts of interest, particularly in a country like India. India gives it a unique touch because of its diversity; it faces its own unique challenges. In every other nation where much diversity doesn't exist, where uniform language policies are a viable solution concerning its homogenous cultural or linguistic factor, such an idea faces resistance in India, and also it is not viable to force a uniform language policy in

such a diverse context that is present in India, and even if it does, it is akin to digging its own grave. According to the *2011 Census of India*, the country has 121 languages and 270 mother tongues. In the past, the numbers were even higher; in the *1961 Census*, 1,652 languages were recorded in India. Later, George A. Grierson (1967–68) had enumerated 179 languages and 544 dialects spoken in various parts of the country. Thus, India, through the lens of the modern nation-state, can be viewed as a single entity in both a conceptual and territorial sense. However, when understood in a contextual manner, it is highly diverse in terms of language, ethnicity, culture, race, and other factors.

Language Issue and its politics

Today, the fact about democratizing educational opportunities and providing access to knowledge for all is reflected and can be seen in the attempts made by the government and its policies. In a multilingual country like India, implementing language policies in educational institutions can take place only after careful contemplation has been done and after strategic measures have been prepared.

India has its own history when it comes to language, and the policies that have come up in the past, like the language policies that give preference to one language, have often faced resistance. For instance, in the 1960s, when discussions were held about making Hindi the sole official language, various protests and opposition came to resist this idea, particularly from the southern states. The government cannot afford to repeat the same mistake. Unlike other nations, where education policies are often based on a single language, India requires well-calculated measures regarding the Medium of Instruction (MOI) because of its linguistic diversity. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 addresses this challenge by giving due importance to the mother tongue and also by introducing the three-language formula to negotiate comprehensively with the linguistic diversity. Since education falls under the Concurrent List in the Constitution, the central government has introduced these reforms, which the state government is required to acknowledge and consider and act accordingly. However, things are not that simple; resistance to these policies has already emerged from various part of the nation. Whether these reforms will be successful in the long run or will be another failure, only time can answer.

But in the era of neoliberalism, when consumerism is at its peak and when globalization has touched every sphere of society, the state's attempts at democratizing education through mother tongues and regional languages raise important questions. Will this approach leads to long-term benefits, or will market forces and the commodification of education and knowledge ultimately overpower the entire process? This is a question that seeks deeper investigation.

In a country like India, there is a stark difference between individuals who receive education in their mother tongue or vernacular language and those who are educated in the language of the market and consumerism, such as English. These differences also determine the access to social justice and equality, as social injustice and social inequality are crucial aspects that both the government and individuals must recognize and address. But sometimes these whole power dynamics are out of people's minds and their consciousness, and these realities are difficult to

perceive, as most of the time they have been normalized through power relations between individuals and have been reinforced by dominant discourses.

India, being one of the most diverse countries in the world, comes with its own varied forms of social injustice and inequality. Language too becomes a vital element here, as the country's rich linguistic diversity means that a vast number of languages and mother tongues are spoken. And it's always the case that language here is deeply linked to an individual's claim to rights, equality, and access to resources.

Thus, formulating and implementing a single-language policy in administration or in education is not a viable option, as it could marginalize and sideline those whose mother tongue is different from the dominant language.

Extensive fieldwork conducted between 2004 and 2009 in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal reveals that education has been presented to us as a pathway for human development, but sometimes this very system becomes a process through which inequality is reproduced. The findings show that students' social conditions, state government policies, and the practices that exist in the classroom together contribute towards the fact of unequal learning experiences. Medium of instruction, classroom interaction patterns, and the sharp divide between private and public schooling—all these factors emerge as critical elements that contribute towards unequal growth and reinforce social stratification and segmentation (Majumdar & Mooij 2012).

Sengupta & Karmakar (2017) highlight the issue that students face in their primary education, especially when the mode of instruction is different from that of their mother tongue. And because of language politics that exist in the education system, the continuation of unequal distribution of resources has been happening, and because of a homogeneous and uniform approach from the state government, such as in the state of West Bengal, the multiplicity or pluralism inherent in human life and in society is in a difficult situation.

Recognizing such a challenge of multiplicity, the government has introduced multilingual policies to ensure inclusiveness and equal access to opportunities. And in India, with its vast and varied linguistic landscape, language politics here have always been a complicated domain. The actions taken regarding medium of instruction (MOI) and its utilization in Indian classrooms have inevitably been affected by this complexity (Jolad & Doshi, 2021). There is a hierarchy of dominance created among the languages spoken and utilized in official as well as commercial situations, with Hindi and English at the top and the primary languages of the state below them. And at the bottom are the minority and indigenous languages that are marginalized and typically recorded as non-scheduled languages in the census (Mohanty, 2008; Benedikter, 2013).

Al Farabi (2020) examines the challenges faced by minority communities within West Bengal's multicultural society and highlights how the current educational system and its curriculum put the dominant language group in an advantageous position while neglecting and pushing back the minority language communities. This again highlights the need for greater understanding of the situation and greater contemplation in terms of policymaking and making education very inclusive in nature.

In India, such issues and dilemmas could be found mostly everywhere, because each region in India has diversity, and this issue holds significance when we consider the dynamics surrounding education and its medium of instruction.

Today, this dilemma surrounding education and its medium of instruction has already entered a new stage. Historically, there has been resistance whenever the attempts were made and whenever preference was given to any single language, which has resulted in the form of protests—and will likely continue to do so—but where the resistance lacks and the social consensus has been highly attained is in the act of the normalisation of English as the undeclared language of academia, the upper class, the market, national progress, and so on and so forth, which has gradually entrenched in the minds and consciousness of the people.

This act of societal acceptance and institutionalisation of English reflects current societal conditions, raising concerns about hierarchies of language and, similarly, people and their access to opportunities.

These education policies have resulted in the creation of two sections of people, i.e., people from India who speak mostly English and people from Bharat who fear it, illustrating how the Indian education system has constrained the nation's potential, making it a “bonsai nation” rather than a “banyan tree” (Chowdhury, 2017).

In such a way, the creation of class, stratification, and hierarchisation of people and the language they use have been intensified because language here provides opportunities. The hierarchy of languages inevitably means and reflects the domination of one language over another, which, in turn, creates the condition for the domination of one group of people over another.

Historically, Sanskrit held dominance, followed by Persian and later English. However, English differs significantly in nature; from the moment it arrived, it became a tool of legitimation and domination, first from the British and then later from Indians themselves. Unlike Sanskrit and Persian, whose dominance was challenged and reduced over time, English, which was introduced by the British, its dominance was not over even after the end of colonial rule.

Instead, it went on to continue to hold a powerful position in Indian society even today. From the Anglicist-Orientalist debate to Bentinck's Resolution, Macaulay's Minute, Auckland's Minute, and finally Wood's Dispatch, each of these events helped the English language in colonial India to reinforce its superiority among the native classes. Even after independence, this dominance was further solidified over time by the natives themselves.

With the help of the concept of "orientalism" (Said, 1979), it can be understood how the English language was used and how it played a significant role in portraying Indians and other local people and their culture as irrational, lacking reason and reasoning, and in need of representation. Thus, to legitimise their empire and their rule and their culture in the different epistemological world that was India during that time, the Britishers forced the use of the English language by various means to educate the native Indians and ultimately to have dominance over them and to make them governable subjects. And this ultimately resulted in

the lesser growth of vernacular and regional languages in political affairs, which continued even after independence and which had its influence in the social sphere as well.

From this, we can see it is obvious that when politics or some ideological motive is linked in terms of treating language, it inevitably influences the education system and the medium of instruction it uses. Hence, this ultimately leads to the creation of hierarchy among languages and also reinforces social hierarchies among people.

Intensification of the dilemma

Hence, in today's time, with the diversity that exists in India, the dilemma surrounding language and its usage in educational institutions has been intensified all because of the global and private economic forces, especially since the rise of neoliberalism.

On one hand, the Indian government seems to be dedicated toward promoting mother tongue and vernacular languages in education through policies. On the other hand, the increasing interconnectedness between people, their culture, nations, and global exchanges, all thanks to globalization, will ultimately place English in a more dominant and convenient position for communication, as English is the undisputed lingua franca.

In such a scenario, cultural and economic exchanges between people and nations are bound to happen with the help of English rather than any other vernacular language, further increasing the value of English and its usage in day-to-day life and also in people's minds.

And in results it creates a fertile ground for market forces and private entities to enter, and these forces have capitalized for their benefit and profit-making.

Since the advent of neoliberalism in India, with the growth of market forces, capital liberalization, privatization, and the gradual retreat of the state from major spheres and opening of gates for private forces, private institutions have taken advantage of this trend. As a result, the English language has become less of a medium of instruction and more of a language and a commodity that can be purchased, turning it into a product that can be sold and purchased by those who possess enough economic capital, thereby deepening existing inequalities in terms of access to English education.

Language is something that an individual can learn in natural and everyday settings, without any need of undergoing formal training or learning the codification, such as grammar. In other words, language is something that can be learned in a spontaneous and intuitive manner by humans. This applies to every language, whether it's a mother tongue or a vernacular language. However, for English, which is an alien language to the Indian soil, it's a different case altogether unless compulsion or external forces are involved for one to learn it without undergoing formal training. To understand this condition, we must understand the importance and compulsion of learning grammar in society and how it is being commodified by private institutions.

As Pierre Bourdieu explains, "The teaching of grammar in school does not, strictly speaking, inculcate a new linguistic practice-generating grammar: the child must already possess in their practical state the principles he learns to subject to logical scrutiny (e.g., conjugations,

declensions, syntactic constructions); but in acquiring the theoretic codification of what he does, he acquires the capacity to do it more consciously and systematically. This transformation is the analogue, in the biographical order, of the historical process by which customary law or traditional justice is transformed into rational, i.e., codified, law derived from explicit principles” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Thus, grammar is a codified theoretical knowledge of a language that must be applied in practice. It enables an individual to become conscious and systematic about their way of using language and speech. In India today, this codified and systematic version is applicable to the English language, which has been embedded in everyday practice. Unlike vernacular and regional languages, which can be learned and acquired naturally, English requires a structured and codified form, as mentioned above, before it can be used effectively, unless force or compulsion is involved and drives its learning without knowing such codification. Thus, what private institutions do and claim is to disseminate this codified theoretical knowledge, which resulted in the commodification of the English language.

That's how English proficiency has become an exclusive asset thanks to these private institutions, which is only accessible for those who possess enough economic capital. As a result, this reproduction of social hierarchy exists and is further intensified by various private institutions. This also leads to the reproduction of the conditions for the unequal reproduction of social and economic capital.

This creates a cycle in which people with less economic capital cannot afford access to English education, while those who can will continue to expand and reinforce their social and economic capital. As a result, individuals who rely on vernacular languages will gradually fall behind, as global and market forces will not be favorable to them. Consequently, they will remain disadvantaged, lacking both social and economic capital, and this cycle will persist indefinitely.

In this context, how can the state's action be justified? On one hand, it promotes vernacular languages, while on the other, globalization and the neoliberal economy have expanded at a rapid pace, making the job market and social mobility more favorable to English speakers. How can these two contradictory approaches be made compatible? Or is it merely a forced compatibility that ultimately pushes vulnerable individuals into even more precarious positions?

Democratization or Massification?

In today's time, education and knowledge are often used interchangeably. As an idea and an activity, education is an essential precondition and the cornerstone of human development. However, in the present era, development itself is being depoliticized, as explained by John Harris (2001). He argues that people are increasingly being made responsible for their own underdevelopment, while the state is stepping away from its political role in human development. According to Harris, the promotion of civil society and NGOs serves as a strategy to reduce state functions, allowing elites to capture public budgets.

In such conditions, how will people whose lives depend on the state and its assistance, especially in terms of access to quality education, receive an adequate education that enables

them to compete in the job market and strive for social mobility? These individuals are more vulnerable than anyone else in this system.

Neera Chandhoke's (2003) concept of the "pluralization of the state" can help us better understand the position of the state in the current time and similarly the neoliberal dilemma surrounding education and its institutions. The impact of the "retreat or rolling back of the state" since the rise of neoliberalism on the economy has profound socio-political implications, which gives a path to other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations to enter and do the work. Chandhoke argues that the role of the state has become diversified, making NGOs and other network organizations essential to step in and cooperate and work with the neoliberal economy, as the state alone is unable to efficiently manage all functions.

So whatever maybe the argument, we cannot deny the fact the state's role and its power have been compromised since the rise of neoliberalism, and similarly, education and its institutions cannot be spared in such an environment.

Understanding this situation concerning education, this shift has provided enough space for private organizations to proliferate and use this opportunity for their profitmaking, which establishes and manages educational institutions. All this to provide better education opportunities, which the state alone is unable to ensure adequately.

Hence, in such a situation, where the state is moving away from its responsibility of human development and global and private forces dominate the economy, the condition for marginalized people will worsen. People's deprivation and underdevelopment have always been and will always be political matters, and similarly, the act of depoliticizing development is itself a political act. But the lack of social and economic capital, which ultimately leads to the marginalization and deprivation of people, results in fewer and fewer opportunities for quality education, which private entities provide. This, in turn, effectively reproduces the conditions that generate relatively less social and economic capital for people compared to those who already possess higher social and economic capital. This cycle keeps getting reproduced.

Friedrich Nietzsche's five lectures, delivered at the Basel City Museum in 1872 and later compiled in his book *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (2015), present his critical views on education, which highlight the problems surrounding educational institutions and also the loss of their original purpose. He argues that modern education has lost its base and its purpose has been compromised by being subordinated to external goals such as economic growth and state service, rather than concentrating on the cultivation of culture and individual character.

Nietzsche also critiques the expansion of education to the masses, which has resulted in the degradation of academic standards and also the loss of the privilege associated with higher education. He argues that the democratization of education has led to the culture of mass production and utility, rather than the culture nurturing individuals with excellence and character. According to Nietzsche, the education system has been turned into a product that can be mass-produced, rather than a process that promotes individual growth and development. He

believes that modern education is heavily focused on efficiency and speed for production and utility, neglecting the important human aspect of self-cultivation and the development of critical thinking. Nietzsche's views on education are often regarded as elitist because of his argument that only the exceptional and the aristocratic should have access to higher education.

Whatever his arguments and stance may be on education, similar practices can be observed in the Indian context in two distinct yet similar domains: the private and public domains. In the former, which is a closed and exclusive domain, the practice of giving significance to character and excellence in education all because of the medium of instruction it uses and the market value that English holds, its role in cultivating individual excellence can be seen as argued by Nietzsche.

In the latter, with the intent of making it accessible, mostly the massification of education is taking place. In other words, this domain has resulted in producing numbers rather than quality. Hence, in the name of democratization, massification is being carried out on a large scale. What hinders the actual intention of the democratization process is the complexity of language, a challenge that the state has been unable to address effectively.

The issue of language has always brought some hard times for the state whenever it came with a policy to address the dilemma of language and the medium of instruction (MOI) in educational institutions. On the one hand, it cannot close down and neglect the importance of private institutions that provide better English education, which helps in various ways for the national economy and for the citizens. On the other hand, it struggles to fully comprehend and address the dilemma surrounding regional languages and their significance for society. While regional or vernacular languages are equally important in education, because of which public institutions primarily use these languages as MOI, these opportunities and responsibilities of giving importance to vernacular language and linguistic diversity are largely directed toward marginalised or lower-class people who take public and free education. This is because they lack funds and cannot afford to opt for private education, which uses the English language as its medium of instruction, and hence choose to go to public and free schools that use vernacular languages as their medium of instruction.

Does the responsibility of preserving linguistic diversity and giving importance to different languages rest solely on the shoulders of these marginalised groups who lack funds and who, because of their condition, choose to go to these public schools? Should this responsibility also be shared by those who are economically and socially equipped enough? Instead, these privileged groups choose to enter a domain in which attaining greater social mobility is the primary priority, thereby giving birth to and perpetuating the social hierarchy in society. Thus, education as a practice of freedom is something that is yet to be fully realised and still has a long way to go and before giving birth to such a practice, these are the issues which need to be addressed adequately. Henceforth, in such a way, language becomes political in nature; for some, it is an instrument to attain social mobility, while for others, it becomes a social hurdle that cannot be avoided and has to be confronted, often without the necessary social and economic capital.

As a result, democratization, which should have focused on providing equal opportunities to

quality education which focuses upon the process of inculcating the quality of critical thinking and making them capable of self-actualisation and social upliftment, is instead leading only to massification which ends up prioritising numbers and student enrolment, that too without adequate institutional arrangements and facilities and also without addressing the language issue adequately, which ultimately results in the deterioration of education and its quality.

Thus, in such a way, the fundamental medium that drives this whole process, 'language', and the policies related to it have not been adequately addressed. And instead of making it democratic, the neoliberal forces are intensifying this issue, using this opportunity for their profit-making, which is resulting in making the ground infertile for democratization by promoting an increasingly exclusive system of English-based private education.

Conclusion:

In today's times, it can be said that there is a dilemma for which the solution does not lie in a standardized resolution. Instead, the contextual ground must be taken into account, where language and education stand today. The value of each language, whether it's vernacular or English; the level of awareness among people about the usage and necessity of the English language; and people's living standards and economic background must be taken into consideration while formulating a policy. Any straightforward dismissal of any language and placing any language in a secondary position should not be encouraged; equal importance shall be given to every language. Hence, an indigenous solution must be built after carefully assessing the issues specific to each region and state.

However, in India, because of its vast geographical territory, it is difficult and not feasible enough to understand each region's diverse cultures, languages, and educational needs from the central level. But also to give a rigid response to counter and to resolve the dilemma, which is so complex and widespread, is still a risky act. Because this dilemma is something that needs to be addressed adequately instead of in a simplistic manner that views every issue from a single lens. And while doing so, it needs to view and keep every step sensitive enough and also treat each region and their language and their demographic needs with importance. And while doing so, federalism and its structure, as well as the responsibilities of local bodies and state governments, could be taken into account. This issue may further worsen if it keeps getting addressed through oversimplified and standardized resolutions from the center, which gives no importance to global and local needs, further widening the gap between different sections of society.

The other issues that persist within the institution itself are overcrowding in schools and classrooms and the shortage of teachers. If building more institutions can help address these situations, then the state should take the initiative, which would also result in job creation in the region. Hence, in all this, the federalist structure of the nation can play a crucial role. From the central government to the state and local levels, each tier can provide valuable input regarding language and its complexities in different regions. Keeping in view the global influence and needs, and the central role and stand that the English language has in today's society. This approach can be beneficial for society, which will help authorities and

policymakers to formulate comprehensive and diverse policies that cater to the needs of every region and every group of people.

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