

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Importance of English Today :

For many years English was condemned as the instrument of colonial exploitation. Politically motivated people raised hue and cry against English to banish it altogether from the Indian soil. It meant that the hey-days of English were already over. But looking at this issue rather objectively, one has to admit that abolishing English would not have been a wise step. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru justified this point of view. He says, " all the regional languages must be developed and promoted. But that does not mean that English should be discarded. To do so will amount to closing a window on the world of technology..... Foreign languages serve as a window on it and it is supposed that translation could take their place was a mistake. It was no use getting into an intellectual prison after achieving political independence.<sup>1</sup>" Considering the experience of the other countries, most of the educationalists have come to the conclusion that we

cannot do away with English in the present circumstances. V.V.Yardi states, " in Srilanka and South East Asian countries there has now been a growing realization that English has a place and that it would be unwise to throw the baby with bath-water<sup>2</sup>". The following discussion explains very clearly how English still is and will continue to be an important language in India.

## 1.2 English as a Link Language.

Importance of English in India as a Link language can hardly be exaggerated. Education being the concern of both the centre and State, the regional languages are promoted with an aim to replace English. But every State having a regional language of its own cannot communicate with other States through its regional language. English acts here as a link. During the struggle for independence the leaders of the various States could converse with each other and could work out their plans only through English. Hence the unifying value of

English cannot be ignored. In this context, S.K.Verma says, " It is an important promoter of geographical mobility. It has been playing an important role in bringing national unity and integration<sup>3</sup>." In 1964, Indian Education Commission also recommended the continuance of English for national integration and higher education in India. English, therefore, has been the associated official language for the inter-State and the State-centre communication. Morarji Desai says, " We cannot deny to ourselves practical as well as cultural benefit of familiarity with English, this most eloquent and popular of languages."<sup>4</sup>

### 1.3 English As an International Language.

English is a language spoken and understood throughout the world. Almost 350 million people on the globe speak this language. It is obvious, therefore, that so far as the linking of the nations in the world is concerned, there is no vehicle other than English. There is no parallel to English as a

common language of communication. It helps in international trade and industry and in the development of diplomatic relations. English alone plays a vital role in the world affairs as T.C.Barnah says, "English has ceased to be the language of its native speakers only. It has attained the status of the world language."<sup>5</sup> Thus with the rapid spread of the means of communication and that of industrial, scientific and technological development, the isolation of the nations has been broken down and the face of the world economy has undergone a change from self-sufficiency to close inter-dependence. Consequently the status of English as a world language become undeniable.

#### 1.4

#### English As a Library Language.

Kothari commission which used the word 'Library Language' recommended the mother tongue as the best medium of instruction but did not forget to add that some proficiency in English was essential for the award of a university degree. This recommendation

has a practical worth because standard books on all branches of knowledge are written in English. These books in English are so rich, abundant and evergrowing that the translation in the regional languages will be an unending task. Hence one has to acquire some amount of proficiency in English in order to be in touch with the latest development in all the branches of knowledge. It must be noted that 60% of the world's technical journals and periodicals are published in English. Hence, knowledge of English is indeed a key to the store house of knowledge, which is not available in the Indian languages. In the entire world, the explosion of knowledge is taking place, particularly in the field of science and technology. The scientists, technologists and professionals have to keep themselves abreast of the latest development in their own fields in order to make further progress in their career. How can they achieve it without the proficiency in English? English must continue to be studied. Radha Krishnan Commission elaborates, " if under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves from the

living stream of evergrowing knowledge..... Our students who are undergoing training at school, which will admit them either to university or vocation, must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with felicity and understanding works of English authors.<sup>6</sup>"

Thus, it is no good denying the fact that English has become the world language. It is the language of international commerce and diplomacy. It contains a store house of knowledge. Khushwant Singh maintains " English is not only the link language which would keep India together but also the language of opportunity. It opens the window of a village novel to the city. It opens the window of India to the world"<sup>7</sup>. It is needless to maintain, then, that English is going to play an important role in the world affairs in days to come.

Consequently, it will be advantageous for us to continue to learn English. Still, however, one should not be under the illusion that English may continue to hold that unique position which it enjoyed in the past. It was the medium of instruction not only at the university level but also at the school level. The objectives of learning this foreign language have become very limited. English is to be learnt and taught mainly as a language of comprehension of the writings in English especially those related to their specialised subjects.

Mother-tongue has been adopted as a medium of instruction in every State in India. Almost all the universities have made switch over from English to the regional language as a medium of instruction. Maximum efforts are being made to develop the regional languages in the field of science and technology. Besides, the claim of Hindi, as a link language, is emphasized. It is one of the plans of the national movement to give primacy to Indian languages, particularly to Hindi 40% of the Indian people

understand Hindi and 1/3rd of the total population of India can speak and write Hindi. But the use of Hindi as a link language has created political problems in the country, particularly the southern States are hostile to the use of Hindi as a link language.

Within the first decade of independence, the geographical areas were marked on the basis of language and these were reorganized into separate States. Every State did give patronage to its regional language required for its promotion. But it must be noted that these languages could not go without the will and the help of the State. In many States in India, English has not received the State patronage but still it has grown in strength and stature. The example of Punjab University may be cited here. In order to get through the S.S.C. examination, one is not required to get passing marks in English. However, soon after they had to revert back to the traditional practice which demanded passing in English. This shows that people have realised the disastrous effects of banishing



English. The inherent strength and advantages that it confers on those who choose to learn it are the factors responsible for the English.

Our own languages could not displace English not because people are not interested in the growth of their mother-tongues. But the plain fact is that these regional languages cannot give the social mobility which people look for. The knowledge of English is indeed a passport of employment. It not only provides a privileged position but also new openings in the world to those who learn it.

Again English as mentioned in the preceding pages, is a store-house of knowledge. The knowledge of English is, in fact, a key to all scientific and technical information. It is the window on the rapid progress of science and technology. Hence any one who likes to acquire knowledge in any field of activity has to turn to English. This kind of knowledge is not available in our languages as there is no demand for it. This causes a vicious circle which is not broken up-to now.

In short, the regional languages have been promoted by all the States in India after independence. Education and administration through the mother-tongue has become the motive today. The thought is also given to evolve Hindi as a link language for which the planned steps are being taken. It is, therefore, obvious that English will not be studied in India as it was studied before. It will not be used in the way it had been used. But it should not be construed that English will be banished from the Indian soil. Because attempts to close this window on the world will be like committing intellectual suicide. It is true that the national pride is a motivating force behind the removal of English. As a result the mother-tongue is adopted as a medium of instruction. But it must be remembered that the neglect of the study of English will be a major risk on the part of Indians. One should pause and ponder over how and to what extent it would help or bind one's social and economical mobility. So, English cannot occupy the same place in India as it did in the past. But it will surely continue to be studied.

The education commission's report realistically points out " although English has status of a compulsory third language today, and may continue to have it for a fairly long time to come, the likelihood of its becoming a foreign language cannot be ruled out".<sup>8</sup> Now let us consider the position of English at the First Year B.A. level in Shivaji University as it serves the basis of my study in the following pages.

1.5

English (Compulsory) at B.A. I

1. The First Year Students of Shivaji University are expected to have a detailed study from the point of view of learning language skills and vocabulary of 120 to 150 pages of English prose and also few poetry passages from the modern period.
2. Remedial course in Grammar.
3. A short descriptive or narrative essay of about 150 to 175 words.
4. Translation of about 10 separate sentences from Marathi or Hindi into English to test the student's knowledge of grammar, structure and vocabulary.

Paraphrase of about 12 lines of poetry.

5. Comprehension of an unseen passage of about 150 to 175 words.

A text book of functional English for Arts is specially designed to cater for the English language needs of the first year students of the Shivaji University as mentioned above. We believe that what the Indian undergraduate needs is a kind of English which will serve two important purposes

- (a) help him pursue his academic course meaningfully through the medium of English if so designed,
- (b) prepare him to meet the social demands successfully after graduation and among other things fulfil the essential requirement for competitive jobs.

In short, begin to acquire functional English. Now, let us see how much functional competence they have actually acquired and whether they are anywhere near the standards they are expected to attain.