



The rise and fall of English medium schools in Bangladesh

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FROM the very beginning of the British administration in India, the then administrators wanted to create a class of people who could be useful for running the administration in different parts of India. There was a large number of provincial languages in India, like, Bengali, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Kernerese, Hindi, etc., but for inter provincial communication only suitable language would be English and it is why the ruling class started seminaries, and institutions for the teaching of English.

In fact, this was the beginning of teaching of English in the then India. This is the story of the early nineteenth century and only this century developed the establishment of English medium schools in different parts of India. The famous English medium schools of those days are the following:

St Paul school in Darjeeling, Loreto in Calcutta, St Joseph in Kodaikanal (Madras), St Xavier in Simla and a few others. These were run by efficient teachers in the manner of Eton and Harrow schools in England.

British purpose in the establishment of the English medium schools was not one sided. No one wanted to create an "Elit" class among the natives who would be a great help in the administration and who would be able to impart English culture to the natives, but at the same time they wanted to streamline & restructure the existing school education in the country. There were "Pathshalas," "tols" and "Madrasas" which were run in a primitive fashion.

In the province of British Bengal, the picture was different. Here the emphasis was given on Bengali (With the publication of first Bengali dictionary by William Carey) and on English both. Bengali was a fairly developed and a rich language spoken and written by a large number of people. It was side by side with English medium schools. Bengali medium schools were running

at that time onward, till today English medium schools are running and a large number of students go to the English medium schools now. After the departure of the British in 1947, the sentiment was against English Language. It was momentarily but this did not affect the English language in the English medium schools. The reason is that good knowledge of English is needed in every field and it was not possible to get a good job without a fair knowledge of English language.

After the setback to English medium school was

in 1972 when Bangladesh became independent. The anti English sentiment was so strong that in a few years English language was discarded. The patriotic sentiments were rising against any English. This went on for a few years from 1972 but the sentiment did not continue long in the field of practical needs. English which was compulsory in the degree level was scrapped. But this has had an untoward effect as a large number of graduates were being produced without any knowledge of English.

This affected the school education considerably as the students were none to teach English.

Thus from 1972 or so again emphasis is being given on English education and a large number of Kindergarten, M.E. H.E. schools were established with English as the medium of instruction. This is a good sign.

Whatever may be said to the contrary it must be accepted that the purpose of education is enlightenment and enlightenment means knowledge of the environment and people which can only be achieved by a language which is universal. In this regard the claim of English language is foremost as a world language.

There is a hidden doubt in the minds of the critics that English medium schools will ruin the young minds as it will inculcate foreign ideas into the young people. I do not believe in this because language is only an instrument and the idea is inborn so if the idea is well imbedded in the young mind, language cannot impair it.

For this, religion, should form a part of the curriculum in the English medium schools and this alone will resist the onrush of foreign ideas.

For an English medium school we need good teachers, efficient in English, preferably Motessori and Kindergarten trained with broad outlook on life and Education.

I notice only one defect and that is the establishment of English medium schools has created a big hiatus between village Bengali medium schools and city schools. This is an obvious defect. Many guardians, just as a lip service, prefer English medium schools for their own children and village Bengali medium schools for others' children. This is the result of ignorance and half learning. It can be removed only by a compact and uniform syllabus for all the existing schools in the country. This is done in U.K. All schools in U.K. have basically one general course of study for all. This will dispell the wrong idea and none will think one is getting the blessing of education more than the other. Because good education is the