"Our grasp of the English language needs to be emphasized because it is the English language that holds the key to our comprehension of the applied literature in English. We are fumbling in our pockets for this key today. If we do not recover it in good time, we may lose it for ever."

—V.K. Gokak

It was natural for a nation striving to discover its identity after political independence that the place of the language of the former rulers in the new education system it desired to evolve was reviewed. It speaks well of the nation's maturity that the review took into account the usefulness of that language as a tool to keep one in touch with the treasures of knowledge mankind has acquired and the new finds added to them every day. Slowly but unmistakably, it came to be accepted by the elite that the teaching of English ought not to be completely discarded if education had to be true to its meaning in the context of the modern times.

SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

A consensus among the elite has trickled round the view that, inspired by language fanaticism and blinded by shortsightedness, we should not 'like the base Indian' throw 'a pearl away', that we should not deny our
students an opportunity to have, through a skilful use of a language, access to the highest realms of knowledge.

There is also agreement among the educated on the view that there should be a shift in the emphasis now in teaching English. In learning, the use of a foreign language as a medium of expression has been considered 'educationally unsound'. Reading has come to be regarded as the most useful of the four language skills as far as the teaching of English in India is concerned.

That the advocates of the cause of English teaching in India have in mind a very utilitarian goal of giving students proficiency in reading comprehension in that language is easily perceptible in the public utterances and writings of nation's leaders and educators, in the discussions at seminars and conferences, and in the deliberations and recommendations of education commissions, committees and study groups appointed from time to time.

Views of Individuals:

The views of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who was highly influential in important policy making decisions in all spheres of national activity, especially during the first decade of
independence, are widely known. He ruled out English as 'the principal medium of Education in India' and at the same time recognized the need to know English as one of the important foreign languages capable of keeping us in tune with the fast developing world so that ultimately we, as a nation, could survive. In his view, English language had a part to play in the industrialization of the country by training competent man-power it needed. Recognizing the limited role English had to play he said, "It is of course not necessary or possible for everybody in India to know English. But a very large number should know it in two ways. One is fully adequate knowledge of the language. The other is to be able to read books and periodicals in it without perhaps being able to speak it easily" (Nehru, p.425).

V.K. Gokak, former Director of the Central Institute of English, thinks along the same lines. In his book 'English in India' he alludes to the western society 'brought up on technology'. Pointing out that the problems of that society and their possible solutions will be interesting as well as instructive to a country like ours which has just struggled towards the take off period in industrialization', he proceeds to say, "The contemporary literature of (Great Britain, Europe and the United States necessarily reflects
these new pressures and problems and we cannot afford to cut ourselves off from an awareness of what may be our own future in the coming years" (Gokak, p. 4).

Even when a regional language becomes the medium of instruction and Hindi the sole official language, Gokak observes, a student "will have to study English as a compulsory second language, if not for purposes of expression, at least for the sake of comprehension. This is the only way in which we can keep in touch with world thought on any subject " (Gokak, p. 61).

It is interesting to note that visualizing clearly the new goal English is expected to reach now was rather difficult for individuals brought up in an environment where English was the medium of not only receiving ideas and feelings but also of imparting them. This, perhaps, explains why Gokak is sounds hesitant and apologetic when he talks of the new role English has to play. English will have to be studied, he says, " If not for purposes of expression, AT LEAST for the sake of comprehension ". Nehru, similarly, suggests that one way of knowing the language now is " to be able to read books and periodicals in it without PERHAPS being able to speak it easily ".

Views of Education Commissions and Various Committees:

The perception of the new goal by different education commissions appointed by the Ministry of Education,
Government of India, appears to be clearer. This is borne out by the unequivocal terms in which, by and large, they have described the goal - to teach English with the main emphasis on the reading skill.

The report of the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) expresses its 'conviction' that "if a language is to be learnt, it should be studied so as to use it effectively and with correctness in written or spoken form" (p.70). On the other hand it says, "If at this stage, foundations are laid for reading with comprehension, interest will carry the student, in later life, as far as he cares to go." It disfavours adoption of 'very ambitious aims' like literary appreciation and writing on abstract themes at this stage (p.99).

The statements of the Report concerning effectiveness and correctness in the written or spoken form and foundations for reading with comprehension need not be thought of as in conflict with the new goal of English teaching stated earlier. No language skill can be taught in isolation; language skills are inter-related. At the preliminary stage, therefore, it is a sound policy to familiarize learners with all the four language skills and, at an advanced stage, to train them in the skill they need to use most.
Whereas the Secondary Education Commission, while it examines the problem of English teaching in schools, keeps in view the super-structure that is intended to be built later on on the base that is provided here, the University Education Commission (1948-49) as also the Education Commission (1964-66), as if takes for granted the soundness of the base provided earlier and describes what the super-structure should be like.

The Report of the University Education Commission (1948-49) recommends:

Out students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to a university or to a 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 facility and understanding works of English authors.

The paragraph concludes:

... We must take into account our Yugdharm. A sense of the oneness of the world is in the making and control over a medium of expression which is more widespread and has a larger reach than any of our languages today will be of immense benefit to us.

(p.325)

As a medium of acquiring knowledge, English is deemed useful to all university students and, therefore,
reading is singled out for emphasis in relation to the teaching of English at the university stage. The Report does not, at the same time, lose sight of the fact that, though for a small number, English by virtue of being comprehensible to a large population of the world, is important also as a medium of expression.

The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) has this to say about the place of English in University curricula:

"English, as an important 'library language' would play a vital role in higher education. No student should be considered as qualified for a degree, in particular, a master's degree, unless he has acquired a reasonable proficiency in English (or in some other library language)."

(p. 292)

The English Review Committee appointed by the university grants commission in 1964 suggested that "in universities where English is not the medium of instruction the aim should be to develop the reading comprehension, whereas in universities which have English as the medium of instruction the aim should be to develop also the skills of writing and speaking" (p. 33). It is a very practical proposition. The committee also gave a few details regarding the courses to be followed in the light of its recommendations.
The Report of the Study Group (1971) appointed by the Ministry of Education and Youth Services is the latest treatise on the teaching of English in India. It is characterized by a comprehensive view of the scene obtaining in the country in relation to the teaching of English, an attempt to give detailed, need-based syllabuses for various English courses and an awareness of the ultimate objective of teaching English in the country today.

The shift in the emphasis by now is complete. The Report of the Study Group shows that the group took cognizance of the need to have a syllabus of English for colleges where English is the medium of instruction or for students who wish to study English literature, but found it obligatory in its approach to the subject it examined, to accept as one of the assumptions "the need to use English as a 'library language' in higher education" (p.3).

The group, in its Report, gives details of the numerous confounding changes in the policy of English teaching in various states and cannot help expressing the fear that in some parts of the country English is on its way out. It says,
The upshot of all these changes, and several others that are becoming known with the passage of time, is that very soon, in certain parts of India, the college entrant will know no English, not even its alphabet.

(p. 6)

Mass education created a situation which was far from desirable for English teaching in the classroom. It brought into the classroom students who had no opportunity of using English outside it on the one hand, and poorly equipped teachers to teach that language, on the other.

The group is of the view that students acquire 'bad English or no English' at school, so "the teaching of English at the university presents an entirely new set of problems" (p. 7).

Referring to the changes in the policy and the situation adversely affecting the teaching of English, the group says:

Cumulatively these changes have produced a situation which causes great concern and which, if left to itself, will result in a further lowering of the standards of English and of education as a whole.

(p. 7)
The study group, with the aid of the Central Institute of English, does a very useful work of suggesting a number of programmes in its Report. Three different but related demands were, the group observes, considered in framing the programmes:

(a) the changing conditions and the need to answer the problems created thereby
(b) the role of English as a 'source' language
(c) the place of English as a 'link' with the outside world for the acquisition of knowledge. (p.9)

GAP BETWEEN AIDS AND PRACTICE

The philosophy of English teaching that has gradually crystallized is based on a very sound, practical approach to the problem. One regrets to see, however, that the nation has yet to fully understand its implications and to translate it into practice. There is a wide gap between the aims and practice of English teaching in our country.

Treatises on the new philosophy of English teaching are, one might fear, more than enough. Programmes based on it have not yet seen the light of the day. Those responsible for the pattern of English teaching in various parts of the country have yet to muster up determination to be at working out the practical implications of this
philosophy, preparing course designs for respective levels and getting them tried out in the classroom.

In anticipation, giving teachers specialized training in foreign language teaching should have received serious attention by now. A few teachers, indeed, get themselves trained in language institutes, but universities, on their part, do not appear to be thinking in terms of the requirement of a minimum number of such trained teachers.

The English Review Committee and the Study Group (1971) have taken note of this inertia that has gripped the bodies of universities responsible for English teaching. The English Review Committee observed that most of the universities accepted the U.G.C. conclusions but "do nothing about them" (p.42). The Study Group (1971) pointed out that the recommendations of the Study Group (1964) had not been implemented (p. 2-3).

In his welcome address to the Eighth Annual Conference of English Language Teaching Institutes at Hyderabad, Dr. Ramesh Mohan, Director of The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, observed that in most of our university departments of English and Education there was much inertia and apathy, resistance to experiment and change, inclination to keep
to the easy, beaten track, to the utter disregard of 'hungry sheep' which 'look up and are not fed'. Dr. Ramesh Mohan has described the malaise in such a telling way that little needs to be added to what he has said.

The inertia of the university departments of English and Education alone is not responsible for keeping the hungry sheep unfed. Various basic policy decisions made by state governments with regard to English teaching in their respective states betray blissful ignorance of the views of Education Commissions, Study Groups and the English Review Committee. In many cases, they are made to suit the vagaries and unscientific beliefs of the administrators.

GUJARAT, A CASE STUDY

Gujarat provides an ideal case study to measure the gap that exists between the professed aims of teaching English in our country and the actual practice of teaching it.

English is taught as a compulsory subject in Gujarat for four years in schools, from grades VIII to XI, and as an optional subject in Standards V, VI, and VII. The official policy disfavors introducing English at the primary stage. In a number of states English is taught for six years which is in keeping with the
recommendation of U.G.C. Committees. Over half a dozen states, indeed, teach it for eight years and Maharashtra teaches it for seven years.

English is 'intensively' taught in the schools in Gujarat, it is claimed, by way of allotting to it as many as twelve periods per week to make up the loss in the time of its teaching. This is an interesting experiment and its outcome could be very instructive. The Government of Gujarat appointed a committee in 1960 to study the outcome of the experiment but for mysterious reasons the findings have not yet been disclosed. In the meantime, the 'experiment' continues - despite its failure, one might add, judging by the poor proficiency of college-entrants in basic language skills.

The language is voluntarily studied by the students of Standard V to VII in many schools. Keeping the quantum of learning the same, two separate courses for the two streams - one comprising students who wish to learn English for four years and the other comprising those who wish to learn it for seven years - have, now, been introduced.

The product of a hesitant and immature policy is passed on from the school stage to the college stage and the situation goes from bad to worse. There is a striking lack of co-ordination between the teaching
of English at the school level and that at the college level. It is not found necessary for example, to ascertain the linguistic attainment of college-entrants before preparing courses for them.

It is also not found necessary to determine the number and nature of lexical and other items to be taught here. In some cases, co-ordination between two proximate levels is not noticeable at the college stage. You might find unadapted text-book material prescribed for lower level and adapted material for a higher level.

Such an untidy strategy is designed to meet a highly complicated situation at the college level.

College-entrants are uniformly unfriendly with the language of the former rulers - irrespective of whether they have spent four or seven years in trying to come to terms with it. To make the situation more challenging in some cases, there are now in the arena those who did not succeed in wrestling with the antagonist in the first round (school stage) but aspire to knock it down in the second (college stage).

An awareness of the lack of achievement despite efforts, created by the absence of a sound foreign language teaching system, renders the very motivation to learn that language weak. There are enough factors
to weaken it further. The Gujarat University and the South Gujarat University, for example, admit for their graduate courses students who do not offer or fail in English at the S.S.C. stage. Though all universities take into account marks in English in giving students a grade, one or two of them are known to have experimented with the idea of not doing so. (Relevant information given in this paragraph was obtained through a Data Blank - Appendix A.)

Left to poor or no proficiency of the learner on the one hand, and his very weak motivation on the other to contend with, the teacher of English finds his experience of teaching Compulsory English to students offering their mother tongue as the medium of learning, generally wasteful and at times irritating. His experience of teaching it in an English medium class is not that of unmixed pleasure, either. For, in addition to the students who did their entire schooling through English medium, the representatives of the abovementioned groups are also here. English is the principal medium of instruction only in the M.S. University, Baroda; but even in other universities, quite a number of students opt for English as their medium of learning.

The position of English in schools and colleges tells on the teachers' linguistic equipment and teaching methods. A few teachers, thanks to their upbringing,
might have been able to receive their complete education through English as the medium of instruction. But a large majority of the teachers studied English as a compulsory subject at school only for four years. After spending a few more years at college, even yet struggling for a year or two to come to terms with the basic language skills and then for a few years trying to be familiar with the literature in that language, they are now in schools and are supposed to teach students basic language skills, or in colleges and are supposed to teach an 'advanced' course in English, now language-oriented. To make matters worse, there are teachers of English at school who did not do their B.A. with English. The B.Ed. course does the school teachers a little good; but, what with the swarming classrooms and the self-defeating course designs, the untrained college teacher is at a loss to see his way through.

WELCOME DEVELOPMENTS

All is not wrong in the state of Gujarat or for that matter the whole country. A number of developments and activities in the field of English teaching hearten one who has the cause of education at heart. Syllabuses of English at the college stage are gradually being revised and language orientation is pronouncedly there in the new courses. Course-designers have been slowly
but steadily, though perhaps reluctantly, giving up their fascination for literature, and literature only, in favour of language. Introduction of linguistics at the M.A. level is also a welcome step.

Another welcome development is the organization of summer Institutes in English. These institutes, guided by the CIEFL, Hyderabad, go a long way in creating an awareness among the teacher-participants of the typical problems they are facing, of the necessity on their part to grapple with the ways of resolving these problems as also to keep themselves in touch with the modern theories of foreign language teaching and to equip themselves reasonably satisfactorily.

The CIEFL has so far trained as many as twenty five teachers from Gujarat. Though it would be ideal if every teacher of English were trained at the CIEFL, to have had twenty five teachers so trained is promising enough.

The Study group lauded in its Report 'the key role in both high level specialist training and in research, especially need-based applied research' of the CIEFL (p.31). Year after year, research fellows at the institute have been investigating such useful problems as the vocabulary resources of Pre-University students or those of the third-year degree students,
translation problems and so on. Text-books, especially school text-books, prepared by it and published by the NCERT are increasingly being used throughout the country.

The H.M. Patel Institute of English, Vallabh Vidyanagar has been doing useful job in training English teachers from schools. There is the welcome news that an institute of foreign languages is about to be set up in Gujarat.

These and other similar developments and activities provide a ray of hope for a successful teaching of English as a useful foreign language in this country. They are certainly going to get strengthened year by year because only they can lead us to a situation capable of meeting the requirements of the 'consumers' of English to their full satisfaction.