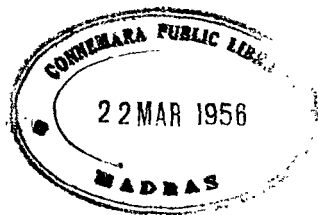


MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

By
M. K. GANDHI

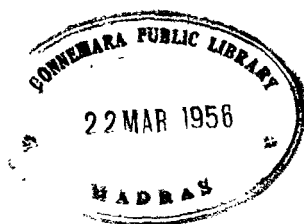
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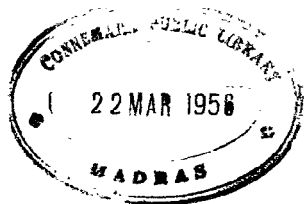
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Drawing on his own experience, Gandhiji was convinced that education could not adequately fulfil its function of developing the powers of the child and of enabling him to contribute fully to the life of the community to which he belonged, unless it was imparted through the medium of his mother-tongue. A logical consequence of this was that all those with the same mother-tongue should constitute a political unit. Only thus, Gandhiji felt, the greatest development of the various parts of our country could take place. For the convenience of the reader we are separating the matter relating to medium of instruction and publishing it in this pamphlet, and are devoting another pamphlet to Gandhiji's statements on the subject of linguistic provinces.

Bombay, 20-6-'54

Bharatan Kumarappa



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MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION



MY OWN EXPERIENCE

Let me give a chapter from my own experience. Up to the age of 12 all the knowledge I gained was through Gujarati, my mother-tongue. I knew then something of Arithmetic, History and Geography. Then I entered a High School. For the first three years the mother-tongue was still the medium. But the schoolmaster's business was to drive English into the pupil's head. Therefore more than half of our time was given to learning English, and mastering its arbitrary spelling and pronunciation. It was not pronounced as it was written. It was a strange experience to have to learn the spelling by heart. But that is by the way, and irrelevant to my argument. However, for the first three years, it was comparatively plain sailing.

The pillory began with the fourth year. Everything had to be learnt through English — Geometry, Algebra, Chemistry, Astronomy, History, Geography. The tyranny of English was so great that even Sanskrit or Persian had to be learnt through English, not through the mother-tongue. If any boy spoke in the class in Gujarati which he understood, he was punished. It did not matter to the teacher if a boy spoke bad English which he could neither pronounce correctly nor understand fully. Why should the teacher worry? His own English was by no means without blemish. It could not be otherwise. English was as much a foreign language to him as to his pupils. The result was chaos. We the boys had to learn many things by heart, though we could not understand them fully and often not at all. My head used to reel as the teacher was struggling to make his exposition on Geometry understood by us. I could make neither head nor tail of Geometry till we reached the 13th theorem of the first book of Euclid. And let me confess to the reader that

in spite of all my love for the mother-tongue, I do not to this day know the Gujarati equivalents of the technical terms of Geometry, Algebra and the like. I know now that what I took four years to learn of Arithmetic, Geometry, Algebra, Chemistry and Astronomy, I should have learnt easily in one year, if I had not to learn them through English but Gujarati. My grasp of the subjects would have been easier and clearer. My Gujarati vocabulary would have been richer. I would have made use of such knowledge in my own home. This English medium created an impassable barrier between me and the members of my family, who had not gone through English schools. My father knew nothing of what I was doing. I could not, even if I had wished it, interest my father in what I was learning. For though he had ample intelligence, he knew not a word of English. I was fast becoming a stranger in my own home. I certainly became a superior person. Even my dress began to undergo imperceptible changes. What happened to me was not an uncommon experience. It was common to the majority.

The first three years in the High School made little addition to my stock of general knowledge. They were a preparation for fitting the boys for teaching them everything through English. High Schools were schools for cultural conquest by the English. The knowledge gained by the three hundred boys of my High School became a circumscribed possession. It was not for transmission to the masses.

A word about literature. We had to learn several books of English prose and English poetry. No doubt all this was nice. But that knowledge has been of no use to me in serving or bringing me in touch with the masses. I am unable to say that if I had not learnt what I did of English prose and poetry, I should have missed a rare treasure. If I had, instead, passed those precious seven years in mastering Gujarati and had learnt Mathematics, Science, Sanskrit and other subjects through Gujarati, I could easily have shared the knowledge so gained with my

neighbours. I would have enriched Gujarati, and who can say that I would not have, with my habit of application and my inordinate love for the country and the mother-tongue, made a richer and greater contribution to the service of the masses ?

I must not be understood to decry English or its noble literature. The columns of the *Harijan* are sufficient evidence of my love of English. But the nobility of its literature cannot avail the Indian nation any more than the temperate climate or the scenery of England can avail her. India has to flourish in her own climate, and scenery, and her own literature, even though all the three may be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. We and our children must build on our own heritage. If we borrow another we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language, and for that matter the other languages of the world, through its own vernaculars. I do not need to learn Bengali in order to know the beauties of Rabindranath's matchless productions. I get them through good translations. Gujarati boys and girls do not need to learn Russian to appreciate Tolstoy's short stories. They learn them through good translations. It is the boast of Englishmen that the best of the world's literary output is in the hands of that nation in simple English inside of a week of its publication. Why need I learn English to get at the best of what Shakespeare and Milton thought and wrote ?

It would be good economy to set apart a class of students whose business would be to learn the best of what is to be learnt in the different languages of the world and give the translation in the vernaculars. Our masters chose the wrong way for us, and habit has made the wrong appear as right.

I find daily proof of the increasing and continuing wrong being done to the millions by our false de-India-nizing education. These graduates who are my valued associates themselves flounder when they have to give

expression to their innermost thoughts. They are strangers in their own homes. Their vocabulary in the mother-tongue is so limited that they cannot always finish their speech without having recourse to English words and even sentences. Nor can they exist without English books. They often write to one another in English. I cite the case of my companions to show how deep the evil has gone. For we have made a conscious effort to mend ourselves.

It has been argued that the wastage that occurs in our colleges need not worry us if, out of the collegians, one Jagadish Bose can be produced by them. I should freely subscribe to the argument, if the wastage was unavoidable. I hope I have shown that it was and is even now avoidable. Moreover the creation of a Bose does not help the argument. For Bose was not a product of the present education. He rose inspite of the terrible handicaps under which he had to labour. And his knowledge became almost intransmissible to the masses. We seem to have come to think that no one can hope to be like a Bose unless he knows English. I cannot conceive a grosser superstition than this. No Japanese feels so helpless as we seem to do.

The medium of instruction should be altered at once and at any cost, the provincial languages being given their rightful place. I would prefer temporary chaos in higher education to the criminal waste that is daily accumulating.

In order to enhance the status and the market-value of the provincial languages, I would have the language of the law courts to be the language of the province where the court is situated. The proceedings of the provincial legislatures must be in the language, or even the languages of the province where a province has more than one language within its borders. I suggest to the legislators that they could, by enough application, inside of a month, understand the languages of their provinces. There is nothing to prevent a Tamilian from easily learning the simple grammar and a few hundred words of Telugu, Malayalam, and Kanarese all allied to Tamil. At the Centre Hindustani must rule supreme.

In my opinion this is not a question to be decided by academicians. They cannot decide through what language the boys and girls of a place are to be educated. That question is already decided for them in every free country. Nor can they decide the subjects to be taught. That depends upon the wants of the country to which they belong. Theirs is a privilege of enforcing the nation's will in the best manner possible. When this country becomes really free, the question of medium will be settled only one way. The academicians will frame the syllabus and prepare text-books accordingly. And the products of the education of a free India will answer the requirements of the country as today they answer those of the foreign ruler. So long as we the educated classes play with this question, I very much fear we shall not produce the free and healthy India of our dreams. We have to grow by strenuous effort out of our bondage, whether it is educational, economical, social or political. The effort itself is three-fourths of the battle.

Harijan, 9-7-'38

2

EFFECT OF FOREIGN MEDIUM ON CHILDREN

I am certain that the children of the nation that receive instruction in a tongue other than their own commit suicide. It robs them of their birthright. A foreign medium means an undue strain upon the youngsters, it robs them of all originality. It stunts their growth and isolates them from their home. I regard therefore such a thing as a national tragedy of the first importance.

With Gandhiji in Ceylon, p. 106

The foreign medium has caused brain fag, put an undue strain upon the nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and thought, and disabled them for filtrating their learning to the family or the masses. The foreign medium

has made our children practically foreigners in their own land. It is the greatest tragedy of the existing system. The foreign medium has prevented the growth of our vernaculars. If I had the powers of a despot, I would today stop the tuition of our boys and girls through a foreign medium, and require all the teachers and professors on pain of dismissal to introduce the change forthwith. I would not wait for the preparation of text-books. They will follow the change. It is an evil that needs a summary remedy.

Young India, 1-9-'21

To inflict English on children is to stunt their natural growth and perhaps to kill originality in them. Learning of a language is primarily a training in developing memory. Learning of English from the beginning is an unnecessary tax on a child. He can only learn it at the expense of the mother-tongue. I hold it to be as necessary for the urban child as for the rural to have the foundation of his development laid on the solid work of the mother-tongue. It is only in unfortunate India that such an obvious proposition needs to be proved.

Harijan, 9-9-'39

I have no doubt whatsoever that if those who have the education of the youth in their hands will but make up their minds they will discover that the mother-tongue is as natural for the development of the man's mind as mother's milk is for the development of the infant's body. How can it be otherwise? The babe takes its first lesson from its mother. I, therefore, regard it as a sin against the motherland to inflict upon her children a tongue other than their mother's for their mental development.

18-3-'42

[From Gandhiji's Foreword to *Medium of Instruction* by S. N. Agarwal, Kitabistan, Allahabad.]

ENGLISH v. THE MOTHER-TONGUE

(English is a language of international commerce, it is the language of diplomacy, and it contains many a rich literary treasure, it gives us an introduction to Western thought and culture. For a few of us, therefore, a knowledge of English is necessary. They can carry on the departments of national commerce and international diplomacy, and for giving to the nation the best of Western literature, thought and science. That would be the legitimate use of English, whereas today English has usurped the dearest place in our hearts and dethroned our mother-tongues. It is an unnatural place due to our unequal relations with Englishmen. (The highest development of the Indian mind must be possible without a knowledge of English.) It is doing violence to the manhood and specially the womanhood of India to encourage our boys and girls to think that an entry into the best society is impossible without a knowledge of English. It is too humiliating a thought to be bearable. To get rid of the infatuation for English is one of the essentials of Swaraj.)

Young India, 2-2-'21

It is my considered opinion that English education in the manner it has been given has emasculated the English-educated Indian, it has put a severe strain upon the Indian students' nervous energy, and has made of us imitators.) The process of displacing the vernacular has been one of the saddest chapters in the British connection. Rammohan Roy would have been a greater reformer, and Lokamanya Tilak would have been a greater scholar, if they had not to start with the handicap of having to think in English and transmit their thoughts chiefly in English. Their effect on their own people, marvellous as it was, would have been greater if they had been brought up under a less unnatural system. No doubt they both gained from their knowledge of the rich treasures of English literature.

But these should have been accessible to them through their own vernaculars. No country can become a nation by producing a race of imitators.

Young India, 27-4-'21

(I must cling to my mother-tongue as to my mother's breast, in spite of its shortcomings. It alone can give me the life-giving milk.) I love the English tongue in its own place, but I am its inveterate opponent, if it usurps a place which does not belong to it. English is today admittedly the world language. I would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the school but in the university course. That can only be for the select few — not for the millions. Today when we have not the means to introduce even free compulsory primary education, how can we make provision for teaching English? Russia has achieved all her scientific progress without English. It is our mental slavery that makes us feel that we cannot do without English. I can never subscribe to that defeatist creed.)

Harijan, 25-8-'46

4

JAPAN'S EXAMPLE

You know what has happened in Japan. The thousands of boys and girls in the Japanese schools and colleges receive their education not through the medium of English but through Japanese. Their script is difficult, but it is no bar to their learning it and they have not given it up in preference to the Roman. Not that they boycott English and other European languages. But they economize their energy. Those who need to learn them do so for enriching the Japanese thought with knowledge which the West alone can give. They take care to turn into Japanese all that is worth taking from the West. That is because the mind of Japan's youth is fresh and alert. The knowledge gained thus has become national property.

Harijan, 1-2-'42

The rapid progress (of the Japanese) was due to the restriction of the learning of the Western mode to a select few and using them for transmission of the new knowledge among the Japanese through their own mother-tongue. Surely it is easy enough to understand that the Japanese could never have adapted themselves to the new mode, if they had had to do so through a foreign medium.

Sevagram, 27-1-'42

Harijan, 1-2-'42

5

NEED FOR QUICK ACTION

If the medium is changed at once and not gradually in an incredibly short time, we shall find text-books and teachers coming into being to supply the want. And if we mean business, in a year's time we shall find that we need never have been party to the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy in trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium. The condition of success is undoubtedly that provincial languages are introduced at once in Government offices and courts, if the Provincial Governments have the power or the influence over the courts. If we believe in the necessity of the reform, we can achieve it in no time.

Harijan, 30-7-'38

Gandhiji deprecated the suggestion that it would need a lot of research and preparation to enable them to impart technical education through the medium of the mother-tongue. Those who argued like that, were unaware of the rich treasure of expressions and idioms that were buried in the dialects of our villages. In Gandhiji's opinion there was no need to go to Sanskrit or Persian in search of new terms. He had been in Champaran and he found that the village folk there could fully express themselves with ease and without the help of a single foreign expression or

idiom. As an illustration of their resourcefulness, he mentioned the word *hava-gadi** which they had coined to denote a motor car. He challenged university scholars to coin a more poetic expression than that for a motor car.

Harian. 18-8-'46

6

HIGHER EDUCATION

I am hoping that this University † will see to it that the youths who come to it will receive their instruction through the medium of their vernaculars. Our language is the reflection of ourselves, and if you tell me that our languages are too poor to express the best thought, then I say that the sooner we are wiped out of existence the better for us. Is there a man who dreams that English can ever become the national language of India? (Cries of 'Never'). Why this handicap on the nation? Just consider for one moment what an unequal race our lads have to run with every English lad. I had the privilege of a close conversation with some Poona professors. They assured me that every Indian youth, because he reaches his knowledge through the English language, lost at least six precious years of life. Multiply that by the number of students turned out by our schools and colleges and find out for yourselves how many thousand years have been lost to the nation. The charge against us is, that we have no initiative. How can we have any if we are to devote the precious years of our life to the mastery of a foreign tongue? We fail in this attempt also. . . . I have heard it said that after all it is English-educated India which is leading and which is doing everything for the nation. It would be monstrous if it were otherwise. The only education we receive is English education. Surely we must

* Literally air-carriage, meaning a carriage which travels at the speed of air.

† Banaras Hindu University.

show something for it. But suppose that we had been receiving during the past fifty years education through our vernaculars, what should we have today? We should have today a free India, we should have our educated men, not as if they were foreigners in their own land, but speaking to the heart of the nation; they would be working amongst the poorest of the poor, and whatever they would have gained during the past fifty years would be a heritage for the nation (Applause). Today even our wives are not sharers of our best thought. Look at Professor Bose and Professor Ray and their brilliant researches. Is it not a shame that their researches are not the common property of the masses?

Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 318-20; 4-2-16

But for the fact that the only higher education, the only education worth the name has been received by us through the English medium, there would be no need to prove such a self-evident proposition that the youth of a nation to remain a nation must receive all instruction including the highest in its own vernacular or vernaculars. Surely, it is a self-demonstrated proposition that the youth of a nation cannot keep or establish a living contact with the masses unless their knowledge is received and assimilated through a medium understood by the people. Who can calculate the immeasurable loss sustained by the nation owing to thousands of its young men having been obliged to waste years in mastering a foreign language and its idiom, of which in their daily life they have the least use and in learning which they had to neglect their own mother-tongue and their own literature? There never was a greater superstition than that a particular language can be incapable of expansion or of expressing abstruse or scientific ideas. A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers.

Among the many evils of foreign rule this blighting imposition of a foreign medium upon the youth of the country will be counted by history as one of the greatest. It has sapped the energy of the nation, it has shortened

the lives of the pupils, it has estranged them from the masses, it has made education unnecessarily expensive. If this process is still persisted in, it bids fair to rob the nation of its soul. The sooner therefore educated India shakes itself free from the hypnotic spell of the foreign medium, the better it would be for them and the people.

Young India, 5-7-'28

7

LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITIES

There seems to be a mania for establishing new universities in the provinces. Gujarat wants one for Gujarati, Maharashtra for Marathi, Carnatic for Kannad, Orissa for Oriya, Assam for Assami and what not. I do believe that there should be such universities if these rich provincial languages and the people who speak them are to attain their full height.

At the same time I fear that we betray ourselves into undue haste in accomplishing the object. The first step should be linguistic political redistribution of provinces. Their separate administration will naturally lead to the establishment of universities where there are none.

There should be a proper background for new universities. They should have feeders in the shape of schools and colleges which will impart instruction through the medium of their respective provincial languages. Then only can there be a proper milieu. University is at the top. A majestic top can only be sustained if there is a sound foundation.

Harijan, 2-11-'47

THE ROMAN SCRIPT

Believers in the Roman script in the place of all the known Indian scripts will have a circle of adherents but the movement cannot permeate the masses. It should not. Crores of people need not become so lazy as not to learn their own respective scripts. A laudable attempt is being made not to replace the alphabets in vogue in India but to teach Nagari in addition in the hope that in course of time millions may learn to read the Indian languages in the Nagari character. And since Urdu characters cannot for well-known reasons be replaced by Nagari, it should be learnt by all the patriots who love their country too well to find the learning of the Urdu alphabet a burden. All these attempts seem to me to be worthy.

With all my readiness to grasp new ideas, I have failed to find a substantial reason for inducing the spread of the Roman alphabet for the purpose of replacing the Nagari or Urdu scripts. It is true that in the Indian Army the Roman alphabet has been largely used. I should hope that the Indian soldier, if he is saturated with the national spirit, will not mind learning both Nagari and Urdu characters. After all, amid the ocean of Indian humanity, the Indian soldier is a mere drop. He must shed the English mode. Probably the reason for romanizing Urdu will be found in the English officer being too lazy to learn to read Urdu or Nagari characters.

Harijan, 21-4-'46

Shri S. A. Ayer of the Azad Hind Government came to discuss with Gandhiji the other day the question of issuing a news bulletin in Roman script for the I.N.A., as proposed by the Central I.N.A. Relief Committee. "The Committee are not enamoured of the Roman script," he observed. "They have accepted it only as a temporary expedient. Otherwise we shall have to print it in three different scripts — Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and that would

mean a lot of expenditure. Moreover it would only be a continuation of the old tradition," he added. "The men had got used to the Roman script while they were in the Indian Army and so retained it when they were operating in S. E. Asia." "You forget," replied Gandhiji, "that you are not working in S. E. Asia today, but in India. May I ask if these men ever write to their wives and children in the Roman script?"

"Never," replied Shri Ayer. "They write one and all in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil or any of the other Indian scripts."

"This means," remarked Gandhiji, "that they all know one or the other Indian script. I could understand your wanting to adopt Roman script as a temporary makeshift if we had no script of our own. But to adopt Roman script for Hindustani which has got two acknowledged scripts is only a sign of the psychological conquest that the English have made over us. In order to conquer the English who had conquered you, you adopted the English garb, i.e. Roman script for your bulletins in S. E. Asia. You should have discarded this symbol of the cultural conquest and insisted on having your bulletin in two Indian scripts rather than in Roman. The latter was primarily adopted for the sake of the British officers and men who had to learn Hindustani in order to rule over us. They solved the difficulty presented by the permutations and combinations of the Urdu alphabet and tempted us by their typewriters, telegraph and printing machines which use Roman script. We succumbed. We may not hark back to the symbol of our cultural conquest when we are out to end India's age-long slavery *in toto*. When you served in the British army it was with the prospect of getting rewards in the form of decorations, comfortable pay and pensions, grants of land etc. But now you don't want such temptations. You serve only for the independence and honour of your country. You do not want the easy way."

Harijan, 5-5-'46

