



PILGRIMAGES, TOURISM AND THE NEED OF ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF NEWASA, SHANI SHINGNAPUR AND SHIRDI

RAVINDRA G. VAIDYA

Assistant Professor & Head

Department of English

New Atrs, Commerce and Science College,

Shevgaon Dist- Ahmednagar, (MS), India

ABSTRACT

Language has been a primary medium of communication and a carrier of information. Being multilingual and multicultural nation variety of dialects is in use in the different regions of India. In the era of globalization cultural exchange across the borders through foreign visits has become a common phenomenon. Multilingual pattern of the country however, is a major barrier in this cultural dialogue. According to a famous proverb, language in the country changes at the distance of every five kilometers. Based on the linguistic pattern, most of the Indians are bilingual. Most of them are competent in their respective mother tongue and Hindi which is one of the official languages of India.

Nationally acknowledged holy places such as Newasa, Shani Shingnapur and Shirdi, located in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra are endowed with great religious and cultural heritage. These places have witnessed growing number of foreign devotees in the last decade. They are naturally very eager to know the cultural and religious importance of the holy places. However, the lack of common medium of communication leaves them disappointed. The present paper explores the opportunities that local graduates of Newasa, Shani Shingnapur and Shirdi could have had they been fluent speakers of English. It also focuses on the prospects of employment that language can bring to the doorsteps of the graduates who have acquired the basic skills of the English language.

Introduction:

India as a nation has been considered a multilingual and multicultural country. Constituent states of the country, however, are monolingual entities. Language was the major criterion while deciding the borders of the states. Tourism and language has been an interconnected phenomenon since the beginning. Maharashtra is one of the leading states in India. It is famous for the pilgrimages such as Shirdi, Shani Shingnapur, Newasa, Pandharpur etc. which



have been attracting foreign as well as out of state devotees since last decade. Such holy tourism at pilgrimages, I believe is not only an act of visiting the particular place but also a process of cultural exchange endowed with faith and curiosity. Holy places are not only the sacred and religious epitomes but also the embodiments of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO in 2003 has started a mission to enlist world's rare cultural heritage. Nationally acknowledged pilgrimages in Maharashtra: Shirdi, Shani Shingnapur and Newasa are enriched with cultural as well as historical heritage. The details of every cultural, historical, and religious activity in these places is available in vernacular language i.e. Marathi. Marathi versions of anecdotes related to the life of Shani Dev, Saint Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, and Saibaba of Shirdi are available. The out of state as well as foreign devotees, despite their desires, due to lack of common medium of communication, do not get information about them. Such pilgrimages need to have bilingual or multilingual individuals who can speak English language, which have become world's most important language of wider communication as the result of British colonial power in the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century and the leadership of the US in 20th century. It has also become main language of popular culture and globalization.

Language and multilingualism

Language is a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice, sounds, gestures or written symbols. It is used as the medium of communication. For successful completion of the cycle of communication common medium is necessary. Our understanding of the existing world depends upon the language. As Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure states that "*Language constitute our world, it doesn't just record it or label it.*" Therefore, in order to understand the world we need to be multilingual. According to Ethnologue (Gordon 2005, www.ethnologue.com) there are 6,912 languages in the world today, but some of the languages included are just considered varieties or dialects in other accounts.

Multilingualism is an ability either of an individual speaker or a community of speakers to use multiple languages. The world we live in is rapidly growing into an enormous melting pot and most of us are very aware of the fact that the ability to speak a foreign language has never been as vital as it has been in the 21st century. "*To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration supposed by many; (particularly, perhaps, by people in Europe and North America who speak a big language) it is rather a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today.*" (Edwards 1994). The origin of the need of being multilingual can be stressed back to colonialism. The European countries especially Britain brought large number of nations in Asia and Africa under British Raj. Naturally English speaking officials and population speaking different asian and African languages came into contact with one another. To enhance the communication between two the intellectuals prefer bilingualism or



multilingualism. Apart from colonization, cultural contact among tow civilization, trade across the borders, migration or labor mobility and tourisim along with pilgrimages are the major reasons which forces humans to be multilingual.

Advantages of being Multilingual:

Owing to the easy access of information on any issue by the internet and other means of communication individual's exposure to multiple languages is becoming increasingly frequent. Therefore it is necessary to acquire additional language. Learning a new language offers many new career opportunities. Every language has its distinctive manner of expressing ideas. This peculiar quality benefits to chsange the perspective of a person of seeing the world through different eyes. It helps to make a person versatile. A Multilingual can understand and appreciate literature in the different languages. It gives them dipper knowledge of different ideas and traditions. The person who is competent in foreign language especially English has got wider choices in the job market. Bilinguals or Multilingual can get prosperous careers in various fields such as transport, tourism, administration, translation, law and teaching. It is also considered as a source to development of languages, societies and cultures.

Importance of Learning English and Spread of English

Nowadays multilingualism implies the knowledge of English. It spreads in a way that it is considered "a threat to the linguistic diversity."(Philipson, 1992). The spread of English is motored by the historical or political movements such as imperialism or colonialism. The spread of English has been visualized in terms of three circles, represented by Braj Kachru in 1985, in different parts of the world.

The Inner Circle: Includes the countries that are traditionally considered the bases of English where English is the first language for the majority of the population. It consists of UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

The Outer Circle: Includes those countries where English is not the first language of the majority of the population but English is the second language that is used at the institutional level as the result of colonization. It includes Asian and African countries.

The Expanding Circle: includes those countries where English has no official status and is taught as a foreign language.



The contact of English with other languages of the world has resulted into new non- native varieties of English i.e. Indian English, Nigerian English, etc. English is being learned by many individuals not only as a second language but also a third or fourth language.

Geographical location of the places under discussion:

The pilgrimages under discussion are situated in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, one of the leading states of India. **Newasa** one of the Tehsil of Ahmednagar district is at the center of two metro cities. It is 55 km far from both Aurangabad and Ahmednagar. Newasa is situated on Pune Aurangabad highway at the distance of 200 km. from Pune. It is near about 470 km from the capital of Maharashtra Mumbai. It is well connected by bus and railway as well as Airplane. Nearest railway station is Shrirampur at the distance of 30km. Nearest Airport is Aurangabad.

Shani Shingnapur is a small village in Newasa tehsil. It is about 35 kilometers from Ahmednagar city. Shani Shingnapur is about 160 kilometers northeast of Pune and 84 Kilometers from Aurnagabad. The nearest Airport is at Aurangabad at the distance of 90 kilometers. Nearest railway station is shrirampur. Distance from Mumbai is about 453 Kilometers.

Shirdi is 122km from Nashik. It is the abode of one of Maharashtra's most revered saint Sai Baba. Mumbai Shirdi distance is 296 kms. It is 112 kms, 126 kms and 183 kms far from respectively Nashik, Aurangabad and Pune. Nearest airport and railway station is respectively Aurangabad and Shirdi.

Cultural and Historical importance of the holy places Under Discussion:

Newasa:

Number of sacred scriptures, written long ago such as Dnyaneshwari, Leelacharitra, Eknathi Bhagwat, have references of Newasa in historical and religious context. It was known by different names, according to myths referred in above mentioned scriptures such as: Marathiyechi Nagari, Nivas, Mahalaya, Nidhiwas. Saint Dnyaneshwar famously describes Newasa as

त्रिभुवनैकपवित्र अनादी पंचक्रोश क्षेत्र जेथे जगाचे जीवन सूत्र महालया असे

Meaning one of the sacred places on the earth, where the crater of the world lord Vishnu resided. Perhaps it accommodates India's only temple of Mohini Avatar (incarnation) of lord Vishnu. According to a myth Demons and Gods had 'Samudramanathana (the Churning of Sea)'. Lord Vishnu distributed the Nector of immortality to Gods. Being the God who is endowed with the responsibility of protecting the universe, he had to keep demons with evil



minds away from the nectar, one of the outcomes of sea churning. So lord Vishnu incarnated as Mohini and distributed the Nectar to Gods and wine to demons. Demons Rahu and Ketu, however, suspected Mohini and went to the line of Gods. Mohini had to behead both of them. The town has been worshipping Mohiniraj form the time immemorable. The fare of Mohiniraj is celebrated in the month of Magha (one of the month according to Indian calendar) every year.

Another religious importance of Newasa is Saint shiromani Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. He told Dnyaneshwari and Sacchidanand Baba wrote it down in Newasa. It is a commentary on Bhagvad Gita, popularly known as Bhavarthdipika (Holy Scripture of Hinduism). The huge temple is built around the Pais (Stone Pillar besides which the Dnyaneshwari was written) . It is remarkable to note that it may be, perhaps only temple built for a pillar in the world. Another important feature of Dnyaneshwari is that it is written in Marathi in Devnagari script, which is the language of common people. Previously, knowledge was restricted to those who could read and write Sanskrit, but Dnyaneshwar took a revolutionary step to open the frontiers of knowledge for common people.

In Historical context Archeological and Historical study at *ladmod hill of Newasa* (hill at the town which is said to be drown in the flood) was undertaken. The study reveals its 20,000 years history. During 1954 to 1961 Dr. H.D. Sankliya and his team members had an archeological survey of the place; the study reveals the connection of the place to Harappa Culture of the History.

Shingnapur

It is primarily famous for the fact that no house in the village has doors. There are only door frames. Despite this, no theft is reported in the village. Villagers never keep their valuables under lock and key. The belief that the lord Shani is a “*Jagrut devasthan (ever awakened god)*”, and Shani punishes anyone attempting theft make them to behave in relaxed manner. In January 2011, the United Commercial UCO Bank opened a ‘lockless ‘branch in the village, the first of its kinds in the country. Shani temple at shingnapur houses the deity of lord shani (Lord of planet Sturn). It is however, not a conventional temple architecture, but a single five feet black stone rather than a sculpt, mounted on a raised platform in an open environment. Generally temple has 30- 40 thousand visitors a day, which reaches to around three lakh on the new moon day because new moon days are believed to be most auspicious day to worship Lord Shani.

Myth about Lord Shani



It has been said that this deity self appeared in the form of this black stone which floated along with the flood which happened around 160 years ago in the village and got stuck in a tree around 150 meters away from the village. The stone was then spotted by a local shepherd who then tried to free it from the tree by poking it. To his surprise the stone started bleeding. The boy was frightened; he ran back to the village and brought villagers. They brought the stone with the help of maternal uncle and nephews, as per the instruction of the lord in the dream to devotees. Villagers followed the instructions and laid down the stone on the place where it is today. The shrine gained popularity with the decade old film 'Surya Putra Shanidev' made by the film producer Late Gulshan Kumar.

Shirdi :

It is a pilgrimage hosting a temple of Lord Sai Baba, the secular saint of Maharashtra. Sai Baba of shirdi popularly known as the 'Child of God' preached tolerance towards all religions and the message of universal brotherhood. Sai Baba believed and respected all religions. Sai Baba lived almost for 60 years in Dwarkamayee Masjid. There is also a place called Chavadi where Sai Baba used to visit every alternate night. Gurusthan is the place where Sai Baba used to sit under a neem tree. It is said that the leaves of this tree lost their bitterness with the grace of Sai Baba. After his death Sai Baba's fame spread far and wide. Shirdi witnesses large number of foreign as well as out of state visitors as compared to Newasa and Shani Shingnapur.

Opportunities the language can bring to the doorsteps of Youths at the pilgrimages:

Above mentioned places have one or two senior colleges providing English as a special subject. Maximum 100 students get graduation degrees per year. However, all the students, given to the nature of bookish English being taught, are not fluent speakers of the English language. These graduates face difficulties while earning their livelihood. They are unable to use their education directly for the betterment of their lives. If they concentrate on spoken variety of the English language they can get number of opportunities in this religious environment:

1. **Working as a tourist Guide:** foreign devotees visiting the pilgrimages badly needs the tourist guides who can show them the places of interest as well as can provide substantial amount of cultural and historical importance of the pilgrimages.
2. **Native shopkeepers** who can speak English are liable to earn more money by selling their products to foreign as well as out of state devotees.



3. **Highly learned farmers** can also get the benefit of selling the farm products to out of station devotees. They would find innumerable opportunities to make farming a beneficial business.
4. **Writing about the pilgrimages:** Youths who have acquired basic skills of English language can write about these places in English and sell the booklets to such visitors.
5. **Working in Hotels or Establishing Hotels:** Hoteling business in such places has flourished to a great extent during last decade. So, working in the hotel as a manager or establishing own hotel can be a prominent source of income.
6. **Youths can work as driver:** driver speaking English would have greater opportunities compared to Marathi speaking drivers.

Conclusion:

In the era where multilingualism has become obligatory phenomenon learning English would provide youths living in the holy places number of opportunities for earning their livelihood. In the era where humanities and social science are neglected due to limited prospects of career development, such employability initiatives would help students to earn their bread and butter. In the pretext of rare job opportunities, creating or identifying such job opportunities is noteworthy thing.

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