

Raja Rao's Reflection on English Language in "The Caste of English"

Himanshu A. Srivastava: Lecturer in English, Anand Institute of P.G.Studies in Arts, Anand

Abstract

Raja Rao is a well-known Indian English writer. Raja Rao tries to defend English language and tries to discover the real caste of English language. 21st Century is an age of globalization and English language has emerged as a global language. In India, also people have realized the importance of English language. But the sad reality is that some favour English language while others oppose its popularity. In such a scenario Raja Rao's essay, "The Caste of English" defends English language and recommends English language to be an Indian language.

Raja Rao is better known as the Indian English Novelist of the first generation after independence. He is known for his work like "The Serpent and the Rope", "Kanthapura", "The Ct and the Shakespeare" and collection of short stories like "The Cow of The Barricades And Other Stories" and "The Police And The Rose." The present essay has been written by him in defence of the English language. Raja Rao believes that English has become a universal language and so it is no more the property of English people. It's caste is no more English because it is spoken universally.

He opens the essay by explaining his gratitude to The East India Company which was the company of traders and initially it came to India for business and not for political power. There were many English, French and Dutch employees in that company and the immediate problem was the problem of educating their children in English language. There was not a single school in the country either teaching English as the subject or English as the medium of instruction. So, the company appointed one person named Ralph Orde to find out the possibility of opening such a school which teaches English as a subject and English as a medium of instruction. Ralph Orde submitted positive report and this is how English education began in our country. According to Raja Rao ever since Orde submitted his report and Macaulay wrote his Minutes, we have been trying to be English in our customs, manners, life-style except in the colour of our skin. Indians are very much fond of remembering the names of originators of different things. If someone asks us who originated English language in our country, we should speak out the names of Macaulay and Ralph Orde. English education began in our country because of these to gentlemen.

When we think about the greatest contribution of the British Empire to our country, it is not the bridges, or railway lines or big buildings or the system of administration, which they offered to us. The greatest contribution of the British rule to our country is the gift of English language. It is

Variorum, Multi- Disciplinary e-Research Journal
Vol.-01, Issue-IV, May 2011

with the help of English language that we have been able to create New India as imagined and perceived by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The English language, which they taught us, enabled us to be in contact with the latest knowledge of every discipline.

The remarkable advantage of the English language is that we can make Shakespeare and Hardy the member of our family because of this language. While enjoying tea in the morning we can have the company of Shakespeare or Hardy in the form of a book written by them. This is how English language enables us to cultivate intimacy for those whom we have never met or seen.

Raja Rao refers to one Indian saint who said that “truth is not the monopoly of the Sanskrit language.” Whenever truth wants to come out, it can come out in any language. The saint believes that the more universal is the language, the greater will be the appeal of that truth. Truth can come out even through English language and English language is capable of it. Raja Rao approves this argument made by the Indian saint.

Raja Rao refers to one more saint who said “whatever is Indian is universal” or “whatever is universal is Indian.” In that sense English is also an Indian language because it has become a universal language. Raja Rao tries to prove it by giving one example that with in last one hundred and fifty years India has witnessed great writers who wrote not simple novels or dramas or poems but outstanding philosophical works also. For example writers like M.K.Gandhi, Shri Aurobindo, Tagore, J. Krishnamurthy and Radha Krishnan made a great contribution to the English writing.

The essayist believes that as long as we are Indian in a real sense of the term, the English language will remain with us neither as a guest nor as a friend. English language has become our family member, a part of our life and it is to remain with us forever. It's caste is Indian and no more British. Of course, we have made minor changes in this language by introducing some native words in English and by changing the spelling of certain words. Raja Rao gives the example of Raja Ram Mohan Roa who introduced a word like “Brahmacharya” in English. Such minor changes have been made to make it suit our Indian culture. But it has not harmed the beauty of this language.

Hindi is our national language and it is spoken by more than half of the total population of our country but India is a secular country and so English is also given due respect. English is accepted as the associate language and it's ude for the purpose of administration is approved through out the country. This is how English has become a language of the Indian caste.

Variorum, Multi- Disciplinary e-Research Journal
Vol.-01, Issue-IV, May 2011

References:

1. "The Caste of English," in *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*
C.D. Narasimhaiah, ed., 1978