

# Why English should be Learnt

The process of learning a language primarily begins with association with real objects and words, symbols representing those objects. Following this process, a man gradually learns to express complex ideas. And the process starts, just after a child is born, with perceiving and imitating sounds around him which are mainly from his mother tongue.

In recent times, evidence has been found that embryos respond to sounds and rhythms made by their mothers. In this way, an inseparable relation to mother tongue develops from our very infancy.

Thus, from a psychological point of view, it is very much logical that children should be instructed through their mother tongue. And also for higher education and official works, one can perform and one's duty with ease using the mother tongue.

The spirit of the great language movement was to uphold the status of our mother language to make it one of the most flourished languages of the world. We do not deny the necessity of introducing Bangla at all levels of education. But should this process also relegate English and other foreign languages at the back-yard? We are required to think over the sensitive issue from a pragmatic viewpoint.

In thought and action, man tends to follow an upward line and hence their consequent reflection and expression in language. And a language gradually develops with the creation of new words and expressive styles as well as gathering of resources from other languages. Let us take the instance of English in this regard. Impressive and deep meaningful words irrespective of their origin are easily incorporated by this language. Thus oriental words like 'Moulana', 'Maulvi', 'Imam', 'Yoga', 'Karma', 'Mahatma' have found their place in the English dictionary. 'Boomerang' (a weapon used by an Australian tribe) and in recent times, two Russian terms 'glasnost' and 'perestroika'

have been accepted in all modern languages including English and even Bangla. Other than the addition of vocabulary, keeping contact and exchanging resources with other languages contribute to a language by improving expressive style also.

The status of a language de-

**In thought and action, man tends to follow an upward line and hence their consequent reflection and expression in language. And a language gradually develops with the creation of new words and expressive styles as well as gathering of resources from other languages.**

pend on the culture of knowledge developed by the people speaking that language. And culture of knowledge cannot progress much in an isolated environment. Japan and China, were isolated from the devel-

oped world till the last century and as a result they were left much behind in the field of science and technology. On realisation of the power of modern knowledge in science, technology and economics,

Now if we are led by fanaticism only, it can work as an interfering factor in the way to spontaneous development of our language as well as our nation. Even in developed countries like the USA, UK and Japan, there is provision for learning a second language in order to make themselves bet-

ter communicative with other countries. So, the necessity of being bi-lingual is more prominent in the context of a backward country like ours. In this regard, English, the most influential international lan-

guage, and also more or less familiar to us for historical background, deserves second most priority.

For so far to do away with English in our education has resulted in the creation of disparities. More kindergarten and English medium schools are being set up, the access to which is available only to the wards of the elite in the society. Thus the opportunity of learning English is being confined to a section of the society. The result of banishing compulsory English from BA and discouragement to taking English as a medium of instruction at the university level are even worse. May be, this attempt has relieved general students from the 'burden' of learning a foreign language. But in most cases, they have to face problems due to lack of necessary books written in Bangla. The result is peculiar. Most of the students tend to rely on prepared answers in Bangla from their seniors and pass the examinations without comprehending the subject-matter properly.

University graduates having good command of written and spoken English occupy better and superior position in government and non-government jobs and also enjoying higher social status. The situation will continue until Bangla becomes a 'bread earning language' along with our overall economic and scientific development. Now, should we not take English as a compulsory second language before reaching a sustainable stage?

The literature of 'transcreation' has not developed much greatly due to linguistic barrier. And in translating and writing Bangla-medium books on latest developments in various disciplines, we need scholars adept in both the languages.

Thus learning English, and in possible cases, other developed languages, has become crucial to meet the requirement of the age. The government should formulate and implement an integrated policy in this regard.



# Indian Students Succeed In US

by GV Joshi

FOR Kiran Kedlaya, June 6, 1990 was a day for "double celebration". Not only was it his 16th birthday, he was that day to receive the top prize for standing first in the Nineteenth USA Mathematical Competition. Kiran was among the seven winners who emerged from a pool of 400,000 student participants in the three-state competition over three months. The award made him qualify for the International Mathematical Olympiad.

Kiran went on to win a gold medal there too. The Olympiad consisted of two four-and-half hour sessions during which a total of six problems were to be solved.

Three years earlier, while still in the seventh grade, Kiran took the Standard Achievement Test (meant for admission to college after passing high school examination) just for kicks. Although he scored the highest marks among the 26,670 students in the US who passed the test, he did not join college and continued with his studies in school.

Kiran is just a representative case of Asian students (among whom Indians constitute a majority) who are now the reigning stars of universities and colleges in the US. While they make up just 2.8 per cent of the US student population, their representation in institutions of higher learning is much more pronounced. At Harvard, for instance, Asians represent about 12 per cent of students; at Stanford, 20 per cent; and at the University of California, Berkeley, 30 per cent.

In 1989, Asians had a high school grade point average of 81.25 per cent, as against an average of 77 per cent for all other college-bound students. During the decade, 1981-90, Asian students won about one in four of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search scholarships. In 1986, the top five scholarships went to children of Indians who migrated to the US in the mid-sixties and early seventies.

According to the 1990 census, people of Indian origin in the US number about 600,000 and constitute only 0.3 per cent of the US population of nearly 248 million. The 1980 figures were 360,000 Indians constituting only 0.2 per cent of the then population of 226

million. In the last 10 years, there has thus been a 126 per cent increase in the Indian population.

California, the largest and richest state in the US has witnessed a phenomenal growth of 176 per cent in its Indian population during the past decade. Their number rose from 57,901 in 1980 to 159,973 in 1990, which forms 6 per cent of the total population of 2.8 million in the State. The Chinese, who went to build the railway lines in California in the late 19th century, outnumber other Asians among the migrant population.

One important factor for the academic success of Indian students is that a large number are themselves children of professionals. Unlike the

In 1991, the 800,000-odd high school students who took the test for college admission achieved an average score of 20.6 on a scale of 1 to 36 — the same attained in the previous two years. While the scores of Hispanic, American Indians and blacks were 18.7, 18.2 and 17 respectively, the score of Asians was 21.6. The whites could notch up to 21.4 only.

Strong family ties and powerful work ethics are the key factors for the achievements of Indians. While an average American is expected to fend for himself after high school, Indian parents try to help their children graduate and even obtain a post-graduate degree as is the situation back home in India.

There is also a fundamental difference between most Indian parents and those of other nationalities on how they react to a child's performance. Most American parents are willing to accept a child's weak areas and emphasise their strengths. But for Indians, the attitude is that if you are not doing well, the remedy is to study late into the night; and if you still do not perform well, to get up and study early in the morning. Most Indian parents believe that any one can fare well in studies with the right effort.

Apart from hard work, there lies another basic difference. Indian children are oriented towards their families and not just their friends. The tend to think of themselves as representatives of a family and consider their task of doing well in school as important not just for themselves, but also for their families as a whole.

Naturally, these have created problems of merging with the society. While Indian children want to behave like their American classmates, their parents are worried about the influences of an alien culture. They want their children to be Americans, but not too American to be seen dating and ending up on live-in arrangements without getting married. Some youngsters are now openly rebelling against arranged marriages in their anxiety to be out on their own.

In effect, the young Indian boys and girls are at the crossroads. While wanting to perform well at schools, they are finding it difficult to uphold Indian cultural values.

— [PT] Feature

**One important factor for the academic success of Indian students is that a large number are themselves children of professionals. Unlike the blacks or other migrants, many of the Indians had not even emigrated with the idea of settling down as American citizens.**

blacks or other migrants, many of the Indians had not even emigrated with the idea of settling down as American citizens.

The parents of today's whiz-kids arrived in the States as well-educated members of the Indian middle-class society. Their goal was to get more education and then go home, but in actuality, they hung around to make a little money and surprised themselves. Increasingly doctors and engineers from India have become vital components in America's professional community.

The most striking characteristic shared by Indian immigrants is their deep respect for education. Since most of them arrived in the US on the strength of their academic achievement and obtained their Green Cards, they are looking out for the best opportunities in learning for their children. Recent studies indicate that Indian students spend much more time on homework than others. In fact, in many Indian families education is almost an obsession.

# Indochina States Gain Readmission to Asian Tutors Club

by Rudy Fernandez

VIETNAM, Laos and Cambodia are back in the mainstream of regional cooperation in the fields of education, science and culture in Southeast Asia.

The occasion that saw these Indochina countries back in the region's education circle was the 27th annual meeting of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Council (SEAMEC) in this capital city of Brunei Darussalam last February.

SEAMEC is the highest policymaking body of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), which was founded in 1965 to promote cooperation among Southeast Asian nations through activities in education, science and culture. It is composed of the education ministers of the SEAMEO countries: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

During the ministerial conference here, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was admitted as a member of SEAMEO while the memberships of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia were reactivated.

South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were members of SEAMEO until the mid-1970s. With the change in governments in these states following the protracted wars that tore them for years, South Vietnam and North Vietnam were unified to become the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Laos and Cambodia, on the other hand, became inactive members of SEAMEO.

"My country is in the process of rebuilding its shattered economy, and in particular, its educational infrastructure," reported Prof Dr Sc Pham Minh Hac, First Vice Minister of Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training, after receiving the document proclaiming this country as a member of SEAMEO.

"Education in Vietnam is now facing many challenges," Dr Minh Hac said. "Education has been given priority by our government and our people to achieve the set objectives such as universalisation of primary education, innovation of secondary education and reorganisation of the higher education system".

Vietnam's school population is about 16 million with a teaching staff of nearly 800,000 for all levels. There are 13,000 primary and lower secondary schools, 1,200 upper secondary schools, and 106 colleges and universities.

In the years that Laos had not been participating in SEAMEO activities, it had been

pursuing socio-economic reforms. It was reported by Laos Education and Sports Minister Samane Vignaket.

"In the education sector," he added, "we also had a reformation with emphasis on uplifting the quality of life of the population and in providing the children with an opportunity to be educated".

In 1989, Minister Vignaket recalled, his government initiated an "open door" policy and cooperation for mutual benefits. It also initiated exchanges in the education field with many countries and international agencies in order to draw on their good experi-

**Since the mid-1970s, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have been absent from the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Council. Now they are back to forge a new regional identity**

ences to improve the country's education system.

Since 1986, Cambodia has been sending representatives to the annual meeting of the SEAMEO Council of Ministers.

The full participation of the Indochina countries in SEAMEO activities elicited encouraging reactions during the 27th SEAMEC meeting. Prince Haji Mohamed Bolkiah, Brunei Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasised in his welcome address:

"The cold war is over and the Cambodian peace agreement has been signed. The result should be the emergence of a new Southeast Asian identity. We are a region that can now look to greater peace and prosperity and the chance to develop confidently in a rapidly changing world".

In 1991 Vietnam expressed its desire to become a member of SEAMEO. Laos also requested readmission.

"I am very proud that the re-entry of Laos to membership in SEAMEO was successfully arranged and completed last year," said Philippine Education Secretary Isidro Carino, SEAMEC president for 1991 in his report to the conference. "I am also happy that the application of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for membership in SEAMEO was approved".

Dr Carino expressed confidence that SEAMEO's thrust for expanded regional and international partnerships will be given a bigger boost with the participation of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Indonesian Education and Culture Minister Fuad Hassan said, "Our family of Southeast Asian nations is nearly fully

represented now in our regional organisation".

Malaysia's Education Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman bin Haji Daud pointed out that Southeast Asia is one of the world's most dynamic regions because of tremendous economic growth, the development in the industrial sector being the most prominent.

There are several factors that have contributed to this development, one of which is the availability of skilled manpower. SEAMEO, through its seven regional centres, has played an important role in this aspect and should continue to do so, Minister Daud

pointed out.

Over the past 27 years, SEAMEO has established in the member countries regional centres that specialise in manpower development and research in as many fields.

The SEAMEO regional centres are: Tropical Medicine and Public Health Project (TROPMED), SEAMEO Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAF), both in Thailand; Regional Centre for Education Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH), Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), both in the Philippines; Regional Centre for Tropical Biology (BIOTROP) in Indonesia; Regional Centre for Education in Science and

Mathematics (RECSAM) in Malaysia; Regional Language Centre (RELCL) in Singapore; and Regional Centre for Vocational and Technical Education (VOCTECH) in Brunei.

Basically a human resource development organisation, SEAMEO has already trained about 25,000 nationals of SEAMEO countries as well as non-member countries. The training ranges from short-term specialist programmes to graduate studies (doctoral and master's degrees).

Most of the products of SEAMEO's programmes are now top administrators, scientists, researchers, educationists, and development workers in their respective countries.

Looking ahead, SEAMEC's new president, Brunei Education Minister Pehin Dato Haji Abdul Aziz, said: "We anticipate challenging times ahead which will require us to make quality decisions in the light of the issues and problems faced by the organisation and its centres. The present unfavourable financial climate which we are facing requires us to rethink and reformulate our objectives and approaches to human resource development".

"There is a need for us to review our current practices in implementation of activities and programmes, and to improve them accordingly. To do so it will be necessary for us to share experiences and work together with national and international institutions and

# Universities Collaborate on East-West Integration

by Michael Seifert

A conference held in the Heinrich Fabri Institute of the University of Tubingen in Blaubeuren, 16 universities and scientific institutions from the USA, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany agreed to collaborate on establishing an Internationales Zentrum (International Centre) and launching a joint programme of cooperation. The centre's objective will be to facilitate integration of the divergent developments in "western" and

"eastern" countries by promoting interdisciplinary projects, summer academics, the provision of exchange research scholarships and instruction courses in those languages represented at the centre.

This initiative constitutes the only international scientific cooperation programme of its kind, and its regional composition will enable two bridges to be forged: between western Europe and central and eastern Europe; and between the USA and the whole of Europe.

German Research Service

# Creating Academic Positions for Women

ALTHOUGH women study just as successfully as men, Schaumann said, their entry into the academic world has been much rarer than far. The Special Higher Education Programme for the promotion of young academic blood plans to award grants for doctoral courses and habilitations in a move to increase the proportion of women.

There is to be an additional grant for childcare. Furthermore, financial assistance — in line with a modified Heisenberg Programme — and funds for work contracts have already been earmarked. They will enable a more flexible organisation of academic activity and thus to improved compatibility of academic work and child-upbringing duties.

Over and above this, the number of women occupying academic posts is to be considerably increased at higher education institutions and other scientific facilities.

When presenting a report on the promotion of women in higher education, Schaumann appealed to higher education

institutions "to work towards the removal of the disadvantages still existing for female academics."

This also applied to the new Bundeslander (constituent states) where the proportion of women acquiring a doctorate only came to 36% despite the fact that they represent 45% of the student body.

What is more, the number

This was particularly noticeable in the number of female habilitations (the right to lecture at university) which came to 13% as opposed to 9% in the original Bundeslander and professorships (about 10% to 5%). Schaumann said he very much hoped that a negative development could be prevented not least with the additional

**The German Federal Government wants to see more women active in university research and teaching. This is also one of the goals of the Hochschulsonderprogramm II (Special Higher Education Programm II).**

of first-year female students in eastern Germany dropped by 8% to 38.6% last year, thus even falling below the number (39.3%) in the original (west German) Lander.

"It would be highly regrettable if the new Bundeslander were to fall into line with west German conditions in the very sector where they have hitherto often enjoyed an enviable head start," Schaumann stated.

help of the Federal Government's programmes and measures, and that the proportion of women as a whole at higher education institutions could be increased.

A further problem, in Schaumann's opinion, is the choice of study course by women. Whereas they represent two-thirds of the first-year students in sport and cultural studies, this figure is

no more than 12% in the case of engineering. The proportion of women reading technical subjects in the new Bundeslander comes a good 17%. So far, however, women have also been strongly represented there in economics.

Graduates and students of these disciplines have been particularly affected by the "radical politico-administrative changes" in the new Bundeslander. As a consequence, a "Higher Education Research" project group in Berlin-Karlshorst, bearing future careers in mind, is concerning itself with the question as to which qualifications, initial professional or orientation aids could "usefully" help supplement qualifications already obtained.

The differing choice of subjects by male and female juveniles, as surveys have shown, starts in school in the original Bundeslander. One striking feature is the fact that pupils from all-girl classes tend to pick Abitur (university entrance qualification) subjects which are not "typical of their sex", such as mathematics or physics, for example. Girls schools, as such, are obviously not a suitable means of promoting women.

A study of the situation of academic young blood among females, for instance, finds that, although computer science student come in a surprisingly large number from girls schools, more than two-thirds of female academics in this sector attended coeducation schools.

This suggests that female students, who were already used to mixing with males at school, are at an advantage when they embark on a university teaching career in "male dominated" disciplines.

The "person-related advancement measures" contained in the renewal programme for higher education and research in the new Bundeslander are likewise aimed at considerably increasing the proportion of women at higher education and other academic institutions, particularly in respect of habilitation and the incumbency of professorial chairs.



Women are as good as their male counterparts in academic fields

— Photo: In Press