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Growth of the English Language in India (1947–2025)

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Abstract

The English language has undergone a remarkable transformation in India since independence in 1947. Initially associated primarily with colonial administration, higher education and the educated elite, English gradually developed into an important language of administration, higher education, science and technology, business, mass communication, international trade and employment. The Constitution of India established Hindi as the official language of the Union while permitting the continued use of English for specified official purposes. The Official Languages Act, 1963, as amended in 1967, provided an institutional basis for the continued use of English alongside Hindi. At the same time, educational policies promoted multilingualism and incorporated English into the three-language framework.

The expansion of higher education, urbanisation, economic liberalisation after 1991, information technology, the software industry, globalisation, private education, digital communication and social media significantly strengthened the functional importance of English. English has increasingly become associated with access to global knowledge, professional employment and international communication. However, its expansion has also generated debates concerning linguistic inequality, educational access, cultural identity and the divide between English-medium and regional-language education.



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This paper examines the growth and changing functions of English in India from 1947 to 2025. It analyses major constitutional and educational developments, the expansion of English in higher education, employment, science and technology, media and digital communication, and discusses both opportunities and challenges. The study is descriptive and analytical and is based primarily on secondary sources including government documents, Census publications, education policies, academic literature and institutional reports. The article argues that English in contemporary India is best understood not as a replacement for Indian languages but as one component of a complex multilingual system.

Keywords: English language, India, multilingualism, higher education, globalization, English-medium education, information technology, language policy, employment,

Introduction

Language occupies a central position in India's social, cultural, educational and economic development. India is characterised by extraordinary linguistic diversity, with numerous languages and varieties functioning at regional, national and local levels. Within this multilingual environment, English has acquired a distinctive position. Unlike most Indian languages, English did not originate in the Indian linguistic environment, yet it has become deeply embedded in India's institutions, education system, economy and public life.

The position of English at independence was complex. It was the language of colonial administration, higher education, law and elite communication, but it was also increasingly used by Indian intellectuals, reformers, political leaders, writers and professionals. After independence, India faced the difficult task of developing a national language policy that



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could accommodate linguistic diversity while maintaining administrative continuity and national integration.

The Constitution of India did not declare English the national language. Article 343 provided for Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, while permitting English to continue for official purposes for an initial period of fifteen years. Parliament was also empowered to provide by law for the continued use of English. The constitutional framework therefore created the possibility of a transition but did not permanently exclude English. The linguistic situation developed differently from the expectations of a rapid transition away from English. Political, administrative, educational and economic considerations contributed to the continuation of English. The Official Languages Act, 1963, and its 1967 amendment established the continued use of English alongside Hindi for important official purposes.

English subsequently acquired additional functions. It became an important language of higher education, scientific research, professional communication, medicine, engineering, information technology, business and international relations. The expansion of private schooling and English-medium education further increased its social visibility.

The period after 1991 was particularly significant. Economic liberalisation, globalisation and the rapid growth of India's information technology and business-process industries created new employment opportunities for English-speaking graduates. English became closely associated with India's participation in the global economy.

By the twenty-first century, English had also entered India's digital environment. Internet communication, websites, online education, social networking, digital journalism, e-commerce and software development contributed to its continued expansion. At the same time, Indian languages



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have also expanded through digital platforms. Thus, contemporary India demonstrates not simply the dominance of English but a dynamic interaction between English, Hindi and numerous regional and local languages. The present study examines this transformation over the period 1947–2025.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the Growth of the English Language in India (1947–2025)
2. To examine the relationship between English and economic liberalisation.
3. To analyse the role of English in mass media and digital communication.
4. To discuss the major challenges and inequalities associated with the expansion of English.
5. To assess the changing position of English in India up to 2025.

3. Research Methodology

The study is based on secondary information. Government publications, constitutional provisions, education policies, Census publications, institutional reports, academic books and research articles have been used to analyse the growth of English in India.

The study adopts a historical and descriptive-analytical approach. The period from 1947 to 2025 is divided into broad phases:

- 1947–1965: Post-independence adjustment
- 1965–1980: Institutionalisation of bilingual official practices
- 1980–1991: Expansion through education
- 1991–2000: Liberalisation and globalisation
- 2000–2010: IT and knowledge-economy expansion
- 2010–2020: Digital transformation
- 2020–2025: Multilingual digital and educational transition

The study does not attempt to measure the number of English speakers for every year because comparable annual national language data are not



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available. The Census of India provides important language and multilingualism data, particularly for 2011, while later developments are examined through policy documents and institutional evidence.

English in India at Independence

English had already become deeply established in India before 1947. British colonial rule introduced English into administration, education, law and higher learning. Macaulay's famous educational intervention in the nineteenth century and subsequent developments in colonial education contributed to the formation of an English-educated Indian elite.

English education produced generations of Indian professionals, administrators, lawyers, teachers, scientists and writers. English also became an important medium through which Indians accessed European political philosophy, economics, science and literature.

The nationalist movement itself demonstrated the complicated position of English. Many nationalist leaders criticised colonial domination but also used English as a medium of political communication. English enabled communication among educated Indians belonging to different linguistic regions.

At independence, therefore, English possessed both colonial associations and practical advantages. The central question after 1947 was whether English should be replaced by an Indian language and, if so, how such a transition could be achieved without disrupting administration, higher education and inter-state communication. India's linguistic diversity made the question especially complicated. Hindi had a large speaker population, but southern, eastern and northeastern states had their own strong linguistic



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identities. Consequently, language policy developed through compromise rather than complete linguistic replacement.

Constitutional Position of English

The Constitution provides the basic framework for India's language policy. Article 343 states that Hindi in Devanagari script is the official language of the Union. At the same time, it provided that English would continue for fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution for official purposes for which it had been used before independence.

Importantly, Article 343 also permitted Parliament to provide by law for the continued use of English after the initial fifteen-year period. Other constitutional provisions also recognise India's linguistic diversity. Article 345 allows states to adopt one or more languages in use in the state for official purposes. Article 346 deals with communication between states and between states and the Union.

The constitutional arrangement therefore created a multilingual institutional structure rather than a simple replacement of English by Hindi. The Government of India's Department of Official Language continues to describe Hindi as the official language of the Union while recognising English as available for official purposes under the Official Languages Act.

Official Languages Act and the Continuation of English

The Official Languages Act, 1963, became a major milestone in the history of English in independent India. The Act provided for the continued use of English, in addition to Hindi, for specified official purposes of the Union and for parliamentary business. Its provisions were subsequently amended in 1967. The significance of the legislation was substantial. It prevented the administrative system from undergoing an abrupt transition



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away from English and enabled English to remain an important language of governance.

English also retained an important role in communication involving states that did not adopt Hindi as their official language.

Consequently, English gradually moved from being viewed primarily as a colonial administrative language to functioning as one of the institutional languages of the Indian state. This development was particularly important because India's federal structure required communication across linguistically diverse states.

Growth of English in School Education

One of the most visible changes after independence has been the expansion of English-medium schooling. In the early decades after independence, regional-language government schools remained extremely important. English was often introduced as a subject rather than used as the primary medium of instruction. From the late twentieth century, however, demand for English-medium education increased substantially. Several factors contributed to this development:

Employment aspirations

Parents increasingly associated English proficiency with employment opportunities in government, private companies, banking, information technology and professional services.

Higher education

English became important for students seeking admission to universities, professional colleges and specialised programmes.

Social mobility

English proficiency became associated with upward social and occupational mobility.

Globalisation

Increasing exposure to international markets and global communication enhanced demand for English.



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Private education

The expansion of private schools offering English-medium instruction strengthened the social demand for English.

The result has been a substantial expansion of English education, although access to high-quality English education remains unequal.

English and Higher Education

Higher education represents one of the strongest institutional foundations of English in India.

Universities and colleges have historically used English extensively in disciplines such as:

- Economics
- Commerce
- Science
- Engineering
- Medicine
- Law
- Management
- Computer Science
- Social Sciences
- International Relations

A large volume of textbooks, academic journals, research databases and international publications is available in English. English therefore functions as a major gateway to global academic knowledge. For Indian researchers, proficiency in English provides access to international journals, conferences, research networks and collaborative opportunities. At the same time, the dependence on English creates challenges for students who receive their early education primarily through regional languages. The transition from a regional-language school background to English-dominated higher education can affect comprehension, academic performance and confidence. The emerging policy approach is therefore increasingly oriented towards bilingual



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and multilingual education rather than treating English and Indian languages as mutually exclusive alternatives.

English and Economic Liberalisation after 1991

The economic reforms initiated in 1991 represented a major turning point in the economic significance of English.

Liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation increased India's interaction with multinational corporations and international markets.

English became increasingly important in:

- banking;
- finance;
- management;
- tourism;
- aviation;
- telecommunications;
- consultancy;
- business-process outsourcing;
- information technology;
- international trade.

India's large pool of English-educated graduates became an important component of its global services economy. The growth of outsourcing and offshore services created demand for workers able to communicate with customers and companies located in English-speaking countries. Thus, English proficiency became connected not merely with education but also with export-oriented services and international employment.

English and the Information Technology Revolution

The development of India's information technology industry during the 1990s and 2000s substantially strengthened the functional importance of English. Indian IT companies provided software development, consulting,



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technical support, business-process services and other knowledge-intensive services to international clients.

English was particularly important because:

1. programming and software documentation frequently use English;
2. international clients communicate largely in English;
3. technical documentation is commonly available in English;
4. professional meetings often use English;
5. international project management requires cross-border communication.

The IT revolution therefore created a strong economic incentive for English-language education. India's technology workforce also contributed to the international visibility of Indian English. Indian professionals working in multinational companies, universities and technology firms have used English as a major language of professional communication.

English and the Knowledge Economy

The twenty-first century has increasingly been described as an era of the knowledge economy.

Knowledge-intensive activities depend on:

- information;
- research;
- innovation;
- communication;
- digital skills;
- data;
- scientific knowledge.

English plays a major role in the global circulation of knowledge.

Indian students and researchers use English to access:

- international academic literature;
- scientific databases;
- online courses;



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- international conferences;
 - professional certification;
 - research networks;
 - technical manuals.

English has therefore become an important component of human capital. However, proficiency in English alone does not automatically produce employment. It operates together with education, technical skills, professional qualifications and digital competencies.

English in Science and Technology

Scientific and technological communication represents another major domain of English use. A substantial proportion of international scientific literature is published in English. Indian scientists and researchers therefore require English for:

- publishing research papers;
- reading international literature;
- attending conferences;
- participating in international collaborations;
- applying for research grants;
- communicating scientific results.

English is especially significant in disciplines such as medicine, engineering, computer science, biotechnology and environmental science. The expansion of English in science has helped Indian researchers participate in international academic networks. At the same time, there is increasing recognition of the importance of making scientific knowledge available in Indian languages. A multilingual scientific system can potentially expand access to knowledge beyond English-educated groups.

English and Mass Media

English has played a major role in Indian newspapers, magazines, radio, television and publishing.

Major English-language newspapers have contributed to public debate on:



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- politics;
 - economics;
 - education;
 - international affairs;
 - science;
 - culture;
 - business.

English-language publishing has also supported India's literary culture. Indian writers have used English creatively to represent Indian experiences. Writers such as R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and many others have contributed to Indian writing in English. Indian English literature has therefore developed into a recognised literary field.

Development of Indian English

The growth of English in India has not simply reproduced British or American English. Indian English has developed its own vocabulary, expressions, pronunciation patterns, discourse practices and literary characteristics.

Indian English incorporates words and expressions influenced by:

- Hindi;
- Telugu;
- Tamil;
- Bengali;
- Marathi;
- Kannada;
- Malayalam;
- Urdu;
- Sanskrit;
- other Indian languages.



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Examples of Indian English usage include expressions such as "prepone," "do the needful," "out of station" and several culturally specific forms of communication.

Some expressions may differ from standard British or American usage, but they demonstrate the process through which English becomes adapted to local social and cultural conditions. Kachru's concept of the "Indian variety" within the wider family of World Englishes is particularly useful for understanding this development.

English and Digital India

The digital revolution has substantially transformed the use of English. The internet initially developed with a strong dependence on English-language content. Indian users consequently encountered English in:

- websites;
- search engines;
- software;
- email;
- online newspapers;
- educational platforms;
- social networking;
- e-commerce.

English continues to be important in digital professional communication. At the same time, Indian-language internet content has expanded significantly. Digital technology now allows users to type, speak and translate between languages more easily. Artificial intelligence, machine translation, speech recognition and large language models are further changing the relationship between English and Indian languages. By 2025, therefore, India's linguistic environment is increasingly characterised by multilingual digital communication.



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English and Social Media

Social media has created a new environment for English usage. Platforms such as social networking sites, video-sharing services and professional networking platforms provide opportunities for Indians to communicate with national and international audiences.

English is widely used for:

- professional profiles;
- academic communication;
- marketing;
- business promotion;
- educational content;
- entertainment;
- international networking.

Young Indians frequently combine English with regional languages.

Social media has consequently contributed to a more informal and flexible form of English.

English in the National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 provides an important contemporary framework. NEP 2020 emphasises multilingualism and recommends that, wherever possible, the medium of instruction during the early years of education should be the home language, mother tongue, local language or regional language. At the same time, the policy does not reject English. It explicitly supports bilingual teaching-learning materials and recognises the importance of English as one of the languages through which students can access knowledge. The policy continues the three-language formula with greater flexibility and states that no language should be imposed on a state.

NEP 2020 therefore represents an important shift from viewing language policy as a competition between English and Indian languages toward a



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multilingual educational framework. The policy also encourages the use of technology for language teaching and learning.

English and Higher Education after NEP 2020

NEP 2020 proposes greater availability of higher education programmes in Indian languages and bilingual formats. The policy seeks to expand access while strengthening Indian languages. This does not imply the disappearance of English from higher education. Rather, it suggests a more diversified language environment.

English remains important because:

- international academic literature is extensively available in English;
- research publication often requires English;
- global academic communication commonly uses English;
- many professional disciplines operate through English;
- multinational employment frequently requires English communication.

The emerging model is therefore likely to involve coexistence between English and Indian languages.

Census Evidence on English

The Census of India provides important evidence concerning multilingualism.

The 2011 Census included detailed tables on bilingualism and trilingualism. These data classify individuals according to additional languages spoken beyond their principal language. The Census also provides information according to education level, age, sex and rural-urban residence. The available Census evidence demonstrates that English in India is predominantly an additional language rather than a mother tongue for the overwhelming majority of its users. This is a significant characteristic of Indian English. Unlike countries where English is the principal home language of most citizens, India uses English largely as an additional language for



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education, employment, administration, professional communication and wider interaction. The 2011 Census data therefore support the description of India as a multilingual society in which English has acquired an important additional-language function.

Major Phases of English Growth in India

The development of English can be summarised into seven major phases.

Phase I: 1947–1965

English continued because of administrative necessity, higher education and constitutional arrangements.

Phase II: 1965–1980

The continuation of English became institutionally established alongside Hindi.

Phase III: 1980–1991

Expansion of school education, higher education and professional education strengthened English.

Phase IV: 1991–2000

Economic liberalisation and globalisation increased the economic value of English.

Phase V: 2000–2010

Information technology, BPO and global services accelerated English use.

Phase VI: 2010–2020

Smartphones, internet access and social media expanded English into everyday digital communication.

Phase VII: 2020–2025

NEP 2020, online education, artificial intelligence, machine translation and multilingual digital technologies began reshaping the relationship between English and Indian languages.

Major Drivers of English Growth

The growth of English in India can be explained through several factors.



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- **Historical legacy**
 - The colonial education and administrative system established institutional foundations for English.
 - **Constitutional arrangements**
 - The Constitution and subsequent legislation permitted continued official use.
 - **Education**
 - English became an important subject and medium in many educational institutions.
 - **Higher education**
 - Universities and professional institutions continued extensive use of English.
 - **Globalisation**
 - International economic integration increased demand for English.
 - **Information technology**
 - The IT and BPO industries created employment opportunities associated with English proficiency.
 - **Urbanisation**
 - English became prominent in metropolitan professional environments.
 - **Media**
 - English newspapers, television, publishing and entertainment expanded its reach.
 - **Internet**
 - Digital communication dramatically increased exposure to English.
 - **Social aspirations**
 - Many families associate English education with modernity, professional success and educational mobility.

Challenges Associated with the Growth of English

Despite its benefits, the expansion of English presents several challenges.



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Linguistic inequality

Access to high-quality English education is uneven.

Educational inequality

English-medium education is often associated with private schooling and urban areas.

Language shift

Excessive emphasis on English may reduce the use of some local languages in particular domains.

Cultural concerns

Language is closely connected with cultural identity, literature and traditions.

Teacher shortages

Quality English-language teaching requires adequately trained teachers.

Rural disadvantage

Rural students may have fewer opportunities for English exposure.

Medium-of-instruction problems

Students may struggle when they move from a regional-language school to English-medium higher education.

Credential inequality

English proficiency can become a screening mechanism in employment even when the job itself may not require advanced English.

English and International Relations

English is also important to India's international engagement. Diplomatic communication, international conferences, multinational organisations, academic cooperation and global business frequently operate in English. Indian diplomats, scholars, corporate executives and government officials therefore use English as an important international communication language. This function has become increasingly significant as India's international economic, scientific and diplomatic engagement has expanded.



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English and Migration

International migration has further strengthened the practical value of English.

Indian professionals and students increasingly interact with institutions in:

- the United States;
- United Kingdom;
- Canada;
- Australia;
- New Zealand;
- Singapore;
- Gulf countries;
- European countries.

English proficiency can facilitate educational admission, professional communication and international mobility.

Indian migrants also contribute to the global spread of Indian varieties of English.

English and Artificial Intelligence

The period leading to 2025 has introduced a new dimension to English-language development: artificial intelligence. AI systems, machine translation, speech recognition, generative AI and digital assistants frequently operate across English and multiple Indian languages. English has historically benefited from extensive digital data and computational resources. However, rapid development of Indian-language AI systems is reducing the technological gap. This creates the possibility of a future in which English remains important but increasingly operates alongside Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam and other Indian languages in digital environments.



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English and the Future of Employment

The future labour market is likely to demand a combination of English proficiency and digital competence. Emerging occupations increasingly require:

- communication;
- data literacy;
- AI literacy;
- programming;
- analytical skills;
- teamwork;
- problem-solving.

English can facilitate access to international information and professional networks.

However, the growth of AI translation and multilingual technology may reduce the need for advanced English in some forms of routine communication. At the same time, higher-level English communication may remain important for research, leadership, international negotiation and professional collaboration.

Findings of the Study

1. English survived the transition from colonial rule because of its institutional and practical importance.
2. The Constitution established a framework allowing the continued use of English.
3. The Official Languages Act, 1963, was a major institutional milestone in the continuation of English.
4. Educational policies incorporated English into India's multilingual education framework.
5. English expanded significantly through school and higher education.
6. Economic liberalisation after 1991 substantially increased the economic value of English.



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7. Information technology and business-process services became important drivers of English use.
 8. English became an important language of science, research and higher education.
 9. Indian English developed distinctive linguistic and cultural characteristics.
 10. Urbanisation and private education contributed significantly to the spread of English.
 11. Digital media accelerated English use after 2000.
 12. English proficiency can contribute to educational and occupational mobility.
 13. Access to quality English education remains unequal.
 14. English has not replaced Indian languages; instead, multilingualism remains central to Indian society.
 15. NEP 2020 provides a framework for combining Indian-language education with continued English learning.
 16. AI and digital translation technologies may increasingly support multilingual communication.
 17. By 2025, English in India is best understood as an important additional language embedded within a multilingual society.

Suggestions

- **Improve English teaching in government schools**
Quality English instruction should be available to students irrespective of socioeconomic background.
- **Promote bilingual education**
Bilingual teaching can help students understand complex concepts while developing English proficiency.
- **Train English teachers**
Teacher-training programmes should emphasise communication, digital pedagogy and contemporary language-learning methods.



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- **Strengthen regional-language education**
English education should not come at the cost of Indian languages.
- **Expand digital language resources**
Free digital English-learning resources should be made available to rural and economically disadvantaged students.
- **Encourage multilingual higher education**
Universities can provide bilingual textbooks and teaching materials.
- **Develop Indian-language scientific resources**
Scientific and technical knowledge should increasingly be made accessible through Indian languages.
- **Use AI for translation**
- Artificial intelligence can support translation between English and Indian languages.
- **Improve employability-oriented English**
English teaching should focus not only on grammar but also on communication, presentation, writing, digital interaction and professional skills.
- **Reduce linguistic inequality**
English should function as an opportunity for social mobility rather than as an additional barrier to employment and education.

Conclusion

The Dutch, Portuguese, and British came to India for trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The British established a monopoly on trade. They formed the East India Company. They had offices in Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Their medium of instruction and administration was English. This was the beginning of English in India, but the noteworthy fact about English teaching is that from its inception, English has been a path of employment and influence for Indians. English became popular because it opened doors to employment.



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Indian education was ever more anglicised as the English language became rooted in an alien linguistic, cultural, administrative, and educational setting. The first universities were established in India in 1857 (in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras). English became accepted as the language of the élite, of the administration, and of the pan-Indian press. English newspapers had an influential reading public. Indian literature in English was also developing . Thus, English is widely used for educational purposes in public schools and institutions providing higher education, at conferences, meetings, and private offices. India being a multi-lingual nation, English is often called a lingua franca in the context of inter-state movement and communication. We have thus in brief discussed the beginning, growth, and development of English in India. We also studied how the status of the English language changed from the time the British people ruled to the time after independence. All we could see in this discussion is that the English language has been the most valuable gift for the Indians. It has helped Indians in several ways. Being the window to the outside world and gateway to knowledge, English has been of great prominence and importance. The study of this language not only makes us more intelligible but also opens up many great opportunities for us in the professional world. We can easily say today, "There is no success if there is no English!". In India, the people's attitude towards English is very positive. Even people from rural areas send their children to English-medium schools by paying heavy fees. They feel that the English school has a good status in society.

The growth of English in India from 1947 to 2025 represents one of the most significant linguistic transformations of post-independence India. English began the independence period with strong colonial associations, but its institutional and practical functions enabled it to survive and subsequently expand. The constitutional framework, Official Languages Act, education policies, higher education system, economic liberalisation, globalisation,



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information technology and digital revolution all contributed to this development. The economic transformation after 1991 was particularly important. The expansion of IT, BPO, finance, management and other service industries increased demand for English communication. English became an important component of the human capital required for India's participation in the global economy. At the same time, English has become deeply integrated into Indian society without replacing the country's regional languages. India continues to operate as a multilingual society in which people frequently use different languages for different purposes. The emergence of Indian English is evidence of this adaptation. English has been reshaped by Indian linguistic, cultural and social conditions, producing distinctive varieties and communication practices. The period after 2020 has introduced another important transition. NEP 2020 emphasises multilingualism, home-language education and bilingual learning while retaining the importance of English. Digital technologies, artificial intelligence and machine translation are also creating new possibilities for interaction between English and Indian languages.

Therefore, the growth of English in India should not be interpreted simply as the expansion of one language at the expense of others. It is better understood as part of India's continuing multilingual transformation. The central policy challenge for the future is to provide equitable access to English while simultaneously strengthening Indian languages.

By 2025, English has become an important language of education, research, employment, technology, business, administration, international communication and digital interaction in India. Its future is likely to remain significant, but increasingly within a multilingual and technologically mediated linguistic environment.



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