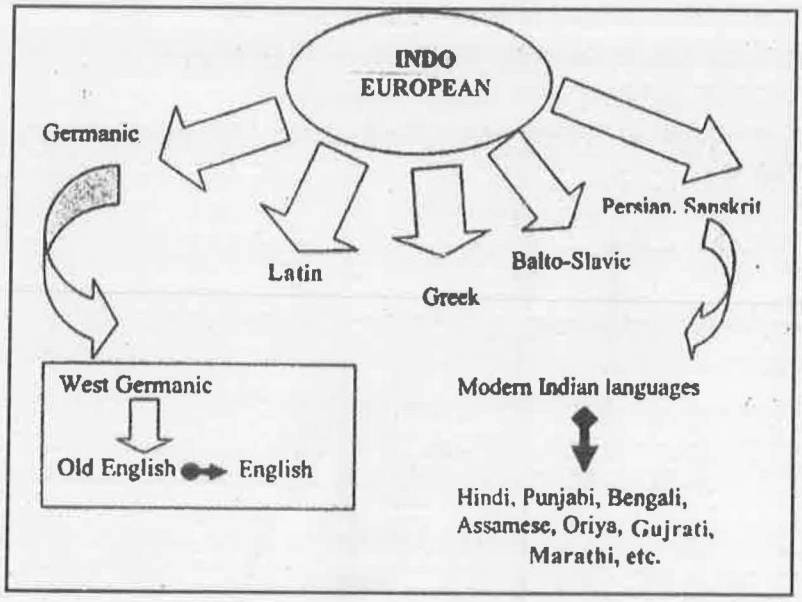
CHAPTER 1

HOW ENGLISH BEGAN

The English language is much 'younger' than Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, Latin, and other great classical languages of the past. When these European and Asian languages were ruling the world, the names English and England did not exist. The English we speak today came from the speech of the Germanic tribes: Angles, Saxons and Jutes (together called the Anglo-Saxons) who invaded England in the fifth century and gave the country its name and its language.

The Anglo-Saxons were Germanic people who lived in North and West Europe (present day Denmark, Germany and Holland). The languages they used were Germanic or Teutonic. These languages were closely related to Latin, Greek Sanskrit and other languages of the Indo- European family (or group) of languages. Thus, through Germanic, English belongs to the ancient Indo-European family of languages. The 'roots' of English are shown in the diagram given below:



The Germanic invaders were called Saxons by the natives of England. The Saxons, on the other hand, called the natives of England "Wealas" or foreigners. They, however, began to call their languages *Englisc*. This word was derived from the name : Angles (Old English: *Engle*). The country was given the name Anglecynn (or Angle-kin, that is, the race of the Angles). From about AD 1000, the name *Englaland* (or the land of the Angles) came into use in place of Anglecynn. Thus both the name of the country England , and the language, English, are not native to English.

Exercises

1. Complete the statements given below:

a) English language is ..... than Persian.
b) English we speak today has come from ..... of ..... tribe.
c) The Anglo- Saxons were ..... people.
d) Through ..... English belongs to the ancient ..... family of languages.

2. Answer these questions very briefly:

1. Who did the natives of England call Saxons?
2. What did the Saxons call the natives of England?
3. Which languages were called 'Englisc'?
4. When did the name 'Englaland' come into use? Which word did it replace?



CHAPTER 2
ENGLISH DOWN THE AGES

The importance and usage of the English language in our modern and globalized world creates the impression that it is the language spoken by the maximum number of people all over the world. However, it is interesting to know that Mandarin Chinese, spoken by approximately 873,000,000 people holds this distinction. English is spoken by about 309,000,000 people, though it is a language which has its presence in all parts of the world and its power is felt the world over. Hindi is the third in terms of the number of speakers in the world. Another surprising fact is that English is just about fifteen hundred years old and the language we are familiar with is less than five centuries old! Moreover, this language has given expression to world class literature in all genres. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton and many others are still considered the greatest masters of their art and are relevant for their ideas and literary genius. The following facts will enable you to understand the reasons which have transformed the once humble East Midland Dialect to a position of unparalleled greatness in our times.

PERIODS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

The evolution of the English language from the beginnings in the Anglo-Saxon times to the modern era has been an unbroken one. We can distinguish three main periods in the history and growth of the language in the following manner:-

Old English (OE) - AD 449-AD 1066
Middle English (ME) –AD 1150-AD 1500
Modern English –AD 1500 onwards

OLD ENGLISH

Throughout this period English continued to be the language of everyday speech for the common mass. The divisions made above are more for convenience but it is possible to distinguish certain linguistic features in each of these periods. The OE period is characterized

by inflections. Gradually over a period of time these inflections were found to have been levelled. Literature produced during the age was not of much significance, as court patronage was lacking and the age came to be known as the Dark Age.

MIDDLE ENGLISH

From 1150 onwards English began to emerge as a language of literature. The language was enriched through extensive borrowings from French and Latin. Apart from this two other major developments occurred-one was the invention of the printing press in 1476, the other being a considerable rise in literacy. The Great Vowel Shift also took place during this time. All these factors contributed tremendously to creating a language for both spoken and written purposes.

MODERN ENGLISH

English used since AD 1500 till now is called Modern English. Recently, this period is being sub-divided into Modern and New English. From the beginning of the Modern period to the end of the 19th century, English was basically the language of the British Isles. With the territorial expansion of the British Empire, together with the growth of science, industry, politics and literature, the English language enriched itself by successfully adding to its vocabulary, and the flavour of the countires the British had colonised. In the twentieth century, the erstwhile colonies of the British Empire acquired freedom. The British left the countires, but English remained. Hence new varieties of English have emerged in different parts of the world. Some of these are American English, Indian English, Canadian English, etc.In simple terms the latest period in the growth and development of the English language may be called the era or period of "New Englishes". This new terminology is enough to indicate how the language manifests itself and moulds to serve the basic purpose of human communication. The story of the English language is like a flowing river, meandering across continents, absorbing the native soil and entering the hearts of the people .No surprise therefore if the people all over the world have accorded the status of an International Language to English.

In the era of globalization English has been found suitable as the language of international communication. It has also equipped itself to serve as the language of the present Cyber age.

In the next few pages we will discuss the characteristics of the English language which have contributed to its growth and development.

Exercises

1. Write T for true and F for false statements :

a) English was once humble East Midland Dialects.
b) Old English covers AD 449 –AD 1066.
c) Middle English did not borrow from French and Latin.
d) The present era is the period of 'New Englishes'.

2. Answer these questions very briefly:

1. Which language is spoken by maximum number of people?
2. Since when is Modern English in use?
3. Which period is characterised by inflections?
4. Why did the Old English period fail to produce literature of much significance?
5. When did the Great Vowel Shift take place?



CHAPTER 3
OLD ENGLISH

The first period in the history of English is referred to by one of the following names: Old English, Anglo –Saxon and Anglo-Celtic. However, the earlier two names are more popular and used more often. The history of English begins with the coming of the Anglo-Saxons from Europe to mainland Britain. This period is from AD 449 to AD 1066.These two dates signify two major invasions that changed the course of history. The Anglo –Saxons were fierce, war-like tribes from Europe and their invasion in 449 changed Celtic Britain into Germanic England. The Norman Conquest in AD 1066 resulted in the infusion of a large number of French words into the vocabulary of English from Europe to mainland Britain.

The relationships between the Celts and the invaders is difficult to describe accurately, but they seemed to have settled down side by side in more or less peaceful contact with the Anglo –Saxons and combined to produce seven kingdoms known as the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy. The leadership of these kingdoms gradually passed into the hands of the Saxons because of their better political understanding. The Celtic languages were not used for any purpose by them, neither did these languages influence the Saxons. Therefore only a handful of Celtic words exist today and most of them are names of places or rivers. Some of these better known are the following.

(Place Names)
Dover, Cumberland, Kent, London, York
(Names of Rivers)
Avon, Thames, Trent, Dee, Derwent.

Some traces of Britain's Celtic past are also preserved in the first syllable of the names of some towns and districts in present-day England. These are- Manchester, Winchester, Worcester, Glouscester, Lichfield, Salisbury and Exeter. Another class of Celtic words preserved in Modern English are words connected with religion or religious activities.

DIALECTS OF OLD ENGLISH

There is a clear line of descent from the speech of the Anglo-Saxons to Modern English in matters of sounds, vocabulary, grammar and spelling, but Old English was not a single uniform language. We can distinguish four dialects in Old English .They are Kentish, Northumbrian, Mercian and West Saxon. Thus, it can be said that Old English was dialectical. This is understandable because three different Anglo-Saxon tribes were involved and it was but natural that a variety in languages existed.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF OLD ENGLISH

Some features of OE make it very difficult to read and understand the texts of this period. The language looks different because of its alien spelling, unfamiliar vocabulary and a totally different grammatical structure. The writing system of OE is very different from what we find with today. When the Anglo-Saxons came to England they used a system of writing which was in use in the Northern and Western part of Europe.(present day Germany and Scandinavia).This writing system used the Runic alphabet. The Runic characters were composed of sharp straight lines without curves. Many of these letters are found on weapons; such as arrows, axes, knife –handles, swords ect. Some are to be seen in monuments, jewellery and caskets made of bones, but their messages are difficult to derive as most of them are generally symbolic.

After the 6th Century, the spread of Christianity led to the gradual use of the Roman script, as this was the writing of the Latin religious texts. The Roman alphabet adopted by the Anglo-Saxons passed through some variations before it reached its present shape in Modern English. The old Saxon forms were superseded by French characters and some new letters were added to the alphabet, such as Q, q, W, w, J, j after the Norman Conquest of AD 1066.

FOREIGN INFLUENCES ON OLD ENGLISH

The story of English is the story of repeated intrusions of foreign elements into the English vocabulary. From the earliest times the country had been subjected to successive aggressions by foreign invaders such as the Romans, French and Scandinavians. Earlier they brought their own languages, but later bestowed on English a fair share of their vocabulary. In the OE period the two major influences were Latin and Scandinavian.

LATIN INFLUENCE ON OLD ENGLISH

Perhaps no single language has influenced English as much as Latin. Words in Latin existed in England before the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. In ancient times Latin had the status of a world language. The languages of some European countries which had come under Roman rule had become Romanised (e.g.Gaulish became French).However, this process of Romanisation was halted by the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, and the collapse of the Roman Empire. Most of the borrowed words in Latin relate to the areas in which the supremacy of the Romans was recognized, that is Military, Agriculture and Trade and Commerce. Some examples are: wall (from Latin Vallum), tile (from Latin Tequla), mile (from Latin Milia Passum), and many derivatives.

About AD 600 Christianity began to spread in England together with the rise of literacy. The Christian missionaries translated a large number of Latin texts (mostly in Northumbrian) and made word glosses. Many of the following words in existence today are borrowed from Latin and are related to religion; ***heaven, hell, God, gospel, Easter, sin, alter, abbot, alms, angel, mass ,nun, priest etc. Other words relating to learning, science medicine are –history, grammatical, master, paper, school, verse, meter, anchor, cucumber, lily, candle, plant, tiger*** and so on.

SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE ON OLD ENGLISH

The second major linguistic invasion of English came as a result of the Scandinavian attacks on England. They were the Germanic inhabitants of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, who as one time neighbours of the Anglo-Saxons in 5th Century Europe, were closely related to them in blood and language. These daring sea-faring people were called Vikings. Viking Age from the middle of the 8th Century to the beginning of the 11th Century.

SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE ON OF VOCABULARY

The result of two centuries of close contact with the Scandinavians had an unavoidable effect on the languages of the Anglo-Saxons. This influence was not immediately apparent because of the hostile relationship between the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons. Towards the end of the 9th Century peaceful co-existence prevailed and many Danish words entering English which were very basic in nature. These words entered through everyday interaction some of these words are – ***birth, bank, bull, call, clip, die, drag, egg, fellow, gap, give, get, guess, harbour, hit, hill, ill, kid, knife, leg, low, meek, muck, odd, race, raise, root, rotten, scare, score, seat, sister, sky, sly, tight, trust, want, weak, window.***

Apart from this, Scandinavian borrowings are found in family names and place names. It is interesting to notice that Scandinavian words were not restricted to nouns, verbs and adjectives. Structure words like prepositions and conjunctions and other forms such as pronouns and adverbs were freely borrowed. Three OE pronouns, **hie, hiera, him** were replaced by their Danish counterparts, **they, their, them**. Words like **both, same, aloft, seemly, to till, fro, though** are all Scandinavian in origin. But the most remarkable borrowing is ARE, the plural form of the most basic verb in English-'to be'. Thus the Scandinavian influence on OE extended beyond the vocabulary to touch the grammatical system as well.

OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

The literature of the Anglo-Saxons is of two types. The first is that which was undoubtedly brought by the Germanic tribes when they invaded England and is preserved in the oral tradition. The second is manifest in the songs, poems and religious writings found in manuscripts produced when literacy came to England. Unfortunately, only a fragment of Old English poetry has survived and the manuscripts are the following:-

1. The BEOWULF (MS)
2. The JUNIUS (MS)
3. The EXETER BOOK
4. The VERCELLI BOOK

The golden period of Old English literature was the era of King Alfred. He was a scholar, soldier, law-giver and ruler. When he became king, there were not enough scholars to read the Latin service books and the early Christian literature. King Alfred brought in teachers and scholars from abroad and he himself set out to translate many of the works in Latin into West Saxon, including Bead's **HISTORY**. The most notable work inspired by Alfred was **The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**. This book is the first book of English prose, and the first continuous history of a European nation in its own language

The year 1066 marks the end of Old English. The Norman Conquest made England into little more than a colony of France. French became the language of the king's court, justice, governance and education. The language of everyday speech among the upper class in England was French. The Normans had no interest in developing and patronizing a language such as English. In the absence of adequate patronage English literary writing almost came to a standstill. However, it continued to be the language of the masses. Over

a period of time, due to close interaction and inter-marriages, English began replacing French, first in the homes and later in the offices and schools. The children of the nobility spoke English as their mother tongue and had to be taught French in school. Thus the English Language survived the onslaught of the French rulers. Moreover, England was restored to English kings within 150 years of the Norman Conquest.

Exercises

1. Write T for true and F for false statements:

a) Old English is known also as Anglo-Celtic English.
b) Old English was a single uniform language.
c) The Writing system of Old English is very different from what we find today.
d) Scandinavian influence on the Old English vocabulary also affected the grammatical system.
e) The era of King Alfred was very bad for English literature.

2. Answer very briefly:

1. What was the impact of the Norman Conquest on vocabulary of English?
2. Name the four dialects on Old English.
3. Write the features of the Runic characters (alphabet)
4. Name the two major influences on the Old English.
5. Name the four manuscripts of the Old English that have survived.



CHAPTER 4
MIDDLE ENGLISH

The year AD 1066 is generally taken to be the end of the Old English period but Middle English came into existence after a gap of almost a century, for the reasons stated earlier. Thus Middle English period is accepted to be from AD 1150-1500.At each end there is a period of transition when the language seems to be in a state of flux. Two significant events distinguish Middle and Modern English. These are (a) the introduction of printing technology, and (b) the 'Great Vowel Shift'.

Today, it is impossible to think and imagine a world without the printing machine. The printing press set up by William Caxton at the Westminster Abbey, England in AD 1476 has played a historic role in the development of English, because it helped to standardize the language. While Middle English was dialectical, Modern English is a standard language, though it also has regional and international varieties.

The other major linguistic change known as The Great Vowel Shift involved a series of changes in the pronunciation of the English long vowels. The changes began in about AD 1400 and were fully established by the end of the Middle period. These phonological changes are seen as the last barrier between the English of the early times and that of now.

DIALECTS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

One of the most striking features of Middle English was the fact that dialects of Middle English existed in both spoken and written form. There was no single literary standard and the language varied from county to county. Further, OE had four dialects but Middle English had one more. They were known as Northern, Southern, East Midland, West Midland, and Kentish. Only the last remains unchanged. The Northumbrian of OE is now called Northern, West-Saxon is now Southern and Mercian is divided into two dialects which came to be known as East Midland and West Midland dialect. Modern English has evolved from the East Midland dialect.

A number of factors together with geographical considerations led to a situation where the East Midland dialect became the most important and useful to the people of this age.

MIDDLE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The most important linguistic impact of French rule in England was that a large number of French words entered the language. Many of these words are related to the dignity and honour of the royal office. Some of these words are royalty, realm homage, prince, princess, duke, duchess, palace, castle, hall and sovereign. The French influence was gradual but significant during the 13th and 14th centuries. According to one estimate about 10,000 new words were brought over from the French into English during this time-Out of these almost 75% are in use today. These words are related to law, literature administration, religion,fashion.

Another dominant influence on Middle English was that of Latin. Some of the words from Latin came directly, but some entered through French and were words related to science, medicine, law and literature. Some of the borrowed words are:
History, index, intellect, legal, magnify, picture, genius, summary, substitute, temperature, magnify, private etc.

MIDDLE ENGLISH GRAMMAR

The Middle English period witnessed extensive and fundamental changes in the phonological and grammatical system in English. The changes in the grammatical system reduced English from a highly inflected language to an analytic one. Due to certain phonetic changes in the language, the word endings that served as markers of number, gender, case and tense were so altered in their pronunciation as to lose their distinctive form, and therefore their usefulness. All but a few OE noun, verb and adjective endings died and grammatical relations began to be indicated by fixed patterns of word order. Thus, the gradual loss of inflections and the fixing of word order were the most important changes during this period.

Another major phenomenon to have occurred during this time is known as the Great Vowel Shift. When we compare the Middle and Modern consonant systems, we find very little difference between them. But the vowel systems are very different. This is because between Middle English and our times the long vowels have changed considerably, but the short vowels have remained almost the same. The series of changes affecting the long vowels of Middle English is known as the Great Vowel Shift.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Middle English Literature reflects quite accurately the changing fortunes of English. The early literature of this phase (AD 1150-AD 1215) is exclusively religious in nature. During

this period the upper classes mainly patronized French literature and English writers could not expect support or patronage from them. It was the Church and their leaders who were keen to spread the religion and so promoted native literature.

The second phase of this period (AD-1250-AD 1350) displays a tendency to variety and dialectical sub- division. In addition to the religious writings there are also some secular works. Many of these were translations of popular French romances. *LAY OF HAVELOK THE DANE,* written in Midland dialect is a good example. This poem shows clearly that the old inflections are all gone, and the vocabulary is almost unmixed with French. Two other works of this period which contain a high proportion of French words are *The Romaunt of the Rose* written by Geoffrey Chaucer and the *Romance of King Alexander.* The second half of the 14th century (AD 1340-1400) is known as the period of great individual writers. This phase is also referred to as the Classical Middle English. The notable writers of this period are Chaucer, John Gower, William Langland, and John Wyclif. The following are the well known works of these writers who have made this an outstanding age.

WELL KNOWN WORKS OF THESE WRITERS

CHAUCER –The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales; The Canterbury Tales
GOWER - Meditantis; Vox Clamantis; Confessio Amantis
LANGLAND- Piers the Plowman
WYCLIF -Bible (Translation)

Two other great works of this period are by unknown authors but this in no way diminishes their importance. These are *the Pearl*, and *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight.* The latter is considered one of the greatest examples of English poetry. The universally accepted pinnacles of poetic achievements are the works of Chaucer which provide a great amount of information about medieval life and times. Thus, Chaucer's works are the major sources of information about Middle English grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Exercises

1. **Write T for true and F for false statements:**
   a) The year 1066 AD marks he end of the Old English and the beginning of the Middle English.
   b) Modern English has evolved from the West Midland dialect.
   c) The early literature of Middle English is chiefly secular in nature.
   d) The second half of the fourteenth century is known as the period of great individual writers.

2. **Answer these questions very briefly:**
   1. What is meant by the Great Vowel Shift?
   2. When did it take place?
   3. Name the dialects of the Middle English.
   4. How many words (approx) were brought over from the French during the 13th and the 14th century? What percentage of these words is in use today?
   5. What made English from a highly inflectional language into an analytic one?
   6. Name four notable writers of the Middle English.
   7. Whose works are the major sources of information about Middle English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation?

