
India's 'untouchables' to build temple to 'Goddess of the English language'

India's downtrodden "untouchables" are to open a temple to a "Goddess of the English language" in honour of Lord Macaulay, an architect of the British Empire.

By Dean Nelson in New Delhi

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Leaders of India



Laying of the foundation stone for the Dalit Goddess English Temple (left) and Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay Photo: ALAMY

[\(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/) 's low-caste Dalits are to celebrate the opening of a temple shaped like a desktop computer to inspire "untouchable" children to improve their prospects in life by learning English.

They believe learning English will open up new opportunities for India's 160 million Dalits in higher education and high-status government careers.

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Dalits are India's most persecuted caste and its members suffer violence and discrimination throughout the country. There are regular reports of Dalit boys being murdered for illicit relationships with higher caste girls.

Leaders of the influential Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh state, where the pro-dalit Bahujan Samaj Party is in power, believe more could escape the worst aspects of "untouchability" if they master the English language.

A foundation stone was laid in April and a 30 inch brass statue of the 'goddess' was dispatched from New Delhi to Lakimpuri Kheri village in Uttar Pradesh where campaigners are hoping to open the temple formally in honour of Lord Macaulay, the 19th Century colonial official who sought to create an English-speaking Indian middle-class elite.

"The idea is to make English a matter of faith among Dalits because we believe it is an empowering language. If a Dalit woman starts worshipping English as a goddess, there is no way her kids would escape the 'ABC' from their childhood," said Chandra Bhan Prasad, the Dalit author behind the plan.

He believes speaking English will help Dalits make better marriages. He said the temple, which will cost around £14,000, will include carvings of famous quotes by English authors and an icon of Lord Macaulay.

He is now planning to build more 'Macaulay temples' throughout India.

Lord Macaulay wanted to "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Today his name is reviled by nationalists and the word 'Macaulayite' is still used as a term of abuse for the Anglicised Indian elite.

The plan to celebrate his role in spreading English in India was denounced yesterday by a spokesman for the nationalist opposition Bharatiya Janata Party.

"A language can be a source of increasing knowledge but cannot be a source of worship. If people say that it is a godlike symbol, that's unacceptable," said Siddarth Nath Singh.

Pavane K Varma, author of "Being Indian", said while he supports the teaching of English in Indian schools, it must not be at the expense of children mastering their own language and culture.

"If you start teaching English in first grade and Baa Baa Black Sheep before your own language, you're making a big mistake," he said.

"Losing your linguistic roots and saying that's the best way [for Dalit] upward mobility is a false argument."
