

#### **4.6. TAG QUESTIONS**

Tag questions are essential features of spoken good English. Normally, they are not used in written standard English.

Tag questions contain their own answers. Nominally, these questions ask the opinion of the interlocutor, but his/her agreement is taken for granted.

Tag questions represent a very important feature of human nature : that in the situation of love and goodwill, informal as well as in social life, we agree to disagree and disagree to agree. Proficiency in the use of tags goes a long way in conciliation, diplomacy and smoothing of human relations.

The forms of the tag questions are interrogative, but their contents are affirmative. Tag questions or appended questions are usually pronounced on a lower pitch than the main clause.

The tag questions may be put into seven groups.

1. A positive statement takes a negative tag and a negative statement takes a positive tag. This feature is based on the principle that two negatives make an affirmative. Hence, in every tag question, there can be only one negative.

It is very hot today, isn't it ? (Answer : Yes, it is very hot today)

It is not very cold today, is it ? (Answer : Yes, it is not very cold today).

You agree with me, don't you ? (Answer : Yes, I whole heartedly agree with you)

You don't agree with me, do you ? (Answer : I do, but I have some doubts on a point raised by you)

2. **Semi-negative Statement in Tags** : Semi-negative questions have words like little, few, hardly, scarcely, rarely, seldom, etc., and they take positive tags.

**Few (rare)** : Few people have good luck like that of Barack Obama for so quickly being rewarded for vision and integrity, do they ? — Positive tag.

(Meaning : Yes, it is rare to have the type of good luck that Barack Obama has had. The majority of mankind works throughout their lives for little or no reward).

Few is negative; a few is positive; the few implies minority.

A few (a considerable number) : Quite a few persons will protest against the ban on free speech, will they not ? — Negative tag.

(Meaning : True, a considerable number of people will defy the ban on free speech)

The few (the minority) : The few who defied the ban on free speech did it out of their conviction that freedom of speech is the essence of our democracy, isn't that so? Negative tag.

(Meaning : True ! Although the few were a small minority, they represented the soul of our democracy).

3. In tag question, if noun or pronoun is in the main clause, only pronoun comes in the tag. He is very sincere and honest, isn't he ? Indira Gandhi was a great leader, wasn't she ? One can't be so careful, can one ?

4. The tense of the main clause is repeated in the tag.

She looks smart, doesn't she ?

He is the jack of all trades, isn't he ?

R.K. Narayan was a distinguished novelist, wasn't he ?

5. If in main clause is Auxiliary + main verb then in tag is the repetition of only auxiliary or modal auxiliary.

We have finished our work, haven't we ?

We should reach the hospital early, shouldn't we ?