

Language Endangerment in India: A Perception of Linguistic Genocide in Education

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Abstract: *Language is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area¹. It is generally held that the speakers of a language vanish the language becomes dead. It is a system underneath a social mind². If the speakers die the language doesn't get extinct, it remains in the system. To understand the society, its system, one has to go to the language that is the system of existence of people, on which their socio-cultural existence is based, which is basically shared by all the speakers of that language.*

Keywords: Language

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area¹. It is generally held that the speakers of a language vanish the language becomes dead. It is a system underneath a social mind². If the speakers die the language doesn't get extinct, it remains in the system. To understand the society, its system, one has to go to the language that is the system of existence of people, on which their socio-cultural existence is based, which is basically shared by all the speakers of that language.

A crucial question comes forth that what does mean the disappearance of a language? It may generally be called that the language is pushed into (temporary) disuse³. For David Crystal it is called the language death⁴. An inconvenience in considering the 'death' is that it either be natural or unnatural. Human being is the one who uses language. If a language is to be substituted then many of the questions arise, i.e. why it is being substituted, with whom, why with this and why not with that, to what extent, for how many time, so on and so forth. Taking into consideration all the questions Skutnabb-Kangas States that the disappearance of a language is not the 'death' but a 'murder' ('death' may either be natural or unnatural, 'murder' the killing by some other than the murdered) by some dominant or powerful language(s). As earlier stated, language is not a phenomenon to be used by a single person but it is a system shared by an ethnic community. There are many varieties of a language as there are varieties of human beings living in the same society (group). If a language has been disappeared, it means all the varieties of, it has been shared by, are 'killed', it is called 'linguistic genocide'⁵.

India, being a multilingual, is a multicultural country. It is the biggest multilingual and multicultural country in the world, but the diversity is in a hierarchic manner, i.e. some languages are dominant and some dominated—Sanskrit and Persian were in the colonial era and English is in postcolonial era. (After independence of India though Hindi was held a superior language and patronized in India, it was extremely opposed by the eastern and the southern parts of the country. As per the necessity of the globalization is concerned, to establish domination all over the world, English suppressed it as it suppressed the other Indian languages). On the one hand there are many of the languages in India only as a means of communication, not as a resource of power i.e. many of the tribal languages, and on the other there are languages like some dominant regional languages i.e. Marathi in Maharashtra, Telugu in Andhra Pradesh, Kannada in Karnataka, etc, and more importantly English who gives access to knowledge, power, politics, and so on. Speakers of the languages consider themselves inferior before the English speakers. To some extent Indian State offered a hand to extinction of many of the indigenous languages. English benefited itself the situation and hailed the privilege upon the languages (only 22 languages are concerned as the Indian languages, who themselves sided the remaining indigenous languages, got themselves sided to the marginal position by English at Central Government level).

A village is a copy of the world. It has its own structure, process of running and preservation. In the process of globalisation the world has become a Global Village. If the world is a global village, it also has to have a structure and a process, which is considered to be the dominated one (in other words the English). Language is a phenomenon that plays a vital role in the process. Colonisers (British, as per India is concerned) ruled colonised people with not the sword but the language (which is a spirit of the system, a resource of power, a window to see the world⁵ and an access to knowledge). Colonisers (now neo-colonisers or imperialists⁶) put their language, culture, knowledge, education as superior than the colonised (now neo-colonised) people. In the superiorities language plays an instrumental role. It becomes a necessity to establish the language, culture, knowledge of colonisers to replace with the indigenous ones. It was very much possible that the language, culture, knowledge of colonisers to be the parts of the colonies as many were there but it didn't occur so for the sake of domination of colonisers. In the process of globalisation the situation is very much illustrative; it will be explained as 'globalisation is a killing agent³'.

It is Elphinston's Minute (1824) who giving privilege to Sanskrit, threw out all the indigenous languages from education as well as administration⁷. Macaulay repeated the situation by giving emphasis on English language and education⁸. All the languages of the big multilingual community (Asian Subcontinent) had been made powerless⁹. Most of the indigenous people prefer English language (or the dominant one) who gives them access to knowledge, power, administration, science and technology, etc.

A language is not a subject of learning but a matter of practice. But for the sake of, sacredness in the earlier period, superiority the dominant languages are to be taught in the education system, which in fact without practice is not possible. So that, many of students struggle for the acquisition of language, that is dominant (English) language, instead of knowledge of that language through their own language. Now in the education system English is taught as a dominant language or as a language of power which is not possible without the killing of indigenous languages. Learning a language and learning about language is different. The former means the language acquisition and the later to get the knowledge of that language. (Raja Rao in his preface to *Kanthapura* states that English is the language of our intellectual makeup, not of our emotional makeup¹⁰.) In acquisition of English the Indian learner kills her/his own language and switch over to the Other language (i.e. English). Automatically the process of killing mother tongue(s) is being done by its speakers, which is the primary condition to become a part of globalisation.

As earlier stated globalisation is a killing agent, without killing of other languages and cultures it is not possible to establish a monolingual as well as mono cultural society, i.e. society of English language and culture. Development is generally held as a process of progress, a substitution of good with the bad. If globalisation is process of development, it is not regarding the languages themselves, rather it is switching over from multilingualism to monolingualism. If the development occurs in linguistic field it means it drives itself downwards through killing the other (indigenous) languages, which is the killing of other cultures too, rather the cultural existence of other people.

The runners of globalisation try to preserve the difference between dominant and dominated people with the help of ideological state apparatuses, i.e. education, social conventions, cultural activities, etc, instead of repressive state apparatuses, i.e. police, military force, etc. The formers make the participants to consent to the domination of others upon themselves which remains for a long time in comparison with the consent made by the later¹¹. If we are agreeing the concept of 'global village', we are to agree to the killing of our languages, in other words—to the killing of our own cultural existence.

However globalisation occurs, language planning should be made in a democratic manner, which should be implemented by all the educational institutions. If a dialogue between the languages, with equal status, does not take place a great paradox will arise, i.e. generally it is held that globalisation is a phenomenon to be practiced in a democratic manner, but its components work in a repressive manner, such as English has become the language of globalisation and all the other languages are put on the margins. If it is not possible to involve all the languages in politics, judiciary, administration, etc, the contact language should be sharable and comprehensive to all the users. The languages should not be sided but befriended with the core languages. As the biodiversity and cultural diversity are necessary to keep the cultural existence of the very group, diversity should be there in the languages too, in which people are to live with their own culture, consciousness, capacities, knowledge and experiences. The consequences of language planning should make constructive contribution to a dialogic interaction between the languages, cultures,

human minds and social perspectives and the extent to which it provides support to enrichment, vitality and dynamics of multilingualism¹².

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