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Retaining the Regional Languages in Post Colonial India

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Abstract

India is gifted with an amazing linguistic and cultural diversity. Each state has its indigenous languages and languages in turn have indigenous culture. According to the 1961 census, there were 1652 languages in India; the 1071 census records 808 languages in India. In the last 50 years, over 50 languages have been lost. As per the People's Linguistic Survey of India 2013, 197 languages are identified as endangered. With a speedy urbanization, outburst of English medium schools and English education, rush towards the west, brain drain, etc. importance and dominance of some regional languages and literatures seem to be challenged. In the 21st century postcolonial India, it is urgent necessity to protect dying languages as well as retain and promote existing regional languages and cultures. Attempts have been made to retain and promote regional languages, literatures and cultures after independence. The present paper brings out some initiatives taken to preserve the regional languages and literatures; it further humbly notes a few suggestions towards the retaining glory and significance of the native languages.

Key Words: Language, Regional, Promote, Literature, Government

Introduction:

India is gifted with an amazing linguistic and cultural diversity. Each state has its indigenous languages and languages in turn have indigenous culture. According to the 1961 Census, there were 1652 languages in India; the 1971 Census records 808 languages in India. As Varun Gandhi notes,

Over 220 Indian languages have been lost in the last 50 years, with a further 197 languages categorized as endangered according to the People's Linguistic Survey of India, 2013. (Gandhi)

With a speedy urbanisation, spread of English education, outburst of English medium schools, colonial impacts, brain drain, the upcoming educated upper middle class aspiring, as Gurucharan Das puts it, to connect to global economy through English (Das), want of written script of some languages, etc., importance and dominance of regional languages and literatures seem to be challenged. In the 21st century post colonial India, it is urgent necessity to protect dying languages as well as retain and promote existing regional languages and thereby, cultures. The present research attempts to discuss the significance and role of regional languages in building up the multilingual, multicultural identity of India and also in constructing the post independence political map of the Indian subcontinent; it then brings out and reviews some initiatives taken to preserve regional languages and literatures and finally, humbly puts forth some suggestions towards retainment of glory and significance of the native and regional languages in present- day India.

1 Language as building up identity:

Language is one of the key factors determining identity of an individual as well as a community and society at large.”Society and culture influence the words that we speak and the words that we speak, influence society and culture,” (Schmitz, 2012) (Ma’am, did not find the citation source ?)Thus, habits and customs that go with a language denote an individual’s identity; culture, traditions and conventions that go with a language, signify identity of a community, of a society. India owes its multicultural identity to its vast variety of languages in use.

Dialects and vernaculars are also linguistic varieties which determine specific communities, regions and their cultures.

2 Role of regional languages in constructing political India:

“Language issue is a prominent topic in Post-independent Indian consolidation....The issue of language has sorted itself out after a heated debate in constitutional and political fields.” (SIGI, 2019)(Ma’am, did not find the citation source?)

In India language has been the determining factor in formation of states. According to the *States Reorganisation Act* of 1956, Indian states were organised along linguistic lines – each state having its own dominant language like Gujarati in Gujarat, Punjabi in Punjab and so on.

Cultural traditions of each state thus, go with its language. It can be maintained that each language has its unique culture and traditions. The more a language is in vogue with large number of speakers, more firm are its roots. In order to preserve the multicultural identity of the country with its long standing cultural and linguistic heritage as well as to retain the identity of various communities and plural societies, retaining significance of regional languages – even those with official status as per the Indian Constitution – and sustenance of some languages identified as endangered languages in varying degree, are challenges that demand serious attention.

3 Initiatives taken towards preserving regional languages:

3.1 The Central Institute of Indian Languages:

The Central Institute of Indian Languages ‘part of the Language Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Government of India,’ founded in 1969, with its headquarters at Mysore and five regional centres, has been undertaking researches in languages and documentation for preservation of endangered languages. It has special units and projects like Regional Language Centre, SC Dialect Survey Project, Mother Tongue Survey of India, Centre of Language Documentation, Centre of Folklore, Creative Writing and Lexicography, etc. through which it works for promotion and preservation of regional, tribal languages, dialects as well as endangered languages. To state its aims and objectives, quoting from its home page: It

- . Advices and Assists Central as well as State Governments in the matters of language,
- . Contributes to the development of Indian Languages by creating content and corpus
- . Protects and documents Minor, Minority and Tribal Languages
- . Promotes Linguistic harmony by teaching 15 Indian languages to non-native learners. (*Central Institute of Indian Languages*)

3.2 Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi:

A significant initiative towards promoting regional literatures and thereby, languages is the establishment of Sahitya Akademi.

India's National Academy of Letters, was established in 1954 by the Government of India. As India's premier literary institution, the Akademi preserves and promotes literature contained in 24 Indian languages recognised by it through Awards, Fellowships, Grants, Publications, Literary Programmes, Workshops and Exhibitions. ("Welcome to Sahitya Akademi")

The British Government had considered the proposal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal for establishing a National Academy of Letters and had accepted it in principle in 1944. It was proposed to establish a National Cultural Trust which would have three academies: Academy of Letters, Academy of Visual Arts and Academy of Music and Dance. After independence, the Government of India established an academy of letters called Sahitya Akademi in 1954. The constitution of Akademi describes it as

a national organisation to work actively for the development of Indian letters and to set high literary standards, to foster and co-ordinate literary activities in all the Indian languages and to promote through them all the cultural unity of the country. ("Welcome to Sahitya Akademi")

The Akademi undertakes literary activities in 24 Indian languages. Along with the 22 scheduled languages, it considers Rajasthani and English as well.

The Akademi has its head office in New Delhi. It undertakes publications and conducts programmes in '*Dogri, English, Hindi, Kashmiri, Maithili, Nepali, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sanskrit, Santhali and Urdu.*' ("Welcome to Sahitya Akademi") It has 5 regional offices. The regional office at Kolkata works in north-eastern languages like Bengali, Bodo, Manipuri, and Oriya. The Bangalore centre focuses on Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu along with publication work in English as well like the Kolkata centre. The Chennai office, functioning as a sub-regional centre focuses on activities in Tamil language. The centre in Mumbai, set up in 1972, actively works

for promotion of literature in Gujarati, Konkani, Marathi and Sindhi; like other regional centres, it also looks after publication work in English and Hindi. The regional office at Agartala functions as the north-east centre for oral literature and works for preservation and promotion of unrecognized languages of the North-East region.

The Sahitya Akademi has opened centre for Oral and Tribal Literature which proposes to preserve original texts of tribal languages in audio-video formats and get them translated in written forms in scheduled languages and English.

3.3 State Sahitya Akademis:

On the lines of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, different state governments have also established independent Sahitya Akademis of the state languages. To name a few of them, Haryana Punjabi Sahitya Akademi, Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Pashchimbanga Bangla Sahitya Akademi, Bihar Hindi Granth Akademi, Telugu Sahitya Akademi, Tamil Sahitya Akademi, Kannada Sahitya Akademi, Rajasthan Sahitya Akademi, Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, etc. All these state akademis work for preservation and promotion of their state languages. As an example, I shall briefly discuss Gujarat Sahitya Akademi.

The Gujarat Sahitya Akademi was established by the Government of Gujarat in 1981 with the main aim to 'encourage organizations and writers in Gujarat to promote the development of Gujarati, Sanskrit and other modern languages....' (Rahaman & Verma 231)(Citation Source???) Apart from Gujarati, the Akademi has 5 other regional akademis, namely, Hindi Sahitya Akademi, Urdu Sahitya Akademi, Sindhi Sahitya Akademi, Sanskrit Sahitya Akademi and Kutchhi Sahitya Akademi. A significant mission and vision of the Akademi is: "In addition to Gujarati language spoken in Gujarat region, work for other languages, Government of India recognized languages...."

www.academybooks.in

3.4 Regional Language and Literature Festivals:

The language and literature festivals organised in different states promote regional writings and thereby languages. The following is a list of a few such fests which contribute to preservation of regional linguistic, literary and cultural flavours.

1. Arunachal Literature and Art Festival: started since 2018
2. Brahmaputra Literary Festival: Started since 2017, it promotes literature of languages of the north-eastern region.
3. Delhi Literature Fest: began in 2013 in Mumbai.
4. Goa Arts and Literature Festival: Founded in 2010
5. Gujarat Literature Festival: Started before seven years to promote literature of the state languages
6. Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters since 2018
7. Kerala Lit Fest: held since 2016
8. Literature for Life: Held in Tamil Nadu since 2010
9. Chennai Literary Festival: started since 2014
10. Queer Lit Fest: Held in Chennai since 2018
11. Hyderabad Literary Festival: held since 2010. It promotes one regional language each year
12. Lucknow Literary Festival held since 2013
13. Gorakhpur Literary Festival since 2018
14. Dehradun literature Festival since 2016
15. Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival; held since 2010
16. Apeejay Bangla Sahitya Utsob since 2015, etc.

3.5 Awards for Regional Languages and Literatures

The Government of India runs certain schemes to honour, recognise and felicitate people for their effective use and successful implementation of the official language policy of the Government. of Hindi as well as regional languages, The following are only a few of them.

1. Under Rajbhasha Kirti Puraskar Yojana,

...every year shields are awarded to various Ministries, Departments, Boards/Institutions, Autonomous Bodies etc., Nationalized Banks, Public Sector Undertakings and Town Official Language Implementation Committees for their outstanding achievements in promoting the Official Language Policy of the Government.

<https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2018-pdfs/ls-06022018-English/58.pdf> (????)

2. Rajbhasha Gaurav Puraskar is awarded to Indian citizens and also specifically to Central Government employees for writing original books on subjects like General knowledge and Science in Hindi.

3. Awards are also given under Rajbhasha Regional Awards Scheme.

4. Increment, incentives and cash prizes are given by the Government for contribution to promotion of regional languages.

Every year, awards are given by the Government as well as by private trusts and NGOs to writers of Hindi and regional languages. Thus, by promoting and encouraging regional writing, attempts are made to preserve and develop regional languages. The following is a list of some such awards:

3.5.1 The Sahitya Akademi Awards:

The Sahitya Akademi gives awards to outstanding writers of regional languages in two categories- 1 *The Sahitya Akademi Award* from the 24 languages recognised by the Akademi and 2 *Bhasha Sanman* 'to significant contribution to the languages not formally recognized by the Akademi as also for contribution to classical and medieval literature.' ("Welcome to Sahitya Akademi")

Akademi also gives *The Yuva Puraskar Award* to 'young writers of outstanding works in one of the twenty-four major **Indian languages**. Instituted in 2011, the Yuva Puraskar recognises young writers under the age of 35 years' (Wikipedia contributors)

Akademi gives Fellowship Awards as well by nominating eminent writers as fellows.

3.5.2 Awards by state Governments:

Like the National Sahitya Akademi, Sahitya Akademis founded by different states also confer honour upon the writers of the languages of the state. For example, the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi gives *Sahitya Gaurav Puraskar* to eminent Gujarati writer, *Yuva Puraskar* to a young budding writer, *Sahityaratna Award* to Gujarati writers for significant contribution and *Ramanlal Nilkanth Hasya Paritoshik* for humorous writing. Similarly, Kerala Sahitya Akademi gives award to outstanding writers of Malayalam literature, while Pashchimbanga Sahitya Bangla Akademi felicitates writers of Bangla literature with *Rabindra Puraskar*. Madhya Pradesh Government gives the *Kabir Sanman Award* for outstanding works in poetry in Indian languages.

3.5.3 Private Awards:

K. K. Birla Foundation gives *Vyas Samman Award* (since 1991) for eminence in Hindi Literature. It also confers *Saraswati Samman* to outstanding literary works among 22 Indian languages.

3.6 Regional language film and drama festivals glorify and popularize and thereby, help to sustain and promote regional languages.

3.7 The New Education Policy:

The recently declared new education policy tends to pose possibilities of increasing significance of regional languages and mother tongues. There is a proposal, though not a compulsion but a strong and sincere recommendation, for primary education in mother tongue or native language. It will be a long debate and a diversion to discuss implications of the provisions but it can certainly be noted here the intention of promoting regional language in it. It stresses on the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction; it also includes

home language, mother tongue, local language and regional language as options for the medium of instruction.

The former ISRO Chief and the head of the drafting committee of the NEP, Dr. K. Kasturirangan said:

...adopting local languages as the medium of instruction till class 5 is important in the early phase of education because the child's strengths in understanding the principles and in displaying it creatively manifests better in the mother tongue as well as in the local language. (*The Financial Express*)

3.8 Promotion of regional languages in higher education:

Under various government schemes, university text books are translated in 22 scheduled languages and published. As per the Press Information Bureau for HRD Ministry, the following steps are taken for promotion of regional languages in higher education:

3.9.1The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT) provides grants for publication of university text books in regional languages.

3.9.2The UGC supports 9 Central Universities under the scheme "Establishment of Centre for Endangered Languages in Central Universities".

3.9.3The Central Institute of Indian Languages has taken up the 'National Translation Mission' to translate the university text books. (Pokhriyal)

4 Suggestions for retaining and promoting regional languages:

Much still remains to be done to retain and promote regional languages. The following are a few humble suggestions to retain regional languages, thereby, our indigenous cultures and rich heritage:

4.1 Not to oppose the increasing vogue and need for English to connect with the global, an awareness should be created among language users that their identity is at risk by letting their language fall out of use; that to preserve their culture, their language should be preserved. To quote varun Gandhi: "ultimately, languages are not preserved by documentation but by having a profusion of people speaking them." (Gandhi)

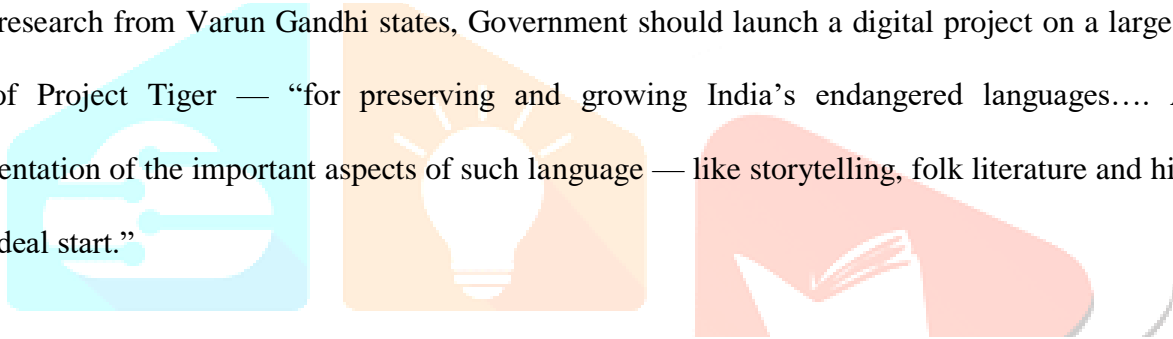
4.2 If we cannot avoid education in English medium, we must facilitate bilingual or multilingual teaching. This will help the language users to retain their linguistic pride and avoid their language from falling out of use. In order to make such teaching possible, bilingual teachers must be absorbed by schools.

4.3 Popular culture can play a role in saving regional languages. Regional language films, music, radio and media can keep language alive. Regional language films, theatre, film and drama festivals must be encouraged. Tax free films can attract more viewers. Local radio channels can also sustain local language.

4.4 Language is significant not simply for the purpose of communication. It is a source of new ideas and intense feelings. A child can be more creative in mother tongue than in foreign language. So, as Gurucharan Das rightly points out, “Since a child is naturally bilingual,... Have a dual medium of instruction – teach the arts in the mother tongue; the sciences in English.” (Das)

4.5 Government schools should be restructured and made up to the mark with high standards. In these schools education should be given following the proposals of NEP about languages.

4.6 In research from Varun Gandhi states, Government should launch a digital project on a large scale on the lines of Project Tiger — “for preserving and growing India’s endangered languages.... Audio-visual documentation of the important aspects of such language — like storytelling, folk literature and history — will be an ideal start.”



Conclusion

To conclude, it is difficult for post colonial India to free itself colonizing effects of power, technology, and English; however, it can recognise its own identity, retaining its own culture and languages and celebrate its roots bearing the pride of its amazing linguistic diversity.

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