



Hindrances In Fostering Tamil Language: An Impact Of Colonial And Post-Colonial Practices

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Abstract

The advent of English language along with the Western Education System through the colonists has made a colossal change in the thought process of the natives in Tamil Nadu. Though the Colonists have left the nation, the colonial mindset of condescending English and disdaining indigenous culture has not left India even today. The colonial causes include incorporating exotic elements in the educational syllabus followed by the native students and distancing them from the indigenous knowledge which is essential for any native. The English language has muddled the indigenous languages in India to an extent that, the Indians are feeling comfortable in using the English language than their mother tongue. The native people of Tamil Nadu cannot differentiate English and unmixed Tamil. If the same condition persists, every colonized nation will become a country without a consciousness of its past. The objective of this research paper is to delineate how English language has subjugated the age-old Tamil language and its culture in the place of its origin.

Keywords: Educational colonization, Cultural colonization, Tamil supremacy, Indigenous knowledge subjugation, Postcolonial Indian Education.

Introduction

Benjamin Lee Whorf says that, 'Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about.' The advent of English language along with the Western Education System has made a profound impact in the thought process of the natives in India. Though the Colonists left the nation, the education system and the language brought by them have not left India even today. The English language has muddled the indigenous languages in India to an extent that, the Indians are feeling more comfortable in using the English language than their mother tongue. The objective of this research paper is to delineate how English language has subjugated the 2600 years old Tamil language and its culture.

The Colonial cause

The Western Education System begins in India with the Charter Act of 1813, passed by the British Parliament, to give education to the native Indian people. "Macaulay's Minute on Education, February 2, 1835" propelled the implementation of Western education system in India.

We must at present do our best 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 tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Macaulay)

This implementation of English in Indian Schools had pushed the usage of native language to contours. The Westerners want the Indians to learn English not to elevate the Indians to the status of equal counterparts, but to make them unconscious of their identity and to depend on the Westerners for any accomplishment in the field of arts, science and commerce.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, a native Kenyan writer was against this Western Education System in colonized countries. In the book, *Writers in Politics* he has vehemently attacked the dominance of English in native schools. He substantiates his disapproval through *Daffodils*, an English poem written by William Wordsworth, an English writer. In this poem, Wordsworth has described the alluring nature of the flower, Daffodils. When the same poem is taught to a native Kenyan child he comes with a wrong interpretation of that particular poem. Thiong'o expresses this as, "I asked him: What are daffodils? He looked at the illustration in the book: Oh, they are just little fishes in a lake!" (4). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says that, the Western Education System force the students to learn about exotic things which were not an integral part of their life. This way of incorporating exotic elements is also tangible in the present Tamil Nadu State Council of Educational Research and Training's (TNSCERT) class 11 *English* text books. A student in Tamil Nadu would not have seen 'primrose tufts' or 'periwinkle' in his/her lifetime, but, the textbook prescribes the poem "Lines Written in Early Spring" by William Wordsworth, which has the verse lines, "Through primrose tufts, in that sweet bower, / The periwinkle trail'd its wreaths;" (9-10). Through their teachers and technological advancements, the students can understand that Primrose tufts and Periwinkles are flowers, but they cannot have a real life

experience of those flowers in their locality. Thiong'o says, "They sing of the beauty of England and of the changing seasons and flowers" (36). The students learning this poem will simply memorise those verses for passing their examinations and it influence their mind-sets and perspectives towards their own country. Another thing which is exotic to the students of Tamil Nadu or the whole of India is the spring season, because a tropical country like India will not have autumn which is to be followed by a spring, but the students were forced to study about spring season through this poem in schools. An Indian poet, Nisha Dyrene in her poem, 'Indian Season' (2007) says that,

Autumn is English

In red, yellow and brown

Autumn is Indian

Whenever leaves fall down. (12-16)

Neo-colonialism takes place through the introduction of exotic setting which the students of Tamil Nadu are not exposed to in their environment. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says, "They recite poems which are an English writer's nostalgic response to his landscape" (36), which is in no way related to the students of colonized countries. The students in Tamil Nadu are unaware of the local landscapes like Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai, but, they are forced to study something which is not relevant to their life. Western Education rejects the needs of the student's local region and it thrusts the non-native ideas into the minds of younger generation.

The Post-colonial causes

The consequences of following Western Education System and how it has affected the thinking process of the indigenous people in Tamil Nadu is palpable in what we see around us. The newspaper article titled 'Tension at Chennai airport as flight details not in Tamil' published in Deccan Chronicle exemplifies how a Government sector is reckless in providing arrival and departure details in Tamil, the local language of the region. In Chennai, more than half of the passengers using Chennai International Airport belong to Tamil Nadu, having Tamil as their first language. It is not sure whether all the passengers travelling would know any language other than Tamil. At this stage, the Airport authorities should provide information in Tamil through the flight announcement systems and display boards. After immediate protest from the passengers, they provided information in Tamil language.

The next cause could be substantiated with a newspaper article titled 'Serve in my language, customers tell banks' published in Times of India, explains how the Government aided banking sectors predominantly use English in their websites, ATM's, deposit slips, withdrawal challans, demand drafts, cheque leaves and call centres. This makes the local people to depend on others who know English to assist in using the bank services. This proves that, though they are proficient in an age-old language they cannot depend on it for their day-to-day survival in their own place.

The next instance can be seen in the Education Department of Tamil Nadu. In a newspaper article titled, ‘Tamil not must for class X students from other states’ published in Times of India proves how the Government of Tamil Nadu is imprudent in protecting the legacy of an age-old language in its own region. It is understandable that, students from other states feel difficult to grasp Tamil immediately, but the Government cannot completely withhold Tamil to students from other states. It should be made mandatory for any student who writes his school examination in Tamil Nadu to have a primary knowledge in Tamil. However, things are improving recently from the side of Tamil Nadu Government.

Another important thing is about the elimination of certain important lines in Tamil National Anthem written by Manonmaniyam P. Sundarampillai. The lines are,

“பல்லுயிரும் பலவுலகும் படைத்தளித்து துடைக்கினுமோர்
எல்லையறு பரம்பொருள்முன் இருந்தபடி இருப்பதுபோல் கன்னடமுங்
களிதெலுங்கும் கவின்மலையாளமும் துளுவும்
உன்னுதரத் தேயுதித்தே ஒன்றுபல வாகிடினும்
ஆரியம்போல் உலகவழக்கழிந் தொழிந்து சிதையாவன் சீரிளமைத்
திறம்வியந்து செயல்மறந்து...”

(English translation)

Many a life! Many a world! Creations of Thine! Decimations too!

Ever pervading Creator! Remain as ever! Ever as Thy have been!

Kannada, Joyous

Telugu, Dainty Malayalam with Thulu!

Born out of Thee! Borne by Thee! Originated out of Thee! Replicated!

Unlike Aryan lingua

franca! Spoken by none! Dead and gone!

Ever remain afresh Thee alone! Purity intact too!

Delighted! Praise thou beauteous Tamil, youthful forever! Awestruck! (quora.com/Why-are-some-lines-from-Tamil-Thai-Valthu-omitted)

These lines proclaim the antiquity and self-dependent calibre of Tamil. These lines declare the supremacy of Tamil language over other languages in southern India. These lines were deliberately avoided in the Tamil national anthem, which thwarts the indigenous people to know about the importance of a language which is as old as the hills. There are many other areas where Tamil has been vanquished by the indigenous people like arguing language in High courts, administrative language, etc.

Conclusion

The recent Keeladi excavations have found that the Tamil Civilization has existed before 2600 years and it also delineates how they have lived a sustained life. The antiquity of Tamil civilization has been expressed by Purapporul Venbamalai in 9th century through the following lines,

பொய் அகல, நாளும் புகழ் விளைத்தல் என் வியப்பாம்?
 வையகம் போர்த்த, வயங்கு ஒலி நீர் - கையகலக்
 கல் தோன்றி மண் தோன்றாக் காலத்தே, வாளோடு
 முன் தோன்றி மூத்த குடி!

The current status of this age-old language is very pathetic. The school going children (future generation) face lot of difficulties in applying Tamil. They make lot of mistakes while writing and reading Tamil. At the same time, they feel much comfortable while writing or reading English. This can be observed from any school going child in Tamil Nadu. The parents are keen to improve the communicative and writing ability of their children only in English and they consider Tamil only as a supplement. In some houses, even the parents inculcate English for their children before Tamil. In this way, the Western Education System has decentralized the native language and centralized English. The current generation is unaware of conserving the wealth of an age-old language and the local communication itself is corrupted with the involvement of foreign words. There is a common belief among the Indian people that, only when a person is fluent in English, he/she can sustain their life. This thought makes Tamil only as an accessory and not as a principal tool of communication.

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