Cultural Diversity: Aspects of Language

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Abstract - **Cultural diversity in general and linguistic diversity in particular has increasingly gaining its importance due to accelerating mobility and agility of people all over the world. As a result of this human mobility, language diffusion is also taking place, which is adding new directions in framing education policy in different country. The present study revolves around the contemporary scenario of language diversity of India with special emphasis on West Bengal.**

Index Terms - **Cultural diversity, language diversity, mother tongue, interaction.**

INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a very important role in our daily life. It is the cultural values and divergent cultural attributes, an individual possesses, is represented by the attitudes, behaviour and interaction of that person with other human populations on the earth. Encompassing the heritage aspect of any region, two types of cultures have been distinguished- tangible and intangible and both types create platforms where people can perform varieties of activities. Such an intercultural competencies, both at individual and collective level, make us enable to manage cultural diversity and monitor cultural transformation with time and scale. In recent decades, increasing effects of globalization and urbanization, human mobility starts affecting on culturescape of a region, creating problems to respective national Governments. This is well reflected by changing strategies by Government at temporal scale. Proliferation of cultural identity may strengthen regional unity by reducing inter-community disparity. To achieve this goal, national governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society are required to put their hands together to implement appropriate policy framework. Cultural diversity can be analysed through the detailed study of language diversity of a region. An individual carry the cultural values acquired through socialization as well as own language as a means of communication with other members of society. Acculturation researchers will surely points out the varieties of acculturative characters of people resulting in various skill of language adoption.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the study as-
a. To examine the possibilities cultural diversity in terms of linguistic pluralism,
b. To find out the scope of cultural diversity in the framework of a multilingual geographical locale.

The paper is entirely based on secondary analysis linked with Population census data, articles of journal, books and newspaper articles. The analysis is substantiated with respect to orientation of other thinkers. It is thematic paper, no empirical understanding is attached here.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-independence, despite the officialization of selected languages in the constitution, standardization of major languages like Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali, and linguistic reorganization based on certain dominant languages, India has remained a multicultural and multilingual country (Benedikter, 2013). Cultural diversity is a debatable, open-ended term with reference to the coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, etc., of human beings. Diverse cultures lead to diverse identities which bring both opportunities and challenges to education and the society (Lin, 2020). Both of the opportunities and challenges coexist in cultural diversity for achieving the path of ensuring equitable and opportunity to all. As a conceptual

framework cultural diversity can be seen as a drive to transcend the parochial boundary of specific understanding. In turn it helps to interact with different kinds of people. Education is the process of cultivating human potential in a person so that s/he can contribute to his/her personal growth as well as those of others. Managing diversity within society is the recognition of collective rights and its negotiation with a state that is based on the concession of individual rights (Dietz, 2014). Cultural sustainability in higher education recognizes the need to honor and transmit culture for future generations, achieved by infusing pluralistic, transformative learning to foster socio-ecological change (Pyne&ONeil, 2019).Handan Celik et al. (2020) focused on cultural diversity as well as language that related on concepts of cross-cultural awareness particularly to understand why interculturally is an issue in language teaching and language teacher education.

Cultural diversity is viewed as essential to provide everyone with a sense of belonging in a society where people with different cultures mix together both in private and public areas. An acknowledged culture is a crucial element for cultivating a sense of belonging (Taylor and Gutmann 1994). The limitations of a single national narrative are problematic in practice as sometimes true for the context of different cultures. Identities can be incompatible to each other, and some textbooks are used to defame minority cultures and identities. As a consequence curricular recognition considers an inclusive national narrative in curricula for facilitating people to bond with different cultures and identities together (Levinson 2012). The Human Development Report of 2004 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focused on 'cultural liberty in today's diverse world'. The mission of education in contemporary world is to promote life in its wholeness simultaneously to bring into communion and solidarity in the light of authentic globalization on the platform of the finest expressions of diverse cultures. Ultimately it will be connected to expressions of human dignity through creativity in several kinds of interactions amidst different patterns of life patterns. The ethnic, cultural, and language diversity among the citizens and within different institutions ultimately enrich the nation. Cultural diversity in education is an approach of teaching and learning that is based on democratic values that affirm cultural pluralism within a diversified country in this interdependent world. The assimilation perspective of cultural diversity in education is that micro-cultures must give up their original culture and identities in order to blend in or become absorbed into the major periphery of culture.

Simonetta Longhi et al. (2014) attempted to analyze the impact of diversity (by birth, ethnicity, religion and residence) on life satisfaction of people living in England. The result shows that white British people living in diverse areas have on average lower levels of life satisfaction than those living in areas where diversity in low, while there is no correlation between diversity and life satisfaction for non-white British people a foreign born. Identifying the status of culturally competent in an organization through model of cultural competency has been applied in Shilpa Kulkarni's (2012) study on various dimensions of culture diversity an organization. Eglantina Hysa (2020) pointed out the relationship between cultural diversity and ethnic fractionalization on one side and governance, competitiveness and human development on the other. Furthermore, it compared the economic performance of these countries with the indicators of the ethnic diversity. Michael Lukesova et al. (2015) define social pedagogy, social and cultural diversity in the Czech Republic and social pedagogy in the context of social-cultural diversity.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN INDIA

India's pluralism is reflected in its diversity in languages. British orientalist and Indian Pandits under colonial conditions, went on a partnership regarding the knowledge criterion on the issue of Indian language and society. Language diversity during pre-colonial India intended for religion-based social construct. For example, during colonial period, social policies focusing on language based education were targeted to fulfil the need for English-speaking people in administrative sector. Medium of instruction was mainly centered around classical languages like Sanskrit and Urdu or Arabic as demand for these languages were determined by the scholarly status of an individual as well as collectivity, which resulted in least importance in indigenous education system through vernacular language (Bhaskaran, 2017). Diversity in language of the country was a major challenge faced by British in framing socio-cultural

policy of the country in pre-independence period. At this time, Indian intelligentsia found it as essential requirement to educate country's citizens through English-education as learning western language and culture as well as style would break their dependency on British Empire in long term. Subsequently, these English-educated intellectuals were started to focus on gaining their position in British administrations and understood the potentiality of India's possibilities towards development (Naik & Narullah, 1974).

After achieving independence, India has proved herself as a culturally diversified multi-lingual country, ranking 4th in terms of the number of languages spoken, according to the Ethnologue Language Catalogue of the world (Jolad & Agarwal, 2021). The linguistic Survey of India compiled by George Grierson conducted between 1894 to 1903 first time for the mapping of language diversity of India. The LSI pointed out the existence of 179 languages and 544 dialects spoken in British India (Grierson, 1903-1927). According to the 1971 census, the country has 1,652 languages belonging to five different language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese and Semito-Hamitic (GOI 1971). The Indian constitution identifies 22 'recognized languages'. About 87 languages are used in print media, 71 languages are used on radio and the administration of the country is conducted in 15 languages (Meganathan, 2011).

British administration in the colonial period classified Indian languages into vernacular languages with common people and language for educated classes as classical languages. Political orientations are related to languages directly and indirectly from the colonial era. Hilly and tribal regions from the historical background never received patronage in language; their languages categorized as minority language with non-recognition by the Government at national level as such. Interestingly, in numerical terms, their language may be dominant one in some specific regions of India. Linguistic mapping of Indian landscape clearly indicates diversity of languages and exclusion of minority languages. According to sources, sometimes a variation can be noted in estimation of number of languages and dialects because of nature and time of survey. The census of India classified languages spoken in India since 1881. After independence, the census took the position of official classifier of languages and mother tongues and became aid of administrative activities. Census avoids the term 'dialects', their focus is on 'mother tongue'. Mother tongues can be related to the process of rationalization then they are regrouped in several other languages. Data showed many languages, as well as mother tongues, spoken by less than 10,000 people are marked as 'others'. This categorization is an attempt to invisibilize their existence.

There are two varieties of languages- 'Bhasha' or the literary variety and 'Boli', or the colloquial variety. People's Linguistic Survey of India (2010-2012) reported 780 languages (without making distinction between language and dialect). According to 2011 Census, 19,569 raw mother tongues were reported which were 'rationalized' into 1369 mother tongues. However, 1369 mother tongues were regrouped into 270 mother tongues (spoken by 10,000 and more people) and 121 languages. The languages are further classified into 22 scheduled languages and 99 non-scheduled languages. Scheduled languages are listed under scheduled VIII of the Indian Constitution and receive state patronage.

CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO OF LANGUAGE STATUS: CASE OF WEST BENGAL

India's unique cultural diversity is represented by its language diversity, which varies from one state to the other. There are different families of languages and among them, Tibeto-Burmese is the most diverse language group. About 66 languages are counted under this family in spite of the fact that only 1% people of India speak this language mainly concentrated in North-East India. State wise scenario reveals that, most linguistically diverse states are Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh followed by Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Interestingly, small states with distinct ethnic and tribal groups show greater linguistic diversity than large densely populated states like UP. Homogeneity in language distribution is maximum in Kerala, where 97% of the total population speaks one language- Malaylam. On the Northern part of the country, the homogenization of language is done by 'Hindi'. According to 2011 census, West Bengal reveals that, though majority of people speak Bengali (87%), but there are varieties of languages both scheduled and non-scheduled languages. Out of scheduled languages, Hindi (7%), Santhali (3%), Urdu (2%) and Nepali (1.3%) follow

the dominant language, Bengali. On the other hand, out of total 99 non-scheduled languages, Oraon form the dominant group with more than 36 percent people of the state speaking this language. It is followed by Munda (9%), Mundari (6%), Savara (5%) with more than 5 percent concentration of people under this category. Other non-scheduled languages with more than 1 percent concentration of people are in languages like- Rabha (3%), English (3%), Lepcha (2%), Tibetan (2%), Bhumij (1%), Arbi (1%), Bhutia (1%) and Malto (1%).

Indian linguistic diversity creates two layers of hierarchical relationship between dominant and minority languages. At one level, there is distinction between English and major regional languages while at another level, there is distinction between major languages and indigenous tribal minority (ITM) languages. In contemporary period, English has become a powerful international language of the global economy and it has pushed major regional languages into a lesser powerful situation and the ITM languages in a marginalized position. As a consequence, the linguistic diversity is declining as number of English-speaking people is increasing. Out of over 700 languages, less than 50 are in use as languages of teaching and learning in formal education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

India is the home to people of diverse cultures coming from different part of the world. Rapid globalization and increase in urbanization creating a scope to assimilate diverse cultures and give a single platform for their interaction. Language is a tool for inter-regional, inter-community and inter-generational transmission of culture, heritage, scientific knowledge and ideas. Diversity of language, thus, is mentioned as a fact and a reality of region, place and space which add a more complex dimension to policy framework for the beneficiaries of the whole country. Generally, no specific policy or line of action is dedicated to languages in the country, hence giving the emerging of language niches in every big cities as well as in rural areas and remote regional pockets. The dynamic nature of language grow, shrink, transform, merge and sometimes die. Hence, it is necessary to formulate proper planning to maintain the social cohesion among people living in these areas. Policy framework should point out towards language sustainability of the whole

country. Language preservation, maintenance and development needs a multi-prolonged strategy to operate. Rich traditions are preserved in every language since its inception. Mother tongue as the medium of instruction is thus, necessary in school and at primary level. Worldwide research shows that, teaching through mother tongue at the initial level of education gives an impetus to the growth of mind and thought and makes children more creative and logical.

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