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LINKAGES FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE MINORITIES Karnataka: A Case Study

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1. EDUCATION OF THE MINORITIES

In this paper I would like to discuss the facilities and provisions provided for the education of the minorities in India. This I will do through a case study of Karnataka. Karnataka offers several features that represent fairly well the linguistic conditions prevailing in the country, even as the state presents some unique challenges. My goal is to present a linguistic map of Karnataka, and to focus on the utilization of the legal provisions made in the Constitution of India, resolutions of the legislature, and the administrative decisions of the various governments that ruled the state since independence. In particular, I will present an analysis of the status of teaching languages in the state, and argue for the academic linkages needed for the education of the minorities.

Karnataka is a newly carved state within the Indian Union, as a result of the re-organization of the provinces into linguistic states. The Kannada-speaking people had been agitating for the re-unification of all the Kannada-speaking areas into a single state. When this was finally achieved to a very large extent, Karnataka emerged as a predominantly Kannada-speaking state, but not without the linguistic minorities. This, indeed, has been the experience of all the linguistically re-organized states of the Indian Union. Linguistic re-organization has brought with it blessings and challenges to the newly carved states.

2. ON DEFINING "MINORITIES"

Minorities are identified with several tags such as the linguistic minorities, religious minorities, linguistic and religious minorities, educationally backward minorities, etc. Depending upon the context in which the identification is done, most of the people in India are minorities, and hardly any group can be called a majority. For example, within the national context, Kannada is a minority language. But, within the context of Karnataka, Kannada is a majority language.

The UNESCO suggests the following markers to identify a minority. Note, however, that such suggestions do not carry any legal value.

1. Numerical subordination.
2. A relationship of political, economic or cultural subordination with respect to another community.

3. A sense of deprivation or lack of access to opportunity. Minority status is more a matter of relationships than of numbers alone, according to the Unesco reports.

3. SAFEGUARDS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE MINORITIES

The Constitution of India, under Article 29, states that the 'minorities with a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same' and that they 'shall not be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them'. Also as per the Article 30: 'All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.' Also 'in granting aid to educational institutions, the State 'shall not discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language'. Article 350A to the Constitution regarding facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education states that 'it shall be the endeavor of every State and of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.'

The Commission (States Reorganization) treated secondary education differently from the education at the primary stage, and did not recommend for the Constitutional recognition of the right to have instruction in the mother tongue at the secondary school stage.

Resolution of the Chief Ministers' Conference on November 16, 1961 desired that: (a) If there are 40 pupils in a school or 10 in a class-room desirous of being instructed at the primary level in their mother-tongue, teaching will have to be done by appointing one teacher; (b) All modern Indian languages mentioned in the 8th Schedule and English be used as media of instruction at the secondary level. For this purpose, a minimum strength of 60 pupils in last four classes or 15 pupils in each class speaking that given language will be necessary, provided that in the first four years a strength of 15 in each class be ensured. It also desired that the Central Government should prepare model text-books both for primary and secondary stages, and that the State governments should undertake the production of these textbooks instead of leaving it to private enterprises.

4. MINORITIES IN THE LINGUISTIC MAP OF KARNATAKA

According to the Census of India 1991, Karnataka has a population of 4,49,77,201 people. Among them 19,15,691 (4.26%) belong to tribal communities. Some of the tribes speak distinct dialects of Kannada as their mother tongue, and some others speak a language of their own as mother tongue. The tribes that have their own distinct languages as mother tongues live in compact geographical areas. The 1971 Census records 166 mother tongues in Karnataka. Karnataka, thus, is a classic example of a multilingual state.

The linguistic map of Karnataka State is gradually changing from one decade to another. Some minority populations have been continuously increasing in their number, while others have been decreasing, and some others have been in the process of vanishing from the linguistic map of the State.

Mother tongue	1961	1971	1981	1991	Increase/ Decrease
Kannada	65.17	65.94	65.69	66.2	+1.03
Urdu	8.64	9.00	9.53	9.96	+1.32
Hindi	0.35	0.44	1.78	1.96	+1.61
Malayalam	1.30	1.41	1.60	1.68	+0.38
Tamil	3.64	3.36	3.76	3.84	+0.20
Telugu	8.68	8.17	8.12	7.39	-1.29
Marathi	4.55	4.05	3.77	3.64	-0.91
Konkani	2.08	1.96	1.74	1.57	-0.51
Tulu	3.61	3.56	3.30	3.06	-0.55
Kodagu	0.33	0.24		0.21	-0.12
Lambani/ Banjari		1.16			
Yerava Soliga		0.04			

5. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. As shown above, the increasing ones (other than Urdu) are, generally speaking, the migratory minorities, and the decreasing ones are, generally speaking, the indigenous minorities.
2. There is proportionate decrease in the number of speakers of Tulu and Kodagu, who do not have any geographical base outside Karnataka and are concentrated in a compact geographical area of the state.
3. The linguistic minorities like Lambani/Banjara and Yerava, who are in every sense socially and economically backward, have vanished from the linguistic map of the state due to the rationalization of statistics by the Census.

6. THE LINGUISTIC MINORITIES AND EDUCATION

After the reorganization of the states in 1956, Karnataka state made provision for the study of mother tongues from standard 1 to standard 4; from 5 to 7 standards, the languages available for study in the Karnataka school system were Kannada, Urdu, English, Marathi, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati and Sindhi; and from 8 to 10 standards, the languages available for study in the school system were Kannada,

Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, English and Sanskrit. However, since 1989, this list got modified due to various reasons and litigations: the mother tongues available for study in the school system from 1 to 4th standards are Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, and English.

It can be seen from the above that, though the minority speakers such as Konkani, Tulu, Kodagu, Lambani, Yerava, Soliga, etc., are in substantial number in the state, (and in spite of the protection given to them under various legal provisions,) these minority languages did not form part of the school system in the State.

In the context of education, the minorities can be classified as follows:

- § Linguistic minorities for whom their own mother tongue may be offered as their school language (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu, Marathi etc.).
- § Linguistic minorities for whom their own mother tongue may not be offered as their school language, but the regional language is supposed to be their "second mother tongue" (Tulu, Kodagu, and Konkani).
- § Linguistic minorities for whom their mother tongue is a distinct dialect of Kannada (distinct features that differentiate the dialect from Kannada (Jenu Kuruba, Hakki Pikki, etc., in some radical ways).
- § Linguistic minorities for whom their mother tongue is not the school language and also not their "second mother tongue" (Lamani, Soliga, Yerava).

It is true that, in the last ten years, Tulu, Kodagu, and Konkani have got some institutional recognition and support through the formation of their own Language Academies. This helps in developing projects for the standardization, use and the propagation of these languages. The literacy rate among the speakers of these languages is high. Rate of bilingualism is also very high. In these languages, a good amount of work is done in the form of creation of literature, grammars, and dictionaries. However, these languages are not learned through formal education. There is a lack of avenue for their introduction at the primary school stage. These factors have not helped these languages to develop their potential fully. Attempts are made to introduce these languages at the post-graduate level rather than at the primary education level. The proposal to introduce Tulu at the primary level has not found favor with the people as well as the government. As for the teaching of Konkani, pre-primary instructional materials are under preparation for the Konkani children of Karnataka.

When we come to the situation of other languages like Lambani, Soliga and Yerava, the status of the speakers is in total contrast with the first three languages we discussed in the previous paragraph. The speakers of these languages are economically and socially backward. The rate of literacy among them is very poor. The 1931 Census records important information about the opening of a Yerava school in 1925 and also the closure of the same because of lack of attendance. In the last decade, an attempt was made to introduce Soliga as a school language in the schools of B.R. Hills with some specially prepared textbooks for the first standard. But the teaching of Soliga did not continue in the second standard. The unofficial information that got currency among the

people revealed that the welfare department of the government stopped the aid to these schools since they were not using the textbooks prescribed by the state government. However, under the DPEP (District Primary Education Program), the first standard and second standard books (*Soliga Nudi*) are under use in these schools mainly due to the attempt of an individual and the backing by a voluntary organization. Similar attempt for the children of the Jenu Kuruba tribe did not take off. If adequate steps were not taken to save these languages, they would become museum languages soon.

7. ROLE OF ENGLISH

English was not in the run when the linguistic rights for the linguistic minorities were decided and responsibilities listed. However, today, English has a major role in decision-making regarding language choice in education. English is replacing the mother tongue and the regional language. Nearly 7 states in the country have opted for the introduction of English from the earliest stage, even along with the mother tongue of the student. When the language policy was debated in India decades ago, only Hindi and/or the regional language were perceived to a threat to the place of the mother tongue in the school system. Today the situation is totally changed. At that time, there were violent protests against ignoring mother tongues, and today we see total submission in favor of English. No right bestowed by the Constitution or responsibility given by the Resolution and Recommendations of the Commissions or governments is able to shield Indian languages from the onward march of English. The minority languages are the worst suffering lot. If not to reverse or to stall the process and to protect the minor and minority languages, it is necessary at least now to develop certain linkages in school. Languages without any power or support for their continued currency and development are bound to vanish.

8. EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS FACED BY SMALLER LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

One of the research projects conducted in Karnataka, namely, 'Tribal Study (under District Primary Education Program, 1994)' throws light not only on the education of tribal children but also other minority language speakers. According to that study, "while answering about their professional problems 48% of the teachers experienced problems relating to language, etc., and 62.5% of them felt that the tribal children have specific learning problems like 'language problem, understanding problem (they can not understand)'(p.39). Parents 'want that education should be imparted in mother tongue only and not by any other language' (p.69). Most of the tribal learners belong to the first generation learners and will be having their own problems in learning (p.109). About the attitude of the learners: 'they have got language problem which is coming in their way of learning' (p.108). In some of the minority schools, it is observed that 'though the medium of instruction is Kannada, most of the schoolteachers use Telugu to explain the difficult concepts and encourage students to respond in Telugu only. Except teaching Kannada, other activities and instructions are given in Telugu language only. That may be the reason that even after 7 years schooling the students of this block are not able to identify the letters of the Kannada script and not able to speak in Kannada' (p.96). Language

problem is the most important problem faced by the children in this area (p.97). The study recommends: "It is high time to think about the 'relevance of the curriculum' and immediate steps be taken accordingly. As almost all tribal people are for Kannada learning, it is better to plan how best it could be taught in lower classes and the teachers are to be specially trained for it" (p.113).

We have to remember that a language may have constitutional, institutional, and individual support for its development. Also it is important to note that (1) a language survives, if it is learnt as mother tongue. (2) In the educational context, a language can be best learnt in all its facets, if it is used as the medium of instruction.

9. LINKAGES

Unfortunately, any discussion regarding the linguistic minorities is construed as divisive, but this need not be so. In fact an open discussion on issues relating to language use on many is often an integrative effort. The linguistic and educational needs of these groups are different and need to be tackled. In this context the challenges before us are as follows.

1. The regional language Kannada may be introduced as a subject from the third standard if the student does not learn it as the first language/mother tongue. Can this language be taught the way it is taught as mother tongue? Or, should it be taught the way English is taught in the schools? Or, is it necessary to devise ways and means to teach it to the linguistic minorities for whom Kannada is not the mother tongue? What are the needs of human and materials resources? Does our teacher education methodology incorporate these aspects? Teaching of three or more languages in the school system is to be integrated at some level or the other. One of the levels could be teacher training. So, an integrated approach towards teaching more than one language has to be developed with the effort of the government and the NGOs, voluntary organizations, and individuals. The methodology thus evolved should be made a part of teacher training. This will make teaching the regional language to the linguistic minorities more scientific and simple. So far it is only the government that has been making efforts to spread the use and learning of Kannada in the minority schools. If the Kannada organizations that work for the promotion of Kannada are involved in the movement to teach Kannada to the students from the linguistic minorities, there may be grater success.
2. Minority mother tongue students, who use Kannada (the regional language) as the medium of instruction, face different learning problems altogether as seen in the research cited above. The problems of such students are to be addressed through special teacher education modules.

As on January 15, 2001, the minority mother tongue medium schools in Karnataka are as follows:

Language	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
Urdu	3868	301
Marathil	1036	189
Tamil	210	9
Telugu	160	24

10. SOME SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

The decreasing number of the secondary schools imparting education in the minority mother tongues gives an indication of the possible switch over to another medium or dropping out of the school altogether at the secondary school stage. It is not clear whether this trend could be arrested. This involves official and business policies regarding language requirements for various jobs, etc. This trend (moving from the mother tongue education to another medium of instruction, or the school drop out rate) is a reality. So, there is a need to make an assessment of the language requirement or proficiency expected of these students for the switch over from one language medium to another language medium. On the basis of such an assessment, the bridge materials have to be constructed to help the students from the groups of linguistic minorities to from their mother tongue medium to another medium.

Of late there is an awakening between the two linguistic minorities in Karnataka, the Kodagu and Tulu speakers, about their languages. Both the groups are asking for the inclusion of their languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Literature of one of these languages has become a subject of study at the Post-graduate level. Learning and teaching at the primary level may gain grounds once the instructional materials are ready.

How do we bring mother tongue education to the other minorities of Karnataka? Is it necessary? If necessary, why? In order to retain the language resources of the nation and to fulfill the commitment of the nation to the linguistic minorities made in Article 350 A, it is really essential to make provision for the education of the minorities in their mother tongue in the primary schools. As already seen in the analysis, efforts of the minorities to learn their mother tongue have not borne fruit. The government, due to its policy, has eliminated some of these languages from the school curriculum. The languages like Soliga, Yerava, Banjari/Lambani may be made part of the school curriculum through suitable changes in the official policy. Preparation of instructional materials and teacher training may be left to the NGOs and voluntary organizations working for the welfare of these groups under the overall guidance of the government

In the beginning of this paper I said that even Kannada becomes a minority language when looked at from a different plane. In case the PUC students who have studied through the Kannada medium want to take the IIT JEE, they just cannot do so, because there is no provision for the same. Also if they intend to take the various Olympiad programs, they cannot, since provisions do not exist. The National Standard Examination Physics questions are available in English. They can be made available in Hindi, Gujarati,

Bengali, Telugu and Tamil provided there are at least 300 students opting for that language. The National Standard Examination Chemistry and Biology shall be in English only. since provisions do not exist for other languages. Note that even the major Indian languages of the country may not be offered as the medium in high-prestige examinations. If this is the case of a dominant regional language, can one imagine the fate of minority languages?

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