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CULTURAL DIVERSITY, PRESERVATION OF MORAL AND ETHICAL VALUES,
ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is a unity made up of internal diversities, but it has never had a clear regional identity. As a result, its dominant social and religious practice, Hinduism, coexists with others, making it impossible to define solely by the Hindu matrix, particularly because Hinduism does not have uniform characteristics across regions or social groups. In recent centuries, India has also been imbued with European culture, which was brought to the country by colonialism and is now spread throughout it by modern means of communication and information that allow people to share multiple cultural realities at the same time. The primary goal of this article is to examine the impact of language threats on linguistic minorities and how this contributes to people's identity crises, thereby assisting in the preservation and promotion of these lesser-known languages and cultures in the Indian subcontinent. Minorities, specifically linguistic minorities, and issues related to the identity crisis and linguistic human rights are then discussed, as well as the country's current language policies and their impact on endangered minority languages. Furthermore, it is critical to consider the various social, political, cultural, and practical factors in order to assess the main grievances of linguistic minorities regarding threats to their languages and to make recommendations for protecting their languages and cultures, thereby preserving their identity.

"India is a pluralist society that creates magic with democracy, rule of law and individual freedom, community relations and [cultural] diversity. What a place to be an intellectual! ... I wouldn't mind being born ten times to rediscover India."—Robert Blackwill

Introduction

India has a very diverse culture and is rich in cultural customs. In India, there are 21 languages recognized by the Indian State, but according to reports there are around more than 400 dialects in various regions of the country. In addition to being the 2nd largest country in territorial extension on the Asian continent and the 2nd most populous in the world, India also draws attention for its linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. There are 28 states and 23 languages, that is, practically every state adopts a different language. As for religion, India is not limited to Hinduism, but is also followed by Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism.

The historical construction of India

When we analyse India from a diachronic point of view, it is possible for us to evaluate the different cultural matrices that have been inscribed within it, at the same time as we realize that some essentialisms that social sciences have juxtaposed to this society – mysticism, immutable caste system, tradition and resistance to change – prove problematic in the face of these prolonged cultural coexistences. Rather, they suggest that we view India as a negotiating structure that has welcomed and synthesized both endogenous and exogenous transformations, which make Embree's definition of "a structure in the making" pertinent.

Linguistic diversity

The constitution of India recognizes twenty-two languages as official languages, and there are, in addition, more than 844 dialects spoken throughout the territory. The most important language is Hindi, spoken by 600 million people, that is, around 50% of the country's population. The official languages almost always correspond to the boundaries of the State and are: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Telugu, and Urdu, a language of the Semitic family. Each of these languages has a distinct script and each has many millions of native speakers.

English is the language of administration and functions as a vehicular language between individuals from different states and among Indians in diaspora.

Being Indian therefore entails the possibilities of speaking one or more languages and dialects and of having different religious affiliations. What makes India quite unique is the reasonably balanced way in which these possibilities coexist.

Language users across the country generally use two or more languages between them, in the different contexts of their activities. Unquestionably, despite great linguistic diversity, communication across the country remains accessible.

"If one draws a straight line between Kashmir and Kanyakumari and marks, say, every five or ten miles, then one will find that there is no break in communication between any two consecutive points" (Pattanayak, 1984:44)

In situations of contact between minority languages and dominant languages, the majority of speakers of the minority language tend to be bilingual or multilingual. This leads to communication between the various groups but also to the maintenance of minority languages and stable multilingualism.

Multilingualism as a positive force

The exceptional feature of Indian multilingualism, the pluralistic ethos and the multilingual function of socialization make multilingualism a positive force. Indeed, multilingualism at the individual and social level has positive consequences, particularly when cultural pluralism and multilingualism are accepted as social norms, although, from a political perspective, it can constitute a major problem for language and education planning, particularly when each region wants to promote its language, creating problems for the central government.

Negative face of multilingualism in India

Despite the above, many languages are subject to discrimination, social and political neglect, unlike some Indian languages that have the privilege of access to political powers and resources. This leads to an interesting phenomenon: the great difference in status between the various languages of India. Therefore, Indian multilingualism is sometimes described as a multilingualism of languages that, although constitutionally equal, are statutorily unequal, in which languages are clearly associated with a hierarchy of power and privileges. Even when languages are preserved in such a hierarchy, preservation is not without cost. The preservation of languages in India involves marginalization, identity crisis, deprivation of freedom and ability, failure of education and poverty.

“Large-scale social neglect and discrimination have led to loss of linguistic diversity and impoverishment of languages in the world. Exclusion of languages from domains of power, official recognition, legal and statutory use, trade, commerce and education, severely restricts the chances of their development and survival. (Mohanty 2009:278-291)”

With English being the dominant language in post-colonial India, as in South Asia and other parts of the world, it reinforced the linguistic hierarchy between speakers and non-speakers and became a strong indicator of status. Data of this nature will certainly have consequences for the future of multilingualism in India, determining the process of language change, marginalization, preservation and the relationship between languages and their speakers.

India and its languages: an overview

India is the world's fifth largest democracy and shares its borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Due to its geographical location and rich history, it has become a multilingual, multicultural and secular nation with different ethnic origins and diverse cultures. It is one of the main global hotspots for linguistic diversity in general and in Asia in particular. India is the fourth most linguistically diverse nation, with 453 living languages.

Most tribes in northeast India are socially and economically better positioned than other tribes distributed across the country. All of these communities speak a variety of under-resourced languages that are underexplored, under-described, and very little documented until now. The World Atlas of Linguistic Structures (Wals) has very little information about these tribal languages, mainly because there are few written languages with any documentation.

There is yet another categorization of Indian languages, between main and minority. Languages officially listed in the Constitution are considered the main languages, while those not listed and those classified as "other" fall under the minority label. Defining "minority languages" in the Indian context is not so easy, as will be seen later.

Status of endangered languages

The main focus of this article is India's endangered linguistic minorities. The categorization of these languages according to their official recognition status:

- (a) Official languages classified as vulnerable (2 in total): Bodo and Manipuri, both spoken in northeast India.
- (b) Unlisted languages classified as vulnerable (50 in total): The majority of these languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. For some of these languages, there was an increase in the number of speakers during the period: Adi (25.38%), Mundari (6.30%), Mizo (23.13%). On the other hand, other of these languages showed a reduction in the number of speakers, and the percentages are quite alarming: Ladakhi (-85.71%), Phom (-55.58%), Simi/Sema (-89.57%).
- (c) Languages not listed and classified as definitely threatened (14 in total): Most of them are spoken in northeast India. The Khond/Kuvi and Konda languages are present in central India and the Coorgi language, in turn, in the south of the country.

As pointed out by Pappuswamy (2002), however, numerical strength cannot be the only criterion for determining whether a language is endangered or not. As can be seen above, there are at least 49 languages on the endangered list that have more than 100,000 speakers (15 of them definitely endangered and 34 vulnerable). Only in some cases, the loss of a language is due to a reduction in its number of speakers - which matters a lot, since, if there are no more speakers of a language, its culture is also lost. Other causes of threat may be related to speakers "exchanging" these languages for others that are politically or socioeconomically dominant - which makes it even more important to strengthen these languages in every way possible, including the development of orthography.

Ethnic minorities, linguistic human rights and identity crisis

There is no single definition for "ethnic minorities", "ethnic communities", "ethnic identity" and "linguistic minorities" that is accepted by all scholars from different areas. In general, most of them see ethnic communities as politicized cultural groups that are grouped according to religious, linguistic, racial, tribal, etc. aspects. In the context of India, most studies describe ethnic movements as "tribal movements". In this sense, tribal communities may be equivalent to ethnic communities or, in other cases, indigenous peoples. Thus, the community to which these people belong and the languages they speak are also labeled as "indigenous communities" and "indigenous languages", respectively. But the term "indigenous" is also not clearly defined. It is not clear who qualifies as "indigenous" in the Indian context - is it just the "first" people of India, the Adivasis? This is difficult to determine. The terms "tribes", "indigenous peoples", and "ethnic communities" are therefore used interchangeably by academics.

There are several types of minorities - in general, they are groups of people that are relatively smaller in number than other, more numerous groups in a community. The basis of minority status of a particular group can be language, culture, religion, race, caste etc. Thus, in India, there are religious (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, etc.), ethnic (based on culture) and linguistic (based on language) minorities.

The Constitution of India recognizes minorities based on religion, culture, language or writing (Article 29). The word "minorities" appears in articles 29 to 30 and 350A to 350B, but there is no adequate definition of the term.

The Supreme Court of India in 1958 defined "language minority community" as a community numerically less than 50% at the state level. However, Bodo, Dogri, Kashmiri, Maithili and Santali languages are not official in any state, despite being spoken by more than 50% of the population in some of them. On the other hand, Urdu, the official language of Jammu and Kashmir, is spoken by less than 1% of the state's total population. Therefore, defining minority languages on the basis of their numerical strength seems inappropriate in the context of India.

The National Commission for Linguistic Minorities (NCLM), meanwhile, defines "linguistic minority" as "any group or groups of people whose mother tongues are different from the principal language of the State and, at the district and taluka/tehsil levels, different of the main language of the district or taluka/tehsil concerned".

The United Nations (UN) defines minorities as non-dominant groups that have and wish to preserve a stable national, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity that differs from that of the majority of the population. Thus, the only aspect shared by most of India's minority languages is that they are different from the rest of the population. The dominance criterion does not seem to be appropriate in a multilingual country like India, where different languages are dominant in different domains. An official/majority language in one state may become a minority language in another state. Kannada, for example, is an official/majority language in Karnataka, but is a minority language in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

If minority and dominant languages coexist in a community, they are often used in different functional domains. Pandharipande (2002) argues that there is a hierarchy of functional load in India that coincides with the power hierarchy of languages. The greater its functional load, the more powerful the language is perceived. Thus, according to the author, minority languages are those that carry a lower functional load and, therefore, maintain a lower position in the power hierarchy. This seems to reiterate the ideas presented by Peterson, according to which the power level of the language can be characterized in terms of the breadth of use of the language in different domains, the degree of control over speakers of other languages in the region and status/prestige in society.

Based on the above discussions, two types of linguistic minorities can be distinguished in the Indian scenario: (i) relative minorities, which comprise speakers of official languages found in other states/UTs in smaller numbers; In these contexts, there is a "kinship state" in which the language is used as official; and (ii) absolute minorities, which include speakers of non-official languages (tribal and non-tribal) and languages

classified as "other". To understand the nature and types of linguistic minorities, the following aspects established by Dua (1986) can be considered: (i) quantity (ii) power (iii) pattern (iv) location and (v) distance between languages.

Minorities have been vulnerable to assertions of ethnic identities. Ethnic identity is defined, objectively, as "primal affinities and attachments"; and, subjectively, as an "activated primordial consciousness". Ethnic groups with a small population and low exposure to development tend to suffer from an identity crisis, and several of these communities claim separate identities. In this context, aspirations for an independent ethnic identity led to the formation of nations within a nation, which occurs in various forms, including ethnic strife and violence. Identities only make sense within ethnic boundaries and there are several layers of identification. Thus, living with multiple identities is a normal way of life for these people - for example, depending on the context and time, a person from northeast India will have the following identities: a) northeastern in relation to the rest of India, b) kuki in relation to the northeastern tribes, c) thadou or paité in relation to the sub-tribe among the Kukis, and so on.

Ethnicity and language are therefore interrelated and shape a group's social identity. Next, we will discuss how identity crisis forms the basis of ethnic conflicts in India.

Language, ethnic affirmation and conflicts

Languages have always formed the basis of asserting ethnic identity in India. Due to intense linguistic sentiments, many states were created on the basis of languages under the State Reorganization Act of 1956. In the years that followed, India witnessed many ethnic/linguistic conflicts. For example, when the Assamese language was imposed on the people of the northeast through the implementation of the Assam State Bill in 1960, there were ethnic clashes between the "relative minorities": the hill tribes and other minorities such as the Bengalis and the Nepalis, faced a threat to their languages. The Sons of the Soil movement in Assam, in turn, led to a series of clashes between many ethnic communities: the first occurred before and after the passage of the Official Language Bill by the Assembly in 1961-62; the second confrontation took place in 1972, between the Assamese and the Hindu Bengalis, when the Assamese language was imposed as the official medium of instruction in the region; and, in the mid-1980s, among Assamese and Bengali Muslims.

Linguistic human rights and constitutional provisions

Rights issues related to minority languages are not new. The cases arose in the Treaty of Bucharest (1812) and the Treaty of Versailles (1919). At the beginning of the 20th century, they formed the basis for the formulation of domestic or international policies of different countries. Language rights are part of basic human rights. The right to speak, learn, educate and carry out all cultural activities in one's own mother tongue, in addition to other official languages, is enshrined in many constitutions around the world, as well as in regulations from UNESCO and the UN's International Labor Organization (ILO), which only in 1945 were legally implemented around the world to protect the linguistic rights of minorities.

In India, as in most countries, language policy is seen as a powerful instrument for promoting the coexistence of multilingualism. In the Indian Constitution, Articles 29(1), 30, 347, 350, 350(A) and 350(B) were created to safeguard the interests of linguistic minorities in the country.

Strategies for language revitalization

Language revitalization is related to the recovery of a sense of identity and belonging to the world [26]. Realizing the value of their cultural and linguistic heritage, many linguistic minorities have begun their efforts to maintain and revive their languages. The government of India has also taken several steps to protect, preserve and promote these languages through educational institutions and other organizations. The Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysuru houses the Endangered Languages Protection and Preservation Scheme, and the University Grants Commission has set up several centers for endangered languages for this purpose.

Communities began approaching academics and government institutions with the hope of reviving their languages. Most of India's endangered languages are unwritten and do not have official status. Campaigns for

official status and other forms of legislation that support minority languages often feature prominently in language revitalization efforts. For them to be considered "proper" languages and thus to be used in various domains of public life, it is important that they are written. As suggested by Pappuswamy (2017), spelling development committees (ODC) should be established to include community members as stakeholders and writing systems should be developed taking into account all social, political and cultural. The actions of the Ministry of Minorities and other related ministries must dialogue with communities and make additional provisions in their policies and general planning that can benefit everyone and improve the existing situation in the country.

Cultural dominance can also lead to language endangerment when literature and formal education are only accessible in the majority languages. Immersion education through the region's dominant language indirectly closes the door for children from minority groups to study through their mother tongue. Therefore, it is essential to print educational books in minority languages, not only on literature and culture, but also on science and technology, history and geography, etc., and distribute them free of charge at the primary level, to motivate children to learn in their language. -mother. Training should be given to minority language authors who can contribute to this task. The materials produced must also be translated into cognate languages, which will certainly promote mutual tolerance between ethnic groups. Such initiatives will help keep these languages alive by enabling people to use, study and share their own languages.

As is the case in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, universities can open courses on language threat and revitalization. About 30 Native American languages are taught at U.S. colleges and universities. Such efforts, if started in India, will not only make these languages visible to the rest of the world but also help revive them.

The Preservation of Ethical and Moral Values

Considering Indian education from an ethical and democratic perspective involves reflecting on cultural diversity, citizenship, social inclusion, the preservation of ethical and moral values, and the collective well-being of all individuals. Education that emphasizes cultural diversity is essential. It should be integrated with educational projects and consistent pedagogical interventions that acknowledge students' experiences and promote a global perspective. This type of education aims to cultivate citizens who can empathize with others, understand different cultures, and navigate social environments ethically. Individuals are encouraged to respect diversity and recognize sociocultural differences in various social settings.

Belonging to a particular culture does not automatically elevate or devalue one's citizenship, ethics, or importance in comparison to people from other cultures. Every citizen's culture should be prioritized, ethically honoured, and valued in all social contexts. Cultural rules are essential for fostering citizenship, thriving in society, and the dignified evolution of humanity. Our feelings, actions, values, moral, ethical, and religious judgments are influenced by the cultural norms we learn from our family and social circle. Over time, we may choose to stick to or change these values, beliefs, or principles in order to form a new set of values or beliefs. In this sense, Passador (2001) adds:

This order, which is the human order by definition, has as its principle and foundation the rules that we produce and on which we base the possibility of being human. Without rules, we would be unable to produce order and meaning for our actions and thoughts and, consequently, for the reality we live and produce. Without them, we wouldn't be the kind of man we are. (Passador, 2001, p. 62).

It is observed, on a daily basis, how common it is for schools to teach many rules, these being rules for memorization, memorization and beliefs outside the students' practical lives. However, in the school context, it is necessary to teach students the path of values, ethics, morals and diversity, so that students can learn to live ethically with differences in society, in the community/collection.

Therefore, it is clear how necessary it is in the school context to educate for life. Educate, based on teachings and fundamental values for living well in society, values that cannot be memorized, nor written and rewritten, but that students conceive through concrete, qualitative and meaningful learning in different

contexts. Obviously, a democratic school will know how to develop in students' ethical attitudes, sensibilities, solidarity, critical thinking, and the real ability to live in society and interact with differences. It is concluded that the school must train students to be able to develop as free citizens and not alienated by the media, or by society, where school teaching-learning must be critical, and focused on values.

Conclusion

The issues discussed in this article highlight the complexities of language threat, its impact on ethnic minorities and their identity. Minority languages are the main victims of the linguistic erosion that is occurring slowly but steadily in India. It is essential to document and make efforts to revitalize these languages as quickly as possible. Language revitalization must happen "from the bottom up" and be built on the efforts of threatened language communities. Therefore, planning based on and for endangered language communities must be adopted worldwide. The effort in this direction, however, is not as easy as it seems. In conclusion of the scientific article, it can be stated that the contributions brought by the work were merely qualitative and significant, however, it is necessary to add that continued and in-depth studies on the topic of cultural diversity are necessary, so that we can achieve new goals, new objectives and new results in social inclusion, and in relation to cultural differences, both in the formal and non-formal contexts.

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