

# DIALECTS AND DISCRIMINATION OF DALITS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

**This paper discusses the role of dialect in the exclusion of individual from the main stream due to identification as a member of Dalit caste, an untouchable caste in India, is criticized. Indian constitution promises every Indian the life with dignity. However, it can't be attained in the context of discrimination on the basis of every aspect of culture. As language is the important identity of every ethnic group in the society, it plays a key role in the power structure of the society. As education is the gateway of emancipation for an individual, this study is deliberately focused on the gathering of experiences of discrimination on the basis of dialect in the domain of education. As this is a study of development of individual in the different context of dialects, various dimensions of dialect are discussed on the basis of information gathered from different sources such as biographies, articles and books. The embarrassing events contributing to the building of self identity as a member of backward class are discussed in detail in this paper. The different socioeconomic aspects of Dalit dialects, hierarchical nature of dialects and its influence in building self esteem among individuals is also been juxtaposed for criticizing the discourse of Marathi language.**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The caste system has been an unique feature of the Indian society in the world. It has thousand years long history of brutal violence. The system of Varnashrama indoctrinated by the Hindu religion scriptures was not only division of the work but also it was a division of workers. Division of groups of people by birth in different categories (Varnas) was namely Priest class (Brahmin), Warrior Class(Kshatriya), Merchant class(Vaishya) and Shudra class(Labour). The fifth class was out of this Varna system, because it was not considered as a part of citizenship of village community and was brutally identified as untouchables (Atishudra). Atishudras are socially identified as Dalits in Indian society.

Every caste in India has its own cultural identity. India as always been not only a diverse platform of diverse languages

and dialects but also it has been a hierarchical platform with hatred towards the culture and languages of Shudra and Atishudra Varnas. With time, the system of Varna has subdivided into different castes, and each caste became in isolated group of identical culture and ethnicity. With respect to the caste, a pattern of language has perceived as an identical dialect of that language. Especially Dalits who were at the bottom of this hierarchy of Varnashrama and were considered as outcast untouchables, were discriminated on the basis of their culture and dialects. Dialects of Dalits castes, especially in Mahar and Mang castes, have been used as violent tool of their domination and exclusion in the domain of education[1]. In India, it is the fact that millions of children are thrown out of school as a consequence of the denial to acceptance their identity. Because at the end, they come to know that their language, dialect have no scope in the domain of school.

The dropout of students at the very beginning of their school education is not only the failure of the child but more the failure of the system as well. This is the most violent activity which is continued since the emergence of Indian school education in every Indian school, and this brutal crime of cutting of academic sprout is continuously happening in the domain of education with every innocent child belonging to backward class [1, 6].

According to my observations, I have never observed the content of linguistics regarding this misconception in the B.Ed. and M. Ed. courses in Maharashtra state which can avoid this violence. Our deal with the languages in these courses had never gone beyond the traditional practices and grammar of standard dialect of languages. The main aspect of linguistics which can give the sense to appreciate and treat each language, each dialect with its own features had never been a part of our critique – the critique which could help avoid the most probable violence in the classroom.

During ten years of service as a teacher, although I believe myself as an activist in the anti-caste movement, I was completely unaware of this conspiracy of the language based violence which cuts the sprouts of the developing minds in the class room. I also enjoyed to laugh and even used to make corrections in the pronunciations in a particular dialect according to so called standard form of the language. Many

teachers even don't know that the children they are teaching are from diverse linguistic background.

As in other domains of life, the language of the powerful is automatically taken as the effective standard medium of education as it symbolizes the success through the lens of powerful. It has been as accepted truth by the society that students from the powerless group of the society must have to accept and learn the socially legitimized standard dialect at any cost in order to move up in the social order. In the multilingual situations it is important for the learner to know the medium otherwise he/she will have the double disadvantages dealing with two unknowns, first the disadvantage of the content and the disadvantage of the medium through which he/she is learning it.

The language known to the child is the language of his/her early childhood experiences with which the child gained his/her experiences of the world around her before coming school. But the prime need of the powerless to achieve the language of power in which it becomes difficult to judge how to tackle the question of the language at the elementary stage. Their parents know very well the material uselessness of their dialect, and they know that their children should not be deprived of opportunities for social nobilities and economic progress because if their deprived dialect/language. Therefore it cannot be denied that the language of power opens many doors and that the powerless should have the access to these doors.

## **CULTURAL CONFLICT AND MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTIONS**

The stance has taken by the organic intellectuals like Kancha Iliah [7] that English should be the medium of education for Dalits. English medium schools are necessary for the dalit students. Activists like Chandrabhan Prasad have constructed the temple of 'English Devi' (Godess English) and also have celebrated the birthday of Lord Macolay in 2006. As per their view, Indian languages are vigourously brahmanised and sanskritised and are isolated from the life of dalits. These languages which are standardized are considered to be standardized because they are brahmanised. In Indian context, brahmanisation is referred as the standardization, because it has been proved as main obstacle in the emancipation of dalits.

According to this view, we should not care for whether these dialects or languages of these minor communities are counting last breaths or dying everyday. Though dialects are the oral documents of the thinking of particular communities which reflects the way of thinking of that community they are not willing to glorify their dialects by any means. According to Gail Omvedt, as the issue of language is related closely with the many social and political problem, the social history of the language should be studied as a social variable to understand the power relations in the society. Kancha Iliah also wrote in his book that how English has emerged and established as a ruling language and the language of rulers by destroying the tribal language.

Uncritical reception of English is not the only option but democratization of English as well as debrahmanisation of Indian languages has also been emphasised by these dalit intellectuals. About the pedagogic options it has argued by the Ramakant Agnihotri that media of education will have the pyramidal structure with large number of languages at the bottom and small number of languages at the top.

It becomes then necessary to transfer students from the medium of mother tongue to the medium of dominant language. I called the method of achieving this goal *the transfer model of the bilingual education*. Multilingualism in the classroom can constitute a site for subversive discourses about the nature and structure of language and a range of social and political issues leading to meta-linguistic awareness and reflections on possible social change. Language as multilingualism is constitutive of us. It is the basis of social identity; it is not only a medium through which child acquire knowledge but it also significantly structures his/her thoughts.

Here one fact has to be mentioned that it is the false idea that the language proficiency could be acquired through the pieces as shown in the text book. It is the fact that the conversations projected in that texts are often unnatural for the child. And it can be very clearly observed in the society that child could not speak frequently only because he/she has been introduced to English in academic domain.

It could not be possible in case of the students whose home language is not English, because language proficiency is difficult to achieve unless it does not have its implications in the functional world. In the academic domain, if the cultural capital from the native language has not been used as an advantage and as an asset, it couldn't be a meaningful effort to build the foundations of future higher education on such a superficial ground of academic English. The question is how a dialect of Dalit can be proved as an advantageous asset if it has devaluated by means of the cultural identity of the untouchable caste. The National Curriculum Framework of India [4] has identified four guiding principles for curriculum development: "Connecting knowledge to life outside school, ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods, enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks, and making examinations more flexible and integrating them with classroom life." These four principles are not so easy to apply as every teacher does not have that sense which has expected while introducing these principles. Whose knowledge would be probably credited as knowledge? Again the question arises about the doctrines of the society and hierarchy of dialects.

For the clarification, I must mention one of my experience when I was studying in primary school. In the assembly session of our school, the teacher was explaining the significance of 'Krishna janmashtami' - the festival of the birth of Lord God Krishna. In that speech he was saying about the food shared by the God Krishna with his peer group that food is called a 'Kala' (the mixture of corn and curd). The teacher asked us what are the ingredients of Kala?

Upon getting no answer from us, he started to say the list of ingredients in kala. After saying few like curd, jawaar corns, the teacher stopped.

Meanwhile suddenly one of my schoolmates, Gangadhar Madhav Nabde, answered "Gurji, Kalyat Kuthmir bi rhati...!" in his so called non impure dialect instead of saying in standard form "Guruji, kalyat kothimbir suddha aste" (Guruji, coriander leaves are also there in it...!). All children with the teacher suddenly laughed on his answer, because the answer given by him was not wrong but given in the so called backwards impure dialect. That is why it became the subject of laughing instead of getting rewards. Due to his language, Gangadhar was insulted, though he had knowledge, but his knowledge was not considered as the knowledge because of his devaluated dialect. After that event I have never seen Gangadhar talking in the school.

It clearly indicates that in India brahmanical culture forms knowledge, and this knowledge is legitimized in the domain. Many times something is appreciated as knowledge not on the basis of what it is but on the basis of whose it is. There was no reward but insult for the answer given by the Gangadhar, because Gangadhar was from backward community and therefore the language of Gangadhar was impure, backward, for the teacher and also for the children who are a part of same hierarchical structure of the society. Here the question is that Gangadhar has seen as the as the autonomous individual learner but not as a person learning through social interactions. As language is always in relation to others and can't be seen as autonomous and yet the social context is made up of very different individuals, this aspect of the social interaction is necessary for every teacher to understand who is going to interact with the students like Gangadhar.

If the child is treated as a person learning through social interactions, the child becomes increasingly capable of abstract thoughts, he does not make meaning alone but acts as a part of the community. Such notions of the society concerning dalits affect the learning of the dalit child in class room. It does not remain as an obstacle only in the childhood but that follows his/her throughout the life. When the child becomes a teacher, the same virus of casteism follows him/her at that point also because, as mentioned by Prof. Kumud Pawde in her autobiography "The Story of my Sanskrit" [3], people have the same biases when the dalit teacher teaches something difficult subject, because it is assumed by the society that dalits have not such an intelligence so as to teach hard subject, therefore they are not liable for teaching. Because the concept of merit favours to only the upper caste and class peoples.

A dalit intellectual, Dr. Anand Teltumbde, wrote that "Merit is used as the an obstruction for dalits entry into higher education". We need to debunk the present theory of merit which makes for a relative position in rank based on marks obtained through written examination. The entire argument of merit is bogus one, because they never tell us what is a merit. So as to achieve a merit or success, it becomes essential for dalit children to imitate the culture,

norms, and policies of upper cast presented by the system as a standard.

One has been able to observe that the African American students have to disconnect themselves from their culture and practices. The reason is that being a good student is equivalent to losing one's racial, cultural identity. But ones basic identity is one's self identity, which is ultimately one cultural identity and without ones cultural identity one is lost. As such system perpetuates to produce oppressors or the agents of oppressors from the oppressed community.

Paulo Freire gives in his book 'Pedagogy of oppressed' [2] formulates an exclusive look at the education system and proves that education in itself can be a contradictory to its aims and expectations; the teacher (oppressor) is there to educate the oppressed (the students) in such a way to construct the slave, vulnerable mentalities.

By considering students as empty receptors, the teacher goes on filling the receptors. No questioning, no critique, more ever no relevance of the content with the experiences of the actual life. By killing the awareness of an oppressed as an exploited, the teacher uses to create the illusion of the false world and plays the role of an agent of the oppressors to maintain the 'culture of silence'.

In such a way the schools can be seen as deeply implicated in producing those aspects of dominating culture that served to reproduce an unjust and unequal society. The forms of structural discrimination, alienation, and abuse that the discriminated dalit children face in schools are so stigmatizing that they are often forced to drop out of school. One of the main issues is the discriminatory practice conducted by teachers. In 2007, the Special report on the right to education noted that "teachers have been known to declare that dalit pupils cannot learn unless they are beaten" [8]. Discriminatory practices against dalit children exercised by teachers may include corporal punishment, denial of access to school water supplies, segregation in class rooms, and forcing Dalit children to perform manual scavenging on and around school premises.

In Nepal, a study on caste-based discrimination in school documented that indirect discrimination by teachers, such as neglect, repeated blaming, and labeling of Dalit students as weak performers, lead to social exclusion of Dalit students in schools. These are very common observations in the Indian context. The consequence was irregular attendance in classroom, less concentration in studies, less participation in school activities, lower performance, failure, and school drop-out [1].

Additionally, Dalit children face discriminatory attitudes from fellow students and the community as a whole, in particular, from higher caste members who perceive education for dalits as a waste and a threat. This is linked to a perception among some higher caste people that educated dalits pose a threat to village hierarchies and power relations, and that dalits are generally incapable of being educated [5].

## CONCLUSION

The question of caste culture and dialect goes with student in the classroom. Ironically, it doesn't confront as any advantage or asset to that child but it creates the atmosphere of disappointment and discouragement for the child. After all, the matter is not only to criticise the medium of discourse in various possible ways to confront with this issue but it is necessary to change the attitude of the society towards the language, dialect, and culture of dalits. It needs to be thoroughly changed. The culture and language of Dalits even are not considered as the language and culture of equal human beings. This mindset is dehumanizing the Indian education system and shaping unequal society with prejudices.

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