

Diversity in Indian Culture, Language, and Literature

Dr.S.Kunjamma



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Diversity in Indian Culture, Language, and Literature

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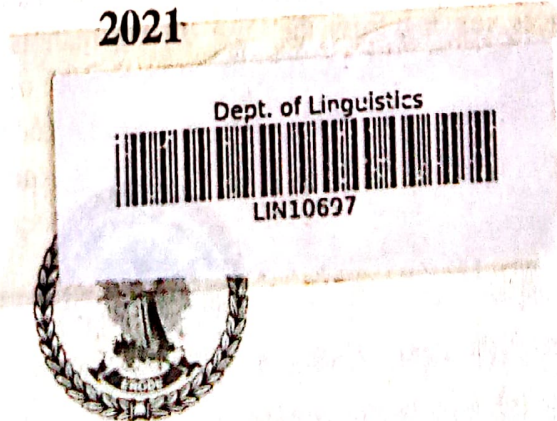
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1. Revisiting the Diversity Discourses of India

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The knowledge on diversity of India is highly accommodated in the disciplines like history, Anthropology and Linguistics mainly. This study attempts to illustrate the nature and perspectives on diversity of India which has been attested across the history of knowledge production since colonial times. Reviewing the diversity discourses of India one can mark Complex meanings of diversity. Diversity has been identified using identity categories. Both static and dynamic features of diversity got explored. Multiple interpretations were discursively constructed in a particular setting for a particular audience. It means the discourses are spatial and temporally linked and ideologically privileged. It is evidently clear that there are changing focuses according to time frame. Initially, diversity has been considered a problem, thus it became a topic of research. Corpora of literatures have been produced as part of the enquiry on Indian diversity. Diversity; further had considered politically in terms of human rights and of late it is focussed as a resource. There are two dimensions in terms of studies and sensitivity that can be detected. Mostly, initial studies were necessitated by colonization and facilitated by the Industrial revolution. Emerged Sensitivity towards diversity is necessitated by Globalization and facilitated by the Information revolution. Before we talk further about the theoretical significance of diversity, let us delimit to define diversity in terms of conceptual categories. First, let us consider India as a physical space and illustrate its diversity.

Topographic diversity

Enough evidence there to site the physiography of India comprises with 1. The Northern Mountains 2. The Northern Plains 3. The Peninsular Plateau 4. The Indian Desert 5. The Coastal Plains 6. The Islands. Further, Diversity has been conceived in terms of the

organization of social groups in relation to the above diverse physiography.

Ethnic Diversity

Diversity of social groupings in India can be traced back in Rgveda, epics, Manusmriti, Arthashastra, sangam literature and some in foreign travellers' accounts. As far as knowledge-creation on diversity in India during Colonial period are dominated with the British Orientalists and Indian pandits and the concept of the superior Aryan race was defined at one end and the 'original' inhabitants of the subcontinent as savages. The British thus started recording castes and tribes in India from 1806 but the first comprehensive Census was conducted only in 1881 Census. When information was pooled for the entire India, it produced a huge list of 18,000 entries on castes, tribes and other groups. The British classified the natives as tribes and castes. Within tribes they categorised some of them as criminal tribes. Colonial discourses in general legitimized the ideology of conquest and its narrations were centered on legitimizing the subjugation of natives. Thus the savage imagery was constructed in relation with the civilized in effect a subhuman identity was constructed through discourses which in turn created asymmetrical ethnic discourse spaces. Nation state discourses on ethnic diversity was formulated following cultural differences. In the lower strata, Hunter gatherers, primitive tribal groups and later modified them as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), and the pre-agricultural agricultural dichotomy. Officially recognized citizens in terms of economy and social position as scheduled tribes, scheduled castes other backward groups and others. Formerly criminal tribes were de-notified as de-notified tribal groups (DNTs). The Government of India classifies the communities into Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, and Other Backward Classes. And the remaining communities are generally referred to as 'General', 'General Merit', etc. The Anthropological survey of India mapped the human surface of India comprises 4635 communities in People of India' (POI) project conducted during 1985 to 1994. There are thus 751 Scheduled Castes, 636 Scheduled Tribes, 1046 OBCs and the remaining 2203 other communities totaling to 4635. This

finding came by considering 776 bio-cultural traits, covering various aspects like distribution, dress pattern, food habits, social organization, occupations, and so on. One of the famous Indian Anthropologist Iravati Karve had estimated about 40,000 endogamous groups in India. If you look at the generated data sets on human surface of India in 1881 census it is revealed that there are 11021 communities including subgroups, in 1931 census it was 4147 communities including 576 subgroups and in People of India project (1992) 4635 communities. It is quite clear to say that the concept on social-sphere of India kept on changing according to time and approach. Thus to comment, the ethnic mapping of India is dynamic in its outlook according to changing times.

Linguistic diversity

The linguistic diversity is yet another primordial category based diversity identification. The genetic classification of languages is strictly based on linguistic genealogy. The family grouping of genetically related languages based on sound correspondences and lexical and grammatical similarities popularly referred to as genealogical classification. As far as India is concerned, there are six language families namely Austro-Asiatic (Munda and MonKhmer), Dravidian, Indo-Aryan (IA) and Tibeto-Burman, Andamanese and Ongan-Ongge Jarawa (The Austronesian lineage). India has high language diversity (the number of languages) but it is poor in phylogenetic diversity (the number of language families). The less phylogenetic diversity reflects the Neolithic stage of India as the main language families were Neolithic lineages. The known Palaeolithic linguistic lineages of India are Andamanese and Ongan language families. Besides, said language families, the presence of isolated linguistic remnant like the Nahali (Central India) are also noted. The Andamanese groups connect India with the prehistoric substratum. The entire linguistic scenario of India underlines the fact that the Andamanese groups were not colonized by the Neolithic expansion due to isolation and on the other hand, many of the mainland representatives of the old substrata got influenced heavily.

Grierson's Linguistic survey of India during the British period recognized 179 languages and 544 dialects for the British India exclusive

of the provinces of Madras and Burma and the states of Hyderabad and Mysore (1927). Out of 3000 mother tongue returns 1652 mother tongues were retained in 1961 census of India. 530 unclassified languages and including 103 foreign mother tongues. As per this report 87.13% spoke Languages of 8th Schedule. In 1992, the Anthropological survey of India had found 325 languages using for in-group communication. Out of 4635 communities about 84 %- communities speak scheduled languages and its regional variants. The peoples' linguistic survey of India (PLSI) claimed about 600 languages and Ethnologue reports 461 languages in India.

Discourse on endangered languages has been acquired momentum in India after the revelation by the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (UNESCO report, 2009) that the rate of endangerment among smaller languages in the country is high. It attested this fact by projecting 196 endangered languages in India at the top slot of country level assessment.

Despite having enormous constitutional safeguards for the protection of language diversity, the language policies of India went in favour of assimilation of smaller languages. The creation of Eighth Schedule (contained 14 languages but today it amounts to 22 languages) was based on selective convenience and not any linguistic rights. Taking pluri-linguistic and cultural surface of India into account, the much laudable three language formula of language education was designed. The overall impact of the above policy choices are assimilation of linguistic identities, conflicts in linguistic identities and language attrition. For instance, status fixation of some languages in the Eighth Schedule made others deprived of status and created linguistic minorities (Chaklader, 1981). It weakened the language loyalties and allowed for the subjugation of the smaller languages especially the tribal languages.

The limited choices in language offered through education made tribal communities and other minorities to opt for regional tongue for betterment. As a result of the unfavourable social ecology, the majority of tribal languages are engulfed by the dominant regional languages

(Biligiri, 1969; Khubchandani, 1983 & 1992; Abbi, 1995 and Ishtiaque, 1999). All studies have shown the gravity of language attrition in detail. The linguistic diversity at one hand and language planning for a multilingual nation on the other have not effectively blended till now.

All efforts made so far do not encourage the diversity but accentuate the diminishing trend of diversity. For example, the strength of the scheduled and non-scheduled languages in 2011 Census clearly shows that the assimilation efforts are well implemented and only negligible percentages of speakers are left out to be integrated. This kind of reductionism in linguistic diversity, in principle, favours the three-language formula of education, which, in turn, reflects the political motivations behind the language planning in India. The crucial issue of diversity lies mostly in this negligible percentage. The policy of non-inclusion of languages having less than 10,000 speakers' strength at all India level has in fact enlarged the base of the scheduled languages' strength. The linguistic diversity of India is characterized by its huge base of smaller languages. These are either surrendered to the regional or nationally dominant tongue or under the process of endangerment. The following assessment (Ishtiaque 1999) shows the gravity of tribal language shift in India. The patterns suggest that it is relative to the level of exposure. This assessment is one-and-half decade old and it is true to state that the present scenario is much more critical. Tribal heartland has not encouraged language shift. In an area where tribals are minorities, there the language shift is evident. The magnitude of language loss was exceptionally high in southern states. This study suggested that there is a need for grass-root level language planning for protecting, revitalizing and promoting the entire range of smaller languages for the preservation of linguistic diversity in India. Otherwise, India can claim the high rate of linguocide as a status symbol. However, a policy ensuring healthy survival of smaller languages and realizing the constitutional provision (Article 350A) of mother tongue education in elementary stages of schooling has not yet been effectively implemented.

It is no way delimiting the earlier linguistic understandings rather to suggest that two streams of looking the tribal language scenario in

India could be noticed. First kind was on the assimilatory status of tribal languages (Khubchandani, 1992) and the socio-linguistic reasoning of the present status of tribal languages is the second one. Razz and Ahmed (1990) observed that half of India's tribal population have already lost their languages and have assimilated with the dominant linguistic group adopting dominant language as their mother tongue. In India, the projected socio-linguistic factors are language policies, modernization, speaker's attitudes towards their languages and separation of the link between language identity or a change in the speech community's perception, (Chakladar, 1981; and Pandaripande, 2002), lack of script, and teaching materials, low speakers strength, etc. (Biligiri, 1969; Khubchandani, 1983 and Abbi 1995). There are various reasons identified (Pandaripande, 1992) as background of tribal mainstream interaction enforced by modernization such as (a). Mechanization of professions of farming, fishing, tanning of leather etc (b). deforestation and urbanization of villages and (c). the policy of state governments to promote education in these communities (through the three language formula). As a result, tribal languages are shifting to the dominant language. The formation of linguistic states and the emergence of major vernacular as state language further accentuated the alienation of small languages from public spheres. Lack of educational facilities such as text books, teachers, tribal language medium schools, lack of script and standard variety, social exclusion, etc. have severely curtailed the sustenance of tribal languages. But the constitution of India attempts to guarantee linguistic minorities the right to use their languages in administration and education. However, implementation of these policies is not always successful for various reasons. Despite the constitutional coverage, many of the tribal languages are under threat of extinction and it is evidenced that tribes were enforced to surrender their linguistic identities in favour of mainstream. In general the perception developed is that the retention of tongue hampers their socio economic progress. Mufwene (2002) argued that shifting to a particular language is typically associated with particular benefits to be derived from its usage, especially economic benefits. Indian experiences clearly attest that smaller linguistic identities were succumbed to the prevailing social ecology. It means the social ecology is the culprit, not the languages being small.

Smaller languages couldn't thrive in the existing social ecology engineered by the modernity.

In short, of late the discourses on endangered languages of India has created a platform for sensitising the language diversity as a resource rather than a problem which in turn to take necessary steps to document, archive and revitalise the vanishing tongues with the help of multimedia information and communication technology.

Script Diversity

Tracing the script diversity of India is concerned; it starts from the un-deciphered seals of Indus valley civilization and following the knowledge of Brahmi and Kharoshti 3rd C in Ashoka's period. The People of India project had recognised 25 scripts. The most productive script culture was well marked with the mother script form Brahmi, which is divided in to Brahmi – Northern and southern. Northern Brahmi had the following sub scripts. Northern Brahmi became the source of Gupta script. From Gupta branch many other forms evolved. For instance, Tibetan script, sharda script etc. Sharda became Takri in north western Himalayan region. The Gurmukhi of Punjab had the origin from the Landa script which was popular among the Kashmiri Brahmins. Mewari and Old Manipuri script too had the Gupta origin. The Second branch named Kutila script which was popular in central India. Proto Bengali script had the origin from Nagari, Maithili- Tirhute script from Devnagari, Modern Bengali and Oriya script got derived from Kaithi, From Gujarati Gujarathi, Assamese, Manipuri script had evolved and all of them were rooted to Kutila branch. The Modi script used for the business purposes too connected with the Northern Brahmi. Kannada, Telugu Tamil /Malayalam Vattezhuthu, Kolezhuthu, Grantha script, Nandi Nagari (Vijayanagara Kings) etc had the origin from southern Brahmi. Many other scripts are also in use; for instance; the Thana script used by Mahal language of Minicoy and chiki of Santhali etc.

Diversity in knowledge representation

The mode of knowledge representation in India also expresses diversity in all its genres. Broadly based on medium of coverage there are Phono centric, script centric and Body centric knowledge representations in the form of folk, performing and literary genres. Modes of storing retrieving and transmitting despite of commonness the diversity is evident in imagination, content and expression. Phono-centric representations mean the expressions in oral media. In production of literary culture according to script owned languages also had enough diversity in coverage and forms. Translations in Indian languages too reflect the potential diversity. The efficiency of translatability is quite high in some languages and low in others. So script capacity alone is not the power to compete in acquiring translation capital. To sum up, there are diverse trajectories in imaginative expressions and knowledge representation marked in the Indian language milieu as per various periods such as Vedic, Buddhist, Islamic, colonial, and post Independent eras. In philosophical and other forms of knowledge productions also diversity is evident.

Religious diversity

India is multi religious since its formation. As per the latest available information, Hinduism (79.8%), Islam (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.72%), Buddhism (0.7%), Jainism (0.37%), Unaffiliated (0.24%) and Others (incl. Zoroastrianism, Bon, Judaism, Sanamahism, Kirat Mundhum, Sarna sthal, Animism and others) (0.67%).

According to the People of India project dataset, nearly three fourth of the 4635 communities in India are reported to profess Hinduism (76%) and these communities are distributed all over the country but much less in proportion in northeastern states except Assam. They are also significantly less in Jammu and Kashmir. Those who profess exclusively Hinduism thus are of 66.9%. There are 439 Hindu groups in which existence of sections that profess other religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Tribal/Local religion, etc., was also reported. Seven

per cent of the communities, profess Christianity, wholly or as part of Hindu or religious beliefs of a tribal community. Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam have high proportion of Christian groups. Twelve percent of the Indian communities follow Islam with high proportion of such communities distributed in Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. There are 130 groups who follow Sikhism distributed proportionately in higher scale in Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana and Delhi. Those who exclusively follow Sikhism are only 42 while the rest have both Hindu and Sikh, or Hindu, Sikh and Muslim sections among them. 93 communities follow Buddhism, from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Assam where they are mainly tribal communities. Those who exclusively practice Buddhism are 51, while combinations of Buddhist and Christian sections, or Hindu or local religion, are also observed. In the mainland, especially in Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, the members of certain scheduled castes have embraced Buddhism and are generally known by the term "Neo-Buddhists. There are 100 Jain groups with high proportion of them in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Those who exclusively profess Jainism are only 78.

Genomic Diversity

India extends enormous genetic diversity. South Asia is important in the history of Human migration. It is one of the first regions to have been peopled by modern humans. India, has been recognized with the history of waves of human dispersal, explored as a hotspot of genetic diversity. Recent studies suggest two major ancestral contributions to most of the Indian sub-populations. To sum up, both ancient and recent genetic signatures are found in India. In situ origin of mtDNA clades are detected. Undoubtedly these studies establish the role of India in early human migration.

The Indian specific mtDNA lineages M, R and U are confirmed as Pleistocene lineages bearing coalescent time at around 50,000 ybp. The high frequencies of M observed across population suggest a deep

founder effect of M in the evolution of Indian population. However, R and U too have their contribution in fixing the ancestral antiquity of Indians. The Y lineages of India are also detected as of pre-Holocene origin. Various studies on South Asian populations do not show any caste or language-specific distribution of major ancient lineages and also confirmed continent-specific distributions of certain mtDNA lineage groups and the genetic variation in India is characterized by a high Y-chromosome diversity, which is reflected by a greater correspondence with linguistic groups of India. Y-haplogroup structure suggests a common Pleistocene origin of Indian population as well as influx of subsequent migration.

Reconstructing Indian population History (Reich D et al 2009) revealed that India had two basic ancient population lineages named Ancestral south Indians and Ancestral north Indians and the present populations is the admixture of both. It is assumed that the Indus Valley population comprised with a mixture of Iranian agriculturists and the South Asian hunter-gatherers, or Ancient Ancestral South Indians. Ancestral South Indians have the same basic mix with higher amount of South Asian hunter-gatherers and Iranian agriculturists and the Ancestral North Indians were the result of the admixture of South Asian hunter-gatherers and Iranian agriculturists and the Steppe pastoralists or Aryans.

Conclusion

In this study we tried to revisit the already generated discourse corpora on diversity of India in order to understand the multiplicity of understandings on the topic specified. This study significantly projects the conceptual variations in understanding diversity based on variety of frame of reference. Taking it as a problem to be handled initially and later ages it acquired a status of resource capital which needs to be preserved for various reasons. Thus the nation is designing revitalization action plan for implementation. At conceptual front, Unity in diversity has been further reiterated not in terms of levelling identities for the sake of homogenisation rather maintaining and co existing distinct identities for effectively maintaining the culture of primordial heterogeneity.

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Diversity in Indian Culture, Language, and Literature



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Chief Editor

The compendium displays how cultural diversity in India exists through a living combination of continuities and transmutations and how tradition is embedded into modern amidst the works of literature of contemporary India. Dalit, tribal and women's voices discoursed in the volume are themes of caste, community, gender identities composite the Indian culture. A survey of the compendium on webinar papers reveals the diverse culture spread over several schools of thought in literary practices of Indian languages. Indian linguistic-literary and cultural ethos are so diverse hence worthless to search for a single pivotal philosophical point. Language is the basis of literature and one cannot speak of Indian literature in a particular narrative form. Whereas the philosophy of the Compendium justifies itself.

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