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**PROBLEMS OF LINGUISTIC MINORITIES IN KERALA: A REGIONAL STUDY**


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**Abstract:** India is a multilinguistic country. As per the 2011 Census, there are about 122 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people. Out of these 22 are the Scheduled languages. Apart from this, there are many Non Scheduled languages especially the tribal and native languages spoken by the people. Language of an area has been influenced by various factors, such as geography, migration, socio-cultural environment, Re-organisation of States etc. The concept of linguistic minority is a relative term. The linguistic minority of one State can be a majority group in another State. It is seen that the linguistic minority groups are mainly located at the borders of the States. The present paper deals with the Tulu speaking people, a linguistic minority group, of Kasaragod district in Kerala.

**Key Words:** Linguistic minorities, Non-Scheduled Languages, Tulu, Linguistic Isolation

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**Introduction:** The district of Kasaragod, falls at the Northern tip of the Kerala State, has a total area of 1961 square Km, and it is one of the developmentally backward districts and known for its linguistic harmony. Generally speaking, Kasaragod district is a conglomeration of languages such as Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Konkani, Marathi and some pockets speak Beary, an offshoot of Malayalam. These languages come under the Dravidian family of languages. Among these Tulu belongs to Non-scheduled languages in the constitution.

The Tulu speaking areas of Kasaragod district in Kerala and Karnataka are usually referred to as Tulu Nadu. The Tulu Nadu has its own unique identity and has its distinct geographical territory, language, folklore and culture. It is seen that the geographical aspect has its own role in the study of culture and develops in its own geographical boundary. The Tulu Nadu is such a culture area in which people speak Tulu as a common form of language and observe distinct rituals and ceremonies. This paper specifically explores the main issues related to language and geography among the people inhabiting in this linguistic border.

Language is a vehicle of culture and forms the strongest medium of communication. One of the main issues prevalent in the Tulu Nadu area is related to language. In Kerala context, the people of Tulu Nadu are linguistically isolated and therefore they are deprived of utilizing State's assistance. This paper mainly focuses on the Tulu speaking linguistic minorities and the issues related to linguistic isolation in the Tulu Nadu areas of Kasaragod district.

**Materials and Methods:** The present study is based on anthropological fieldwork and the study has been conducted at Dharmathadukka and Meppod of Puthige Panchayat, Kalichanry, Kojappe-Berippadave areas of Paivallige Panchayat in Kasaragod district. The nearest big town is Kumbala. Not much work has been done previously on the Linguistic minorities of Kasaragod district.

For data collection, the key informants were identified from the Tulu speaking people of the area. The help of translators were also utilized for conducting the study. Personal interview and Observation were mainly employed for collecting information and data thus collected have been cross checked with younger generations.

**Objectives:** The main objective of the study is to identify the nature of isolation of linguistic minorities, especially Tulu speaking people in Kasaragod district in Kerala.

**Linguistic and Cultural dimensions of borders:** Tulu Nadu has its distinct geographical territory, language, folklore and culture. It is seen that the geographical aspect has its own role in the study of culture and develops in its own geographical boundary. The geographically close areas show similar culture traits which possess greater similarities in comparison to those located distant. This distinct geographical area is termed as culture area. The Tulu Nadu is such a culture area, and this geographical and language frontier is also a cultural border in which people speak Tulu as a common form of language and observe distinct rituals and ceremonies. Clark Wissler proposed a model for a culture area represented as a circle. It has a culture centre, which would be expected to have the largest frequency of the typical traits. It also has a culture margin where the traits thin out and interpenetrate with traits of another culture area (in Grunlan and Mayers, 1988). Since the people are at the borders or margins of the Karnataka and Kerala states, different spatial bound cultural markers and most importantly language make them culturally included and excluded in a society due to the interpenetration of traits. Kerala State re-organisation occurred in 1956. At that time a major part of the Karnataka's South Canara district was merged with Kerala which also resulted in the occupying of linguistic minorities on the border areas of Kerala State. The main Castes in the border region of Kasaragod district in Kerala are Billava, Bunts, Mogyeyar, Gowda, Goud Saraswat Brahmins and the Trib-

al groups such as, Koraga, Mele Kudiya and some settlements of Mavilan. For Borneman, borders convey a sense of inherent duality and promote a “process of mirror imaging” (1992). As per Lamont and Molnar (2002), place, nation and culture are not necessarily isomorphic.

Tulu speaking people are commonly known as *Tuluva*. Most of them are bilinguals. They mainly speak Tulu and occasionally use Kannada. The main language of this region is Tulu, though the official language is Kannada in Karnataka and Malayalam in Kerala. The Tulu Nadu is an example of bilingualism and Kannada and Tulu are spoken side by side. Some are trilingual also. Tulu is now fading in Tulu Nadu mainly due to the use of Kannada for Tulu. Bilingualism is a linguistic condition in which two languages co-exist. The Tulu speaking areas of Kasaragod and Karnataka are usually referred to as Tulu Nadu. Tulu Nadu comprises the present Udipi and the Dakshina Kannada districts of Karnataka and the northern part of Kasaragod District of Kerala. It spans an area of 8,441 km<sup>2</sup> (3,259 sq. m), roughly 4.4% of the total area of Karnataka with a population of 3,005,897 and population density of 356.1/km<sup>2</sup> (Anon., 2001a).

Tulu script known as the Tigalari script bears partial similarity to the Malayalam script. Even though there is a script, there is not much written documents in Tulu. It along with Konkani, Hindusthani, Biary and Havvaka are better known as scriptless languages (Subrahmanya, 2015). Presently, Tulu writings are using Kannada script. The area exhibits a remarkable degree of language maintenance and continuance through the use of Tulu. They have revitalized the language, Tulu as a viable medium of communication among them.

Since the region lie at the border of the two states, various spatial bound cultural aspects play a vital role in their identity. For instance, in Kerala Onam is a famous festival. But in the Tulu Nadu areas of Kasaragod, people are not celebrating Onam but celebrate Deepavali which has popularity in Karnataka. However they observe Vishu, a Kerala festival which marks the beginning of New Year in Kerala. In Karnataka, Christmas holiday restricted to one day. But in Kerala Christmas holiday lasts for nine days. Since they are in Kerala they get nine days holiday. That is, the construction of otherness constantly takes place on both sides of the border (Berdahl, 1999). Boundaries are conditions not only for separation and exclusion, but also for communication, exchange, bridging, and inclusion, echoing the theme of “omnivorousness” (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Kedossa is the ritual observed by the people of Tulu Nadu, to propitiate earth. It is the ritual related to fertility. It is the observance of the puberty of earth. It is observed only once in a year based on the Kannada calendar and refer it as *yugadi* (New Year's Day for

the people of Kannada). It usually comes in February. They observe it in three days. In order to observe Kedossa they smear cow dung in the front courtyard in front of the entrance in a round shape. This indicates earth. On the first day evening they bring nine cereals and place in the smeared area. The cereals are Green gram, wheat, paddy, Bengal gram, Black gram, Brown peas, Horse gram, pea etc. On the second day noon they serve vegetarian food especially rice and curries on plantain leaf, symbolizing food to earth. It is essential that they have to serve curries having ingredients Brinjal and drum stick. All the household members also take the same food. On the third day they place coconut oil and *thali* (natural shampoo) there which indicates the bath of earth and on the fourth day morning they place *kumkum* (sindoor) and flowers on it which symbolizes adorn of earth.

In Tulu Nadu area, mainly the inheritance is through mother's line. They refer this as *Aliya khatt* i.e., they followed Aliya Santana law of inheritance. The term Aliya Santana is the term prevalent in Karnataka and in Kerala it is termed as marumakkathayam. *Makkale khatt* refers to patrilineal line. In this region, the women adorn like the females of Karnataka. They adorn their hair with flowers every morning and adorn bangles and nose stud. Their names again reflect the names in Karnataka. Even though they are in Kerala they are very much influenced by the political parties in Karnataka and their activities. Thus, the communities show a conglomeration of culture.

In the Tulu Nadu areas of Kasaragod, they mainly study in Kannada medium, mainly because the schools in their area are Kannada medium schools. They don't have access to Malayalam medium schools. They read Kannada news papers. One of the main issues prevalent in the area is related to language. They speak Tulu, and read Kannada. Due to lack of their access to Malayalam, they would not get any information related to educational opportunities and Government appointments in Kerala. As the linguistic minority group, the State machinery should have to extent protection to the people of Tulu Nadu area especially by providing communication in Kannada medium. But the State machinery is not providing such protection to the people of Tulu Nadu areas in Kerala. Even though the tribals have reservation in Kerala PSC (Public Service Commission) recruitment, their meager access to Malayalam newspapers and Malayalam language hinder their entry into government service. Thus, the communities are deprived of their Constitutional rights to have access to governmental aids in Kannada medium. Since all the schools are Kannada medium, those who wish to study Malayalam would not get an option. In addition, in all the Government offices the notification always put in Malayalam to spot the beneficiaries. These again drop their chance to earn their benefits. The Governmental

order regarding Kannada and Malayalam as the means for official communication in the border areas, especially in the Tulu Nadu areas of Kasaragod is still remain as utopia. This creates a communication barrier between the linguistic minorities and the government as the official communications is in Malayalam.

Even though there is provision for appointing Kannada knowing people in Government offices and schools in this region, usually the appointments are not done as per the provisions. This again hardens the situation in Tulu Nadu. Considering the difficulties in the Tulu Nadu area, a newspaper is publishing from Mangalore in Kannada termed Udayavani. But this newspaper reports only the local news of the Tulu Nadu area. Thus, linguistic isolation seems a major constraint in the Tulu Nadu areas of Kerala. The communities in this area are linguistically isolated in the sense that they have limitation in communicating the official language of the State. It may also serves as a barrier to the receipt of social, educational and development aids. The concept of Linguistic Isolation

was developed in preparation for the 1990 census (Siegel, 1991) in order to provide estimates of the numbers and characteristics of households which might need assistance to communicate with government and social services. In Tulu speaking areas, therefore, to overcome the state of linguistic isolation, proper concern and State level interventions are crucial.

**Conclusion:** Tulu Nadu shows a conglomeration of Kerala and Karnataka cultural attributes. Language is a vehicle of culture and forms the strongest medium of communication. One of the main issues prevalent in the Tulu Nadu area is related to language. The Tulu Nadu areas of Kasaragod district of Kerala are linguistically isolated and therefore they are deprived of utilizing State's assistance. In order to overcome this linguistic situation, State level interventions and effort in this locale is utmost important. In the border areas, to ensure the access of communities to government service, bilingual communication- both in Kannada and Malayalam- are essential.

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