



Postcolonial Discourse

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Abstract

Discourse; a natural output of a span of events termed as colonization that changed the appearance, setting, and the well being of every colonized nation. Postcolonial periods embark on the residue of the colonizers in the form influences that have made the colonized succumb to the implementations that dished out changes which had to be adapted to and resorting to choices deemed necessary to be a part of the changes that resulted in contemporary challenges people are standing against. Language (mother tongue) is a sphere influenced heavily in the colonization process and which in the postcolonial period is fading away. This paper will focus through the lens of postcolonial discourse to discuss how the processes of changes and choices eventually became a challenge and at the same time will shed a little light on how it can be nurtured before extinction.

Key words: expression, discourse, identity, adaptation, mother tongue

Language, a medium of expression, holds great importance in the communication process in one's day to day life. It is a phenomenon that absorbs and assimilates the words from different cultures, regions and people. With the advent of the British and the usage of English language as the official language for communication, the mother tongue of Girmityas' was relegated to the background. It was like cutting off a part of the body of a human being and expecting them to rely on substitute parts. The Mother Tongue of these Girmityas; their identity, was at stake and for which the colonizers had no empathy. Mahatma Gandhi stated;

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the land to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Gandhi's voice very clearly stipulates that one should always learn their mother tongue but at the

same time learn other languages enhancing one's spectrum. It is a common belief that every colonized nation moved towards a society in which the medium of communication is largely English and a move away from mother tongue which is the first language that a child learns right from birth. This is also recognised as the birth language that plays a crucial role in one's lives for a wide array of reasons. Mother Tongue connects individuals to their culture and roots which is a matter of pride boosting one's confidence and creates awareness in the individual's mind.

Whenever there are changes made in any particular context, there will obviously be choices that individuals will have to make to be a part of those changes. In the course of colonialism, the change in communication mode saw the mother tongue diluted and 'Fiji Hindi' coined and utilized alongside English. Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu and Punjabi were some of those dialects brought to Fiji by the Girmitya's during colonialism whereas;

English was the language of the colonizers. It is often a central question in postcolonial studies. During colonization, colonizers usually imposed their language onto the people they colonized, forbidding natives to speak their mother tongues and in some cases the colonizers systematically prohibited native languages which endangered their identity. Keeping the identity alive and progressive is a fundamental ideology of life. During the span of colonialism, these different dialects made communication a little tough for the overseers and the colonizers as well, therefore, a common language was coined for easier communication and thus, 'Fiji Hindi' was born, however, English was untouched being the colonizers language as it could not be compromised with.

This choice of dilution and unearthing a new dialect had to be resorted to so that difficulties in communication would not be seen. Getting accustomed to a new dialect was not much of an issue for the Girmityas as it had the mixture of their mother tongue but the sad part was that their own identity was at stake. This is one of the choices that they had to make in the wake of the changes in the process of colonization. Moreover, as the nation gained independence, the traits of the colonizers were left behind and their language, English, one of those traits blossomed. As generations evolved, English gained more importance and as such, families saw that it is going to make them look good or recognised with better status if they had a good command or rather good knowledge of English either verbally or literally. So another choice was made and that was to move away from Fiji Hindi and concentrate more on the colonial language; English.

According to the great Nelson Mandela, if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his mind. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart (2019). For instance, a child says to his father, "Are you deaf?" The father in his mind understood it and at the same time was glad knowing that his son could speak well in English. But what if the child had said the same words in his mother tongue? It would have been culturally hurting because he did not teach his son to speak in that manner meaning; the father took it to his heart. If you do not use a language, you lose it.

Furthermore, when a language declines, it takes with it an entire knowledge system. Foucault (2009) believed that discourses brought about a body of knowledge and if it is not reflected upon with great consciousness, it becomes harmful and the harm that emerged are the challenges that have popped up whilst adapting to the changes and making choices.

Moreover, this serves as a huge challenge for the societies as mother tongue is directly connected to one's culture and traditions and it is extremely disheartening to note that in the course of the changes and choices, this challenge has evolved. A challenge of saving the mother tongue from extinction that can have a drastic impact on culture and identity which to some extent is fading away from the clutches of societies. It is essential for families, especially those of Indian descent to engage more in their own mother tongue at home from the time a child is born as this will prove to be the first step to restore the pride of mother tongue within the household, societies and nationally as well. There is no strict rule to only be focussed on English because it will be learnt after all so why not learn both the languages to be more efficient in enhancing other skills such as critical thinking, skills to learn a second language and literacy skills. Sardar Patel, in Ankur Sharma's text mentions that children taught in a foreign language were forced to memorize the words without understanding and when the cramming power increases, understanding decreases (2020).

Saving the mother tongue from extinction will also keep the identity of one intact and at the same time culture and traditions will be imparted that had been the pride of the Girmityas and was thwarted by the colonizers.

The adaptation of English, a language of the colonizers, is rooted across all societies and has become a trend of postcolonial families to give more importance to a foreign language and in the process have put their mother tongue on the altar. Children from a very tender age are spoken to in English by their parents believing that knowing English is the way forward. It is a fact that English is a universal language and there is a need to know it well to

understand the communications but as Robert Paul states:

“When we learn our first language, we face the universe directly and learn to clothe it with speech; when we learn a second language, we tend to filter the universe through the language already known” (2003).

As proven through these children who learn their mother tongue first, learn the second language easily. Friedlander, in his literary work entails;

“In fact, first language development is required in order to have good strategies to transfer to the new language. If students do not have good strategies in their mother tongue, they will not have good strategies to transfer to the new language, and therefore, their cognitive development will be reduced (1997).

It is quite simple to comprehend that mother tongue acclimatizes one to the environment on a better note and when there is a mother tongue to learn then why not learn it to keep the identity alive. No one in the world will be prosecuted if they keep their mother tongue nurtured. But because of the impact of colonization changes in the adaptation of second language has been preferred. Languages are a repository of one’s collective knowledge and wisdom which is amassed over the course of the long journey of vibrant civilization. According to Foucault, this is an underlying and probably largely subconscious set of assumptions and operating hypothesis that make thought and social life possible. Foucault was interested in the discursive practices within a culture which provided the framework for knowledge, meaning, and power.

Adapting to the changes during the span of colonialism required the people of Fiji to make many choices which in one way or the other thrust a knife into their guard of identity. Furthermore, the third generation’s choice of prioritising English heaped more wreckage to the already weakened identity guard and contemporarily, it has become a challenge to re-ignite the love and passion for their mother tongue. Children of the current generation are not willing to even study or learn their mother

tongue in any setting. Responses from schools on students of Indian decent dropping the vernacular (mother tongue), suggests that the students are not interested in their mother tongue. At home parents start communicating with their children from a very young age in English. Madrinan, in her text suggests that;

“In the second language acquisition process, it may be useful for teachers to teach the new language using the mother tongue as support in order to develop not only the target language but also the cognitive development required to be academically and professionally successful” (2104).

It entails that mother tongue will enhance the learning of the second language because it will create clear understanding of the discussion in the second language.

Changes and choices were all part of the process of colonization and as such huge challenges in the forms of fear of identity loss as far as language is concerned emerged and it has become a contemporary issue. The change included the mother tongue of the Girmityas’ being put to the corner and unearth a new form of language for better communication and comprehension whereas, the colonial language, English, was not affected in any way as it was the language of the colonisers. The Girmityas’ had to make that choice of following the decisions of the colonisers and this choice of the Girmitya’s at that time founded a new form of mother tongue for every individual that came to Fiji through the indenture system. Ever since and till to this current time that same mother tongue is being used but to a lesser extent in the education and home settings. This mindset needs to be changed so that mother tongue is saved from extinction and the future generations will not lose their culture, tradition and identity.

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