Educational Status of Mother Tongue in Kerala Schools

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Abstract
In this article, the author states that India is a country having a diversity of languages, religion and culture. Our education commissions have stressed the need to have one’s mother tongue as the medium of instruction from primary classes to the postgraduate level. The people of Kerala claim to have 100% literacy rate but many Malayalees are ashamed to speak in their mother tongue Malayalam. This major issue is now under discussion inside and outside Kerala. Mother tongue influences the students to develop their innermost creative and innovative behaviour. As Malayalees we have known the greatness of our language, writers, cultural and historical backgrounds. Malayalam is the mother not foster mother of our state and people. It influences a child who learns at his mother’s feet.

Keywords: Educational Status, Malayalees, Kerala, languages, religion

1 Introduction
India is a country with diversity of languages. Out of more than thousand mother tongues, only eighteen have been included in the eighth schedule of the constitution as official languages. Though Hindi is India’s national language, every state has its own regional language. Development of a particular state or region, to a great extent, depends on the development of its language. This was the primary concept at the time of formation of linguistic states, though such a linguistic division was criticized by many. India’s national leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi, held the view that the true values of democracy could be spread among the common villagers only through regional languages. Further, almost all education commissions constituted by the central Government have stressed the need to have the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction, from primary class to the post-graduate level.

2 Major issues of Mother tongue
It is paradoxical that in Kerala, there are 333.88 lakhs of people living in the state (2011) and other 16.25 lakhs of people living and working in other countries, inspite of 100% literacy rate that has been claimed. On 2013 February 21st Kerala government declared Malayalam as the official language, but as mentioned before Malayalees are ashamed to speak in their mother tongue, and we
find that they always encourage their children to use the English language inside and outside the family. So, their children cannot use their own mother tongue and their guilty feelings towards the language leads to gradually forgetting their natural language and culture. These students cannot imagine and identify our cultural wealth and are not able to speak or write their mother tongue in an appropriate manner.

This is a major issue now under discussion among the Keralites in and outside the State. Interestingly enough, there has been a hue and cry over this matter for a long time. But unfortunately, there is no sign of any improvement. Mother tongue influences the creative and reflective thinking of students’, and helps them improve their academic performance. Hence Mother tongue or the language of the state is as important to the child as air and water to human beings. It should be seen with that much importance.

Language policy of Kothari Commission (1964-1966) decided that “Mother tongue should be compulsory at the lower primary stage. Hindi or English as a second language should be added at the lower secondary stage. Any two languages should be compulsory at the higher secondary stage. Hindi should be studied as a link language and English as a library language. English should be used as the medium of instruction in all universities”.

This shows the importance of Malayalam in secondary education level. But Malayalees has considered his mother tongue as a second priority in education; a wonderful joke in the world. Other countries give first priority to their own mother tongue. The first language of a child is part of his personal, social and cultural identity. Impact of the first language is that it brings about the reflection and learning of a successful social pattern of acting and speaking. At the same time, at higher secondary level in Kerala, English is the first language. Actually it is a foolish trend in our education system. Our country which is ruled by a democratic government, majority students are compelled by others to study other languages like English, Hindi, Arabic, Sanskrit etc. to obtain maximum marks while scoring. This is not a good trend, actually Malayalam should be studied at the first language till the Secondary level and this rule should be continued to the Higher Secondary level.

3 Importance of Mother tongue and Curriculum

Mother tongue influences the students to develop their ‘most creative and innovative’, behaviour. So secondary School curriculum gives more importance to literary attitudes of students. Government has now decided to consider mother tongue as the first language in our secondary school curriculum. It supports the development of a positive self concept, helps to strengthen the existing relationship with in the family and provides opportunity to continue cognitive development while learning other language as a second language.

A person easily assimilates what he/she learns through his/her mother tongue. But many children studying in CBSE or ICSE Schools cannot enjoy learning their subjects through the mother tongue. So these children should get a chance to enjoy the sweetness of their mother tongue when the government implements the new programme.

Actually it is better for every child to start education in the language he/she speaks at home. Even in prestigious examinations such as civil service, national Eligibility Test etc. all regional language finds equal place. As such, it would not be a waste of time if one is forced to study in their mother tongue. As Malayalees we have known the greatness of our language. We know the works of so many Malayalam writers like Viakom Mohammad Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai, Kamalasurayya and M.T.Vasudevan Nair which translated into many foreign languages including English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Malayalam has its own cultural and historical backgrounds. So
we should perpetrate these backgrounds. But so many educated people, though they got education through Malayalam do not understand or try to understand the importance of Malayalam. Some pretend not having any knowledge in Malayalam. Those people turn to English in unnecessary situations. English is a world language, but it is used as the communicative language in India. But using English by avoiding Malayalam come from the old India colonial mind, even now, many English medium schools avoid Malayalam in their syllabus. It is feared that this will harm our language. To protect Malayalam it should be taught from primary classes. So our children can an independent study among the Keralites, especially among the educated it will reveal the alarming fact that even the teachers are not proficient in Malayalam language.

Malayalam is our mother not foster mother. Hence making our mother tongue compulsory means paving the way for the tiny tots to taste or drink the breast milk of their natural mother. Malayalam is really disgraceful to those who can’t read and write. How can one who is born in the soil of Kerala, take pride without knowing Malayalam? Now a days it has become a fashion for some parents to say that their children do not know Malayalam, which is one of the most beautiful languages in the world. This attitude should be changed.

4 Recommendation of mother tongue

The language which is the vehicle of instruction has a crucial role as the key to classroom communication and consequently to pupils acquisition of knowledge. A great deal of research has confirmed that types of education based on the mother tongue significantly increases the chances of educational success and give better results.

5 Role of Mother tongue in Education

Mother tongue plays a tremendously useful role in the education of a child. It has great importance in the field of education. Therefore, mother tongue must be given an important and prominent place in the school curriculum.

Specifically, the importance of mother tongue is due to the following reasons.

- **Medium of expression and communication:** Mother tongue is the best medium for the expression of one’s ideas and feelings. Thus, it is the most potent agent for mutual communication and exchange of ideas.
- **Formation of a Social Group:** It is through language and especially through the mother tongue, that individuals form themselves into a social organization.
- **Easy to Learn:** Of all language, the mother tongue is most easy to learn. Full proficiency or mastery can be achieved in one’s own mother tongue.
- **Best Medium for Acquiring knowledge:** Thinking is an instrument of acquiring knowledge, and thinking is impossible without language. “And training in the use of mother tongue – the tongue in which a child thinks and dreams- becomes the first essential of schooling and the finest instrument of human culture.”(Ballard).
- **It brings about intellectual development:** Intellectual development is
  - impossible without language. Reading, expressing one self, writing, acquisition
  - of knowledge and reasoning are the instruments for bringing about intellectual
  - development, and all of these are possible only through the language, of the
mother tongue of the child.

- Instrument of creative self expression: We may be able to communicate in any language, but creative self expression is possible only in one’s own mother tongue. This is clear from the fact that all great writers could produce great literature only in their own language.

- Instrument of Emotional development: Mother tongue is the most important instrument for bringing about emotional development of individual. The emotional effect of literature and poetry is something which is vital importance in the development and refinement of emotions.

- Instrument of Growth of the pupils: The teaching of the mother tongue is important because on its depends the growth of our pupils. Growth in their intellectual life, growth in knowledge; growth in ability to express themselves; growth in creative and productive ability-all stem from the mother tongue.

- Source of original Ideas: Original ideas are the product of one’s own mother tongue. On account of the facility of thought and expression, new and original ideas take birth and get shape only in own mother tongue.

Thus mother tongue has tremendous importance in education and in the curriculum. It influences a child’s learning in his mother’s lap. It is the language which the child learns almost without any conscious effort on his part. It is a language which the child acquires while living in his own social group.

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