CHAPTER V

CULTURAL ASSIMILATION OF LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

The diverse language groups of India has given rise to a unique composite culture in the world. This has been resulted from a cultural contact of various groups for a long period. Such a contact is very remarkable in the border regions of two states in which two different languages are spoken. The border areas include people speaking two or more languages and having more or less different cultures. In course of time, they exchange not only linguistic peculiarities but customs, ideas and various ways of life so as to develop the mutual relationship in the various cultural groups. Besides the border regions, the linguistic minorities moving towards the big centres of industry, trade and commerce, take their culture with them and contribute to the compound type of culture, which develops in these centres of population. The languages of India are mutually related to each other and therefore, it is not very difficult for linguistic minorities to adopt themselves to the
majority language group of a particular region. The following factors have favoured the development of Indian culture with rich variety of languages representing different communities.

The linguistic heritage of Sanskrit

The ancient classical language of Sanskrit has played an important role in the sense that each language, belonging to Indo-Aryan and Dravidian families unexceptionally, has been enriched by this one of the important classical speeches of the world. The languages of Indo-Aryan family have directly descended from Sanskrit. As a result, all of them have similarities of alphabet, vocabulary and grammatical structures with slight differences. It is more remarkable that though the languages of South India belong to the Dravidian family, they have inherited various aspect of Sanskrit enriching them and bringing them to their present forms. The Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Vedas have been translated invariably in every language of India and is the common treasure of ancient literature. Thus Sanskrit is the most basic element in the similarities underlying the outward differences in Indian languages.
Hindu religion

The Hindu religion, the philosophy of which was originally written in Sanskrit language is common to the people of Indo-Aryan family as well as Dravidian family. Again it may be noted that one finds a great mixture of Aryan and Dravidian culture in this religion. For example, Lord Shiva, which was originally a Dravidian god, is worshiped by all people of Hindu religion. The author would not hesitate to state even that Hindu religion of the present Indo-Aryan realm is being modified with an introduction of foreign elements while the Dravidians still strictly follow the rules and principles of Hindu religion, in their essence. The Muslim religion of India has not kept itself from the majority religion. It has been already mentioned that Urdu has been developed as a language as a result of grand assimilation of Hindu and Muslim culture. The religious differences are many but they do not harm the unity of culture. The two communities are slowly merging into each other and are exchanging the customs and ideas. Diwali is originally a festival of Hindus but now Muslims also celebrate it and it has almost become a national festival. Though the history of this
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Country is full of wars among groups following different religions, the equal status given in the Constitution of India has helped to minimize the religious bigotry which was formerly very dominant. Now, an increasing number of people belonging to Muslim community take part in Hindu festivals. Though the process of assimilation of these two religion groups is very slow, it certainly exists and would be more intelligible in the future.

The development of various languages

The present majority languages of India developed out of a nationwide movement against Sanskrit during tenth and thirteenth century (Deshpande, p. ). The masses were kept away from the original literature regarding Hindu religion and were not allowed to learn Sanskrit, which was then the monopoly of Brahmins. This resulted in the development of local languages like Marathi, Kannada, Oriya etc. Thus the factor which favoured the development of all Indian languages of the present time was common. It is an apparently contradictory fact that Sanskrit, which is the foundation stone of all Indian languages was itself responsible for leading diversities in regional languages. But it cannot be denied that the development of these
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languages was based upon the classical literature.

With a great amount of common elements, the significant languages have established themselves as independent forms of speech. But with the increasing scale of economic development of India as a country is leading to the greater movement of people from one part of the country to other favouring more contact with various language groups and assimilation of these leading to the composite culture of India. Linguistic minorities play an important role in this process of contact leading to progress. The cultural exchange between various language communities is a complex phenomenon because it is a natural and slow process extending over a long period. A few instances of such a cultural exchange have been discussed in the foregoing pages.

Urdu and Hindi minorities have been moving to various parts of the country since long. They have been affecting the languages like Marathi, Gujarati and others. Urdu itself has enriched Hindi by way of addition of Persian and Arabic words. These two minorities together spread widely over the rural areas of Maharashtra and have left a deep impact on
Marathi language spoken in these areas, especially in the northern districts of Maharashtra. Hindi movies are released from Bombay and are very popular all over the country without any exception. Hindi movies themselves exhibit the mixture of various cultures of India. One finds that the scenes of marriages in these movies are based upon Gujarati culture, the people are dressed in Maharashtrian way and the actors sing songs in Hindi in the mountains of Himalayas. This has been cited only as an example of cultural assimilation of various language groups. Besides this, Urdu and Hindi minorities have settled in large numbers in the industrial centres of Maharashtra and have contributed to the economic development of the country as a whole. Bombay is one of the cradles of present Indian culture in the sense that various linguistic minorities have been staying in this commercial capital of our country and have made it the biggest cosmopolitan region of India. Here, Marathi forms 43% of the population while the rest includes the other linguistic minorities. Diagram shows the linguistic composition of million cities of India, which have attracted large number of minorities on account of their economic activities.
The majority of the population in Bombay (57%) and Hyderabad (53%) belongs to the group of linguistic minorities. The speakers of Gujarati, Urdu and Hindi are very dominant in Bombay while Hindi and Urdu are the leading minorities of Hyderabad and Calcutta. Punjabis rank first among the minorities of Delhi. It can be concluded that Bombay and Hyderabad are the leading urban centres in India, which have attracted largest number of linguistic minorities and may, therefore, be called cradles of modern composite culture of India. A great amount of cultural give and take may be witnessed in these cities resulting into broader outlooks and a healthy approach towards new customs and ideas. If people in such big cities develop a feeling of mutual relationship with each other, that attitude will slowly penetrate into interior parts of various states and will enhance the spirit of unity among diversities. Otherwise, politicians seek their interests by encouraging disputes, as it was being done a few years back in Bombay against Tamils. Such tendencies are very harmful in a country like ours where there are multiplicity of languages and where the states have been formed on language basis.
states should also be looked upon with a more correct approach in which their bridging function is more emphasized than that of separation of two cultural groups. Linguists should point out the linguistic similarities in these regions instead of seeking for well-defined lines of separation. The cultural study of the border regions would reveal that these regions are culturally more advanced than the core areas. One finds a stronger spirit of cultural give and take, a greater amount of mixing of customs, traditions and ideologies here than in core regions, where people try to stick to their standard language and also to the so called pure culture. A person staying in Poona is more worried about 'Pure Marathi' than one in Dhulia who mixes it with Gujarati and Hindi. The results of this tendency of accepting the peculiarities of neighbouring language community can be seen in the people staying in border areas. They are more liberal in their thoughts and respond positively to the cultural modifications. The linguistic minorities adopt themselves with the majority and the majority, in turn, accepts linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the minorities. Therefore, it is more correct to look upon the border regions as areas of linguistic as well as cultural assimilation.
At present, the conditions are exactly opposite to this. The border areas are looked upon as the battle grounds between two language communities. Map 17 represents the transitional zone between the state of Maharashtra and Karnataka. This is, in fact, a bridge area. One finds a deep impact of Marathi and Kannada upon each other and the cultural influence can also be clearly seen. This bridge area is of great significance because it is one of the meeting grounds of Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages. It is very unfortunate on the part of these two states that the politicians look upon this zone of contact as a disputed region and make people claim each other's territory. The problems of minorities in these tracts can be solved very easily on the basis of their proportion or total strength at a particular place, for which the Government of Karnataka has devised a minimum proportion of 15%. It can be clearly seen in the map that none of the areas can be transferred to one disputing state because its adjoining area is claimed by the other making it geographically least possible to transfer a part of one state to the other. The dispute between these two states is yet to be settled. The grave effect of this has been that the urban development of Belgaum city has been stopped and the area as a whole
Boundary dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka

Map 17
Cultural assimilation is under political tensions. Therefore, it would be wise to consider the border tracks as bridge areas rather than zones of separation.

Thus, linguistic minorities in the transitional areas and in major urban centres of our country have an important role to play in the political and cultural life of India. These minorities may either become the elements of linguistic bridges or cause harm to the unity of the country by way of creating language disputes. It all depends upon the attitude of people towards the linguistic minorities and the sense of national integration among the minority groups. It is for all to decide whether to have state patriotism or to develop the national spirit.