CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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1.1 Multilingualism in the Nilgiris

India is a multilingual country. This is evidenced by the fact that one can see great many differences in cultures, languages, life styles among various communities of the nation living in urban, rural, semi-urban and tribal areas. All these communities though they live either side by side to each other or in isolation show varying degrees of socio-economic development.

Nilgiris, the hill district of Tamil Nadu is not only a place of tourist attraction but also a home land of many tribals. This district is adjacent to the Kerala and Karnataka states. In this district, tribal population speaking different languages such as Toda, Kota, Kattunaicka, Kurumba, Irula, Paniya reside along with other non-tribal Dravidian population speaking languages such as Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada. Since the state language is Tamil, almost all people who live in the Nilgiris speak Tamil, besides their own tribal mother tongue. The tribal population mingles and interacts with the other tribal and non-tribal groups through the medium of Tamil. The competence in Tamil comes to the tribal population due to their frequent and necessary interactions with Tamils, in situations other than their family context. These situations incorporate those related to business, festivity, education and profession. The Nilgiris district is comprised of Udhagamandalam, Kothagiri, Coonoor and Gudalur taluks. Tamil is the
administrative/dominant/state language of the district. In all the taluks of the Nilgiris along with the native tribals like Toda, Kota, Kurumba, Irula, and Paniya speakers of Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada live closely. Other than their mother tongue almost all the tribal and non-tribal speakers are found to be well versed in at least one additional language. In such a background, it can be claimed that the Nilgiris is a multilingual (sociolinguistic) area.

1.2 Tribal Communities of the Nilgiris

India possesses the second largest population in the world. Of the 52 million total population, the scheduled tribal people constitute 8%. The Nilgiris district has a population of 630169 people according to the 1981 census. Of this the scheduled tribe population alone is 20874 which comprises of 10507 males and 10367 females. Among the scheduled tribe population 4274 persons are literates comprising 2770 males and 1504 females (for details refer Table-1.1).

Though in a village more than one tribal community is found, they usually reside in separate settlements. These settlements are generally located in thick forest areas and in isolation from the non-tribal societies. Most of the tribals earn their wages by employing themselves in different kinds of labour. Since their childhood, the tribal children used to assist their parents either indirectly by looking after the younger ones of the family or directly by associating with
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Taluk</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Literates among Schedule Tribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Gudalur</td>
<td>1,41,339</td>
<td>5,224</td>
<td>5,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ootacamund</td>
<td>2,23,014</td>
<td>1,698</td>
<td>1,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kotagiri</td>
<td>1,00,347</td>
<td>2,688</td>
<td>2,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Coonoor</td>
<td>1,65,469</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,30,169</td>
<td>10,507</td>
<td>10,367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1
(Literacy Rate of the Nilgiris District's Scheduled Tribe 1981 Census)
their parents in the various occupational activities. Poverty, lack of education, domination by upper class society, etc. are some of the factors contributig to their existing backwardness. In the vision of non-tribals, the tribals are normally considered as 'primitive people', 'ethnic minorities' and 'disadvantaged societies' (Kundu, 1985).

The term 'tribe' is defined variedly. According to Naik (1968:86) it is defined as follows:

"a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance from other tribes or castes....following tribal tradition, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration."

Whatever may be the definition, a 'tribe' shall possess three salient features viz., non traceable origin, primitive way of life and backwardness.

The tribal languages of Nilgiris belong to the South Dravidian family of languages. Eventhough, the linguistic divergence gives problems of interaction, the tribals of Nilgiris learn to speak the locally dominant language as a link to their native language within their
community. It appears that certain amount of bilingualism (i.e. competence in one's own tribal mother tongue and competence in Tamil) prevails among the tribal communities. Among these tribal populations, the competence in Tamil language appears to increase gradually, when they advance in age. That is to say, that the incidence of bilingualism of the tribal children when compared to that of the tribal adults is at a lower level. Also, most of the women folk of the tribal communities are found to have less competence in Tamil because they have less scope and accessibility for interaction with other tribals and Tamils.

1.3 School System in the Nilgiris

Government of Tamil Nadu has created and provided facilities for imparting education to the tribal children. Government has also started schools and gives special attention to promote literacy among the tribals. The government also takes up measures to remove the educational imbalance between the tribals and non-tribals. Now there are 18 primary schools, 5 middle schools and one high school which are exclusively meant for the tribal children of Nilgiris, and are run by the Government of Tamil Nadu. These schools are popularly known as G.T.R. Schools (Government Tribal Residential Schools).

1.3.1 Teaching Learning Situation

Tribal children of the Nilgiris generally enter the school with the competence of their mother tongue. When compared to the non-tribal children, the tribal children are found to have lesser competence in
Tamil. These children generally learn Tamil as a language subject and learn other non-language subjects through Tamil at the primary level.

In the classroom situation, all the teachers are Tamilians who do not know well the tribal languages, except three teachers.* Of the three teachers, two teachers are Irula speakers and one is a Kurumba speaker. These teachers teach Tamil and all the non-language subjects through the Tamil medium to the tribal children whose mother tongue is not Tamil. General text books are used for teaching Tamil to the tribal children. So it is true to say that the teachers follow in their teaching, those instructional strategies which are meant for the dominant cultural groups. This causes the development of negative attitude towards Tamil language / state language / the medium of instruction among the tribal children. The interaction between the students and the teachers is not satisfactory because of the language problem. The non-tribal children also face one way problem created due to the existing differences between the spoken and written forms of Tamil. Non-tribal children are familiar with spoken Tamil, and when they come to school they are taught the written Tamil which is considerably different from the spoken variety. But the tribal children face a two way problem viz., the problem created by the difference between spoken and written forms of Tamil and the one created by the difference between Tamil and tribal mother tongue.

* This information was obtained from the register available with the Nilgiris Collectorate, Udhagamandalam.
There is no chance for the tribal children to develop their language acquisition outside the school, and this is due to their locale or settlements / huts which are separated from those of the Tamil groups. Even in the school situation the tribal students are found to interact only with their own groups, and so they do not get more chances for the acquisition of Tamil language.

In this context the degree of language learning is also considerably less, because the students do not show any interest to interact with the non-tribal teachers or go close to them.

The urban middle class oriented text book is one of the factors which prohibits language learning of tribal students. Also separate books are not available for tribal students. Books published by the Tamil Nadu Text Book Society alone are used for teaching and learning purposes. Dominant culture based instructional strategies employed by the teachers have caused the development in the tribal students, a negative attitude towards themselves, their people, their language and culture. So the learning progress is found at a lesser degree in the tribal areas.

Most of the teachers who teach the tribal children, have negative attitude towards such children. This also makes the tribal children to develop negative attitude towards a developed society and dominant strategies. It is found that, the tribal students' negative
attitude towards dominant language arises due to the following factors:

1) text book portraying developed social culture
2) attitude of teachers representing the dominant culture
3) teaching methodology followed by the teachers
4) dominancy of the language.

The diagram (1.1) focuses the present situation of the tribal students.

In order to promote the literacy, and develop the educational and linguistic skills among the 'disadvantaged' and 'ethnic minorities', sociolinguistic research findings and theme must be integrated into second language teaching.

1.3.2 School Set-up and Facilities Available

Most of the Government Tribal Residential Schools are situated in the forest areas. The aim of these schools is to promote the level of literacy and education among the tribals. These schools are located mostly near the tribal settlements. However, a few schools are found to be situated far away from such settlements.

Hostel or residential facilities are also given to the tribal students. Facilities such as water, play ground, accommodation facilities
(Diagram 1.1: Tribal Students' Negative Attitude)
in the hostel are not up to the mark. Recent survey by the World Bank shows that poorer the country, less the children learn in school, and the facilities in schools in developing countries are far below the minimum acceptable levels in the developed countries. (The Hindu, 1983).

In these schools classes are clubbed together. Normally two classes are maintained by a single teacher. Most of these schools do not have enough staff strength. As a result, the classes are poorly maintained and students are at liberty to spend most of their time in play and not in studies.

The Government supplies free of cost three meals a day, dress, books, notebooks, soap for bathing to the students of the Government Tribal Residential Schools. For this, the Government grant per student is Rs. 85/- per month. As per the G.O. No. 3231, dated 12.12. '86, the Department of Social Welfare has directed to all tribal schools, the regulation to be followed in the preparation and allocation of meals to these students. The schools are also directed to supply meals according to the menu prepared by the Government in the form of a chart which contains several names of the food items to be served during the days of a week. Anybody who visits the tribal school can see the menu chart that has been exhibited there.

1.4 Scope of the Present Study

There are many factors which contribute to the problems of
learning Tamil by tribal children. They are:

1) Less competence or no competence in Tamil (in this case spoken variety of Tamil) at the time when the children enter into the school system.

2) The distance between one's own tribal mother tongue and the target language viz., Tamil which is used in the classrooms/textbooks for instructional purposes.

3) The distance between the spoken variety of Tamil (in the Nilgiris) and the target language i.e., Tamil which is used in classroom/textbooks for instructional purposes.

4) The curriculum which does not take into account the learners early childhood experiences in terms of environment, culture and home language or dialect.

5) The teaching methodology followed by the teachers.

So, the scope of the present study is to identify all these problems and give suggestions for future planning and development in the domain of education in general and that of language teaching in particular.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

The study has been delimited through the following factors:

a) It is confined to the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu.

b) A total number of 150 primary school students 30 from each
class (i.e., classes 1-5 representing Kurumba, Irula and Paniya tribes drawn from the Government Tribal Residential Schools) are used as 'subjects' for this study.

1.6 The Need for the Study

As per the 1981 Census, there are only 21% of literates among the scheduled tribes as against 30% among the scheduled castes and 47% in general population in Tamil Nadu (for details refer Table 1.2).

In Tamil Nadu according to the 1971 census only 30% of the tribal literates have completed their primary education and another 2% have completed matriculation. Among the literate females, 85% do not have any formal education and only 14% have completed primary education and another 1% has completed matriculation.

It is generally felt that the tribal children face a lot of problems in education in general and in learning the state language in particular. That is, one of the reasons why the government has designed various special developmental programmes meant for the tribal children. It is felt that Tamil language skills are not properly developed in tribal children whose early childhood experience in terms of environment, culture and home language is much different from the childhood experience of a native Tamil child. The curriculum and the teachers, it appears, do not bother to consider these differential aspects when imparting Tamil language skills to the tribal children.
TABLE - 1.2

(Percentage of literates among general population of SCs and STs from 1961 to 1981)
All India and Southern States:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPs</td>
<td>SCs</td>
<td>STs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>10.27</td>
<td>8.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>24.14</td>
<td>17.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>5.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This feeling is supported by the present investigator's visit to the primary schools as part of the research work, and his discussion with the teachers there.

In terms of language learning skills, it has been observed by the investigator that children in Class-1, Class-2, and Class-3 levels seem to have not acquired much of reading and writing skills. A quick and subjective analysis of the note books and answer sheets of the children in the primary schools, especially of Classes-4 and 5 revealed that children commit errors in pronunciation, spelling, sentence construction, comprehension of passages in the textbooks, in expressing the content of the textbooks and also in conversation. The source for the errors appears to be two fold: one is due to the interference of the spoken variety of Tamil that the children generally acquire / learn over a period outside their home environment. That is to say, that the acquisition of the spoken variety of Tamil appears to increase more and more outside their home environment i.e., public places, inclusive of school. The other source for the errors is the tribal mother tongue of the students. So, in the school situation, the interference is from the tribal mother tongue and also from the recently acquired spoken Tamil. Tamil is a diglossic language which has two styles: spoken style meant for informal situations and written style for formal situations (Karunakaran, 1983; and Shanmugam, 1983). There are studies, which have proved that the tribal children discontinue school at every level (i.e., some in Class-1, some in Class-2, etc.) of the primary school stage. (Ahuja, 1987).
Particulars of tribal students in the Nilgiris are given below. This index shows the number of tribal students studying in all the schools in the district and from this table one can identify the number and percentage of the drop-outs.

**TABLE - 1.3**

(Particulars of Tribal Students in the Nilgiris)

A. Class 1-5 (Age Group 6 - 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1631</td>
<td>1526</td>
<td>3157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2077</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>3760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### B. Class 5-8 (Age Group 11 - 14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### C. Class 9-10 (Age 14 - 16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### D. Class 11-12 (Age Group 16 - 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of drop-outs is found to increase from the elementary school stage onwards. This could be verified from the following table (E) which presents the students strength.

E. Students Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1 - 5</th>
<th>3760</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>9 - 10</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>11 - 12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Figures Obtained from the Office of the Chief Educational Officer (Nilgiris) as on 30-9-1987]
The present study tries to find out the problem of drop-outs which is due to the existing socio-economic and linguistic factors. This study also tries to give some possible system to remedy the drop-out situation.

1.6.1 Review of the Pioneering Studies

The following are some of the studies related to tribal education and tribal language problems undertaken by specialists in tribal studies. Most of such studies are either sociological or psychological or anthropological. The present study takes up a specific problem, namely, pedagogical and approaches it, by integrating the applied linguistic methodology.

1) Srivastava, L.R.N. (1968), "Education and Modernization among the Munda Oraons of Ranchi."

These studies are mainly based on the sociological and psychological aspects.
This study is mainly based on the educational research and is relevant to Tamil Nadu as a whole.


7) Kundu, M. (1985), "Teaching English to Tribal Learners in Orissa: The Use of Ethnically Oriented instructional strategies to improve language skills and to influence attitudes."

These studies deal with the educational problems of particular tribes. Kundu's study is confined to one particular tribe, and the regional language / state language teaching has not been discussed in it.


This study identifies some of the causes for the low achievement of the learners. This study also does not come under the purview of regional language teaching.

This study emphasizes the promotion of national language and use of an efficient and effective system for language teaching.


This study explains the general teaching methodology with reference to Tamil.


These studies are helpful to language teachers for the creation of proper language instructional materials.


This study explains some of the general problems involved in teaching Tamil to the tribals.

None of the studies mentioned above refer to the problems of tribals in learning and teaching in particular. So, the present study tries to analyse the problems involved to acquiring the four language skills
viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing of the three tribal groups when they learn Tamil, the state language of Tamil Nadu. So this study in a way tries to bridge the gap found in tribal research.