Abstract of the Thesis

Gender and Class Roots of Language: A Sociolinguistic Inquiry of Bengali Women in Kolkata

The present study explores the interrelationship of gender, language and social class in India, which has not yet been recognized or acknowledged adequately by Indian sociologists despite its multilingual social reality. It is often being argued that language often facilitates the construction of certain social identities including gender identity. In our every day life language used about or for women as well as used by women and men are often gendered, which in some way or the other portray women less than an individual and very often substandard than their counterpart i.e., men. Thus it becomes easier to treat women with contempt, disregard their rights and reduce their existence, often to the extent of nullity. And thus, even today, language is considered fundamental to gender inequality. Moreover, since women do not form a homogeneous group and can not be straitjacketed into either or categories, women’s different social class positions based on their education, occupation, income and lifestyle patterns also further their domination giving rise to ‘multiple oppressions’. Given this backdrop, this research aimed at identifying the major objectives, which are- to find out the perception of Bengali women regarding the differences in the linguistic practices of men and women, the impact of gender in learning and using language, the facilitating role played by language in crafting gendered identity and finally the role of social class in determining one’s linguistic usages. Here, the inquiry of the intersectional relationship of gender, language and social class has contributed significantly not only to the understanding of gender but also has emphasized women’s lived experiences by unearthing the hitherto uncultivated and subjugated areas of knowledge regarding everyday practices, including their linguistic usages. In this research, with the help of in-depth face-to-face interview and ‘narrative’ analysis of 80 Bengali women in Kolkata, the attempt has been to reflect how subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of gender, language and class and thus to underscore the multidimensional inequalities of these marginalized subjects (i.e. women) in Kolkata, a modern urban metropolis in 21st century.