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**Linguistic and Cultural Shifts of the Aranadan Tribe
in Kerala**

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Abstract

Language and cultural shifts are the major causes of endangerment of any community, which begins from minor switching of practices and verbal repertoires and ends with a whole change of community, and finally culminates in the community losing its own identity. Language shift usually takes place in a bilingual or multilingual speech community. It is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given society due to underlying changes in the composition and aspirations of the society. This process transitions from speaking the old to the new language. This is not fully a structural change caused by the dynamics of the old language as a system. The new language is adopted as a result of contact with another language community. The term language shift excludes language change which can be seen as an evolution, and hence the transition from older to newer forms of the same language.

Contact between two or more cultures often leads to different sociological processes such as acculturation, cultural change, cultural genocide, and cultural shift. Cultural shift occurs when a community gives up its own socio-cultural practices like customs, rituals and traditional beliefs, and is characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organizations, or value systems. It differs from the process of cultural change in which a community's culture can evolve independently. Shifts may take place at the level of an individual speaker who gradually forgets or shifts to another language and consequently this language spreads to an entire community. This phenomenon can be seen among the Aranadans, a primitive tribal community found mainly in the Malappuram district and in other Northern districts such as Kasargode and Kannur of Kerala, owing to their irreverence towards the preservation of their own language and culture. The socio-ecological, psychological and educational factors impact their language and cultural shifts. This paper illustrates and clarifies the reasons for the language and cultural shifts of the Aranadan tribal community.

Keywords: Linguistic Shift, cultural shift, Aranadan tribe, endangerment

Introduction

Language and cultural shifts are the major causes of endangerment of any community. This starts from minor switching of practices and verbal repertoires and ends with a whole change of community which finally loses its identity. Language shift usually takes place in a bilingual or multilingual speech community. It is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given society due to underlying changes in the composition and aspirations of the society, which goes from speaking the old to the new language. By definition, this is not a

structural change caused by the dynamics of the old language as a system. The new language is adopted as a result of contact with another language community, and in particular the regional language. The term language shift excludes language change which can be seen as an evolution, that is, the transition from older to newer forms of the same language.

Contact between two or more cultures often leads to different sociological processes such as acculturation, cultural change, cultural genocide, and cultural shift. Cultural shift happens when a community gives up its own socio-cultural practices like customs, rituals and traditional beliefs, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, or value systems. This differs from the process of cultural change in which a community's culture can evolve. Shifts may take place at the level of an individual speaker who gradually forgets or shifts to another language and later the language spreads to the entire community. This phenomenon can be seen among the Aranadans, a primitive tribal community found mainly in the Malappuram district and in other northern districts such as Kasargode and Kannur of Kerala, because of their irreverence towards preservation of their own language and culture. The socio-ecological, psychological and educational factors impact on their language and cultural shifts. This paper illustrates and clarifies the reasons for the language and cultural shifts of the Aranadan tribal community.

Socio-Ecological Factors

The socio-ecological factor can be both a natural and physical factor. Any change in physical features will automatically lead to a change or to total shift in culture, habits and way of living. The shift of settlement location and pattern from a hilly region to a neighborhood of a town can significantly alter house construction, occupation, and shape and use of instruments or artifacts.

Settlements and Habitat

Once, the Aranadan area was characterized by hills, valleys, rivers, thick bushes, streams and grasslands. Nowadays, their settlement patterns can be seen in two types; one is a group of Aranadans who live with civilized mainstream people including Christians and Muslims. The Kottuppara colony in Karulai is the best example of this kind of settlement. There, the people live only half a kilometer from the main junction and bus stop. There is a Muslim management English medium school which functions in front of the Kottuppara colony in the Karulai Aranadan settlement. The second type of settlement is somewhat primitive.

Until the beginning of 20th century, the community did not make huts, but rather, lived in caves. They then built small huts called Pandal. The plinths were not raised, and floors may have been tamped down earth (Madava Menon, 1996, 12-13). Now, the State Government provides standard housing and community halls with all facilities as part of the welfare programs. The evolution in the settlement pattern of Aranadan communities constitutes the strongest motive for their shift away from their ethnic language and culture.

Socio- Economic Status

Aranadan people have limited social organizations, which enforce conscious efforts for the preservation of their language and culture. They prefer to wander in the forest for hunting,

collecting minor forest produce and capturing reptiles such as snakes. Therefore, there is no constant social setup with which to maintain their social customs and behaviours which have been shifting from the time of early reported documents by various scholars. As an example, Aranadan women were subjected to avoid certain things, and hence separated from their natal homes after maturity. The duty of a girl or woman was to not make eye contact with her brother due to that the social convention that seeing siblings of the opposite sex after maturity was “ayittam.”

Aranadans are referred to as “kijjaati” (lower cast) by others and often use this term to introduce themselves to the delegates from the government and other social institutions. Other tribal communities in the area maintained distance from the Aranadans; their colonies were located far away from other habitations and in isolated settlements and designated as the Aranadan ceeri (Usha 1992, 16).

Currently, Aranadan people have good relations with their neighbours, including other tribes (Cholanaykar, Kattunaykar, and Paniyar), as they do with mainstream people. The large number of inter caste marriages shows this clearly. There is commercial interaction between outsiders and Aranadans. They sell their forest gatherings to outsiders, and this is the main source of their income. The deforestation in the Nilambur area and the strict imposition of the forest laws in the remaining parts of the forest poses a severe threat to their survival. Presently, many have started to participate in the National Rural Full Employment program (deśiia gramiiṇa toḷilu Rappu paddhati).

Most of the Aranadan communities have access to electricity, television and mobile phone facilities, etc. Much media is not in their native language. As such, modern media and technologies have shifted Aranadan language and cultural habits.

Religious Status

Every Aranadan was said to be a natural worshiper of forest (sun as ‘pakalmooppa,’ moon as ‘iravumoppa,’ tampuratti, tampurana, gulikan, and mala theiyvam etc.). Their religious acts were conducted by the priesthood of Cemmakkarana (eldest leader). But today, the importance of forest gods and priesthood has faded. Now a considerable number of community members have shifted to Hinduism. Lord Shiva, Krishna and other Hindu deities have become their gods as the Aranadan communities have abandoned their old worship system.

Food

In their early days, Aranadan people collected forest food items, and hunted wild animals. The flesh of monkeys was a highly desired delicacy. Now, they follow the food habits of their economic condition.

Psychological Factors

People shift their languages predicated on the change in their thinking, attitude and

behaviour. In contact with mainstreamers, most Aranadan people found that their language's viability is less than the language of outsiders. The majority of Aranadan people (more than 75%) believe that they cannot compete with outsiders successfully in business, schooling, and employment by using Aranadan language. Moreover, the younger Aranadan generation perceives that their language is substandard, and using it among others will degrade their identity. This leads them to perceive themselves as speakers of a bizarre verbal format, and to see their language as non-prestigious. This is a powerful factor in the shift of Aranadan to the Malayalam spoken by outsiders. This style has gradually shifted to every domain in Aranadan communities. The Aranadan people observe that the Malayalam speaking outsiders are an advanced community where people have educational, economic and infrastructural development. They believe that they can attain the same progress through changing their world view. Leaving their indigenous language is the best way to renounce their outmoded world view and practices. This somewhat represents the linguistic relativism of Sapire-Whorf, through a the psycho centric theory of linguistic reality.

Educational Factors

All Aranadan people use their mother tongue in their homes, which has been the communication mode with which to interact with their parents, grandparents, spouses, children and grandchildren etc. Nowadays, they have a tendency to speak in Malayalam in their home situation, as the education of younger generation attends residential schools, frequent contact with Malayalam speakers, and inter caste marriages. It is clear that the tendencies towards code switching and shifting phenomena are high among educated Aranadan.

An increase in the rate of literacy among Aranadans is another cause for language shift. Census and scholarly reports show that currently 78 children are attending school. Students have the facility to continue their studies up to tenth standard at Nilamboor under the supervision of ITDP institutions. Those who pass are sent to do their higher secondary with hostel facilities within the Malappuram district. All educated persons of this group are preparing for jobs under the Public Service Commission. Among the older population it is very difficult to find someone who completed matriculation.

Illustrations of Language Shift

Linguistic features of the Aranadan tribe are hardly found because of its shifting nature. Currently, a sheer quantity of the Aranadan population is shifting their language from Aranadan to the Malabar dialect of Malayalam. Most of the special features of the Aranadan language have changed gradually. The proto base form /yaa-/ was found in the kinship terminology of Aranadan as yaappen 'Father, yaamme 'Mother,' which has been changed to appan , amma as in Malayalam.

The lengthening of the medial vowel /-a-/ is changed into a single vowel.

Eg: ulaakke > ulakka 'pestle'
 avaanu > avan 'he'

The word final /-ai/ has changed into /-e/ in earlier Aranadan language and then changed to /a/ as in Malayalam.

Eg:	aamai	>	aame	>	aama	‘tortoise’
	eruma	>	erume	>	eruma	‘buffalo’
	talai	>	tale	>	tala	‘head’

The Aranadan language feature /-b-/ in the initial and medial positions is changed into /-v-/ as in Malayalam. Moreover, /e/ in medial and final positions is changed into /a/ and forms the word as in Malayalam.

Eg.	bale	>	vala	‘net’
	berelu	>	viral	‘finger’
	cebi	>	cevi	‘ear’

In the Morphological aspect, Person, Number and Gender distinctions are not revealed in verbal forms as in Malayalam.

E.g.	Second person singular	niin	is changed into	nii
	/niinaaru/	>	/niiaru/	‘who are you’

In Aranadan, animate nouns take the plural markers /maar/ and /-ka/; for inanimate nouns, the plural meaning is indicated by the quantitative adjective /kuRe/ but is changed as they shift to Malayalam

Egs.	/kuRemaram/	/marañña/	‘trees’
	/kuRekallu/	/kalluka/	‘stones’
	Aranadan masculine gender marker /-en/ is shifted to /-an/ as in Malayalam		
	/aben/	/avan/	‘he’

Shift of Lexical items to Malayalam:

/ceRiyaan/	>	/aniyan/	‘younger brother’
/ka:tti/	>	/eruma/	‘buffalo’
/pe:və/	>	/paśu/	‘cow’
/peṭke/	>	/kotuku/	‘mosquito’
/pandzi/	>	/paṇṇi/	‘pig’
/pa[[e/	>	/vayaRu/	‘belly’

Conclusion

Currently, Aranadan communities have more opportunities for physical mobility and social interaction with non-tribal groups, village officials and also the market in connection with selling and buying of goods. The ooru mooppan (headman appointed by Panchayat) of the settlement reported that there were no school dropouts among their children. Thus there will be a gradual change in future through the opening of educational opportunities implemented by

different educational schemes and methods, which will promote the social status of Aranadans. However, all these developments will lead to linguistic attrition and language shift.

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