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## NEED FOR TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO TRIBAL STUDENTS THROUGH THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on research in the area of “English Language Teaching” through mother tongue. Mother Tongue plays an explicit role in teaching and learning English language. A conceptual frame was needed in this respect to achieve the goal of teaching English language to the target group. For most of the tribal learners English becomes their third language as their mother tongue is their first language, the dominant language of the place they live or language used at school becomes their second language.

**Key Words:** Mother Tongue, Educational policies, English Language Teaching

### INTRODUCTION

Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. Tribals are those inhabitants who dwell in the forest area and live far off from the main land. In the present Indian context, the term tribal has become a catch word for the political consciousness of a Forty million of India total population (Chattopadhyay, 1978). They are the descendants of the primitive tribes, the oldest inhabitants of India.

Literacy rate among tribal (excluding children aged 0-6 years) is 59%; and it is 68.5% among males and 49.4% among females. Literacy rate in tribal is lower than the national average which is about 74%. There is a literacy gap of 19.1% between males and females and it is higher in rural area (19.9%) as compared to the urban areas (12.9%).

### TRIBAL LIFE AND CULTURE

Some aspects of tribal life and culture which takes into account are their rich tradition of myths, folk-tales, poetry and legends, their oral culture, concept of (pleasure) and learning. Some of their folk-tales and legends have been recorded and highly praised by the missionaries like Bodding (1942) and Bompas (1909) in the early part of this century. Otherwise, hardly any attempt is made to record them till date. As a result, some of them are dying out. Oral Culture is the tribal culture of India, even today; it is primarily an oral culture. Hardly the tribal languages of India have scripts of their own. Every aspect of their life-origin, history, customs, traditions, folk-tales, myths and legends is translated into songs and handed down from generation to generation. One is really surprised to see some old, illiterate tribals remembering a host of things about the history of their race, myths of creation, customs and traditions, some of which, if reduced to writing, will run into volumes (Kundu 1983a). This they manage and developed to do through an indigenously mnemonics. Even when attempt is made to translate their poems and myths into

written modes some distortion is inevitable, as the semantics of verbal utterance are strongly influenced by non-verbal cultural, gestural and rhythmic environment which can only be understood in their original cultural context.

#### MISMATCH WITH MAINSTREAM STUDENTS

There is an argument that many tribal students or learners of ethnic community struggle in schools primarily because of cultural mismatch between the student's home culture and classroom culture. Advocates of bilingual education have argued that heritage language is central to cultural identity (Tse 2001; valdes 2001). Maintenance of the heritage language is understood to be central of academic achievement and individual self-esteem (Tse 2001). However, no necessary steps are taken by the government to preserve the cultural identity of many tribes. It almost took centuries for them to come out of their circle and get educated.

According to N. Krishnaswamy and T.Sriram (1994). The three goals of teaching English in contemporary India are:

1. Mobility (i.e., the utilitarian function of English as the language of opportunity);
2. Modernization (i.e. he interactive function of English as the 'window n the world' and as an instrument of change); and
3. The projection principle i.e., the interpretive function of English as an international language to project our identity and values and to promote better human understanding).

In the case of tribal learners none of the goals mentioned above are accomplished successfully. The purpose was not served as there were no measures taken by the government in teaching English to the tribal learners.

#### NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION (1968)

**Regional Languages:** The energetic development of Indian languages and literature is a sine qua non for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of the people will not be realized, standards of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to the people, and the gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses will remain, if not widen further. Regional languages are

already in use as media of education at the primary and secondary stages.

**Three Language Formula :** At the second stage, the state governments should adopt, and vigorously implement the three language formula that includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking states, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the non-Hindi-speaking states. Suitable courses in Hindi and/or English should also be available in universities and colleges with a view to improving the proficiency of students in these languages up to the prescribed university standards.

#### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (1989)

(Introduction to the report of the CDC)

With increasing awareness of the importance of the learning process a more learned-oriented or enquiry-oriented teaching method should be introduced in the instructional system, which enables the learner to engage himself in creative and divergent thinking, problem solving, self-learning and to explore new avenues of communication, productive work as well as innovation through such methods as simulation, games, project work and the like. Accordingly, the main thrust of the proposed curriculum should aim at shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning, which has to be an important element in the new approach to education. This will necessitate re-organizing the curriculum packages, possibly in a modular form. Greater emphasis should be placed on the student's motivation to learn than on the teacher's ability to lecture. Further, the curriculum should be so designed that it would make the education more meaningful to the needs and aspirations of its beneficiaries as well as to make it socially relevant.

#### THE NEED FOR RESEARCH IN ELT WITH REGARD TO TRIBAL LEARNERS

The mainstream society always has negative opinions of tribals in India and the tribals themselves internalize the mainstream society has a negative opinions of them. The existing system of education, with its urban middle class values, its medium of instruction urban middleclass oriented

textbooks, its system of evaluation and non-tribal teachers also fosters in the tribal learners a negative. The existing textbooks in English with upper middleclass ; and with ideas and concept foreign to the tribal learner not only create problems for them but also develop in them a negative self-concept and a negative attitude to their own people and culture (Kundu, 1980a). Hence there is a need for bringing special textbooks in English for them.

The national study favours the view that minority cultures are assets to be preserved and that the ethnic minority augment their sense of self-worth and gradually broaden their ethnic perspective to create love for and understanding of other peoples and other cultures. The teaching of English to ethnic minority learners, following this approach, should not concern itself only with developing English language skills. Enhancing the ethnic minority learner's self-concept, their love for and pride in their cultures should also form a necessary part of its objectives. The approach goes well with the present world trend towards the ethnic minorities and with the principles adopted in the constitution (Article 30) education of tribals through their language and culture. It is also in harmony with the views of Jawaharlal Nehru who wanted the tribals not to be assimilated into the general population but be integrated to the national groups should be integrated into the national culture maintaining their own identity, language and heritage. Any system of education or programme for them is based on this approach should foster in them a love for and pride in their own culture, life maintaining their own identity, culture and language (vidyarthi, 1968) but in practice hardly any attempts are made to tribals to teach through their language and culture.

In the initial stage this is necessary and desirable provided, the ultimate aim being to level them up with the mainstream society equipping them with knowledge and skill and inculcate in them a sense of pride for their culture, but a little is done in this direction. This has adverse repercussions on them, implanting in them the idea that they occupy their position not on the basis of merit but concessions (Chauhan, 1967). All these have a detribalizing effect on them. The educated tribals of

today like to list themselves as speakers of non-tribal prestige languages and dialects (Gumperz, 1971), tend to change their surnames adopting non-tribal higher class surnames (Chitnis, 1974) and are of little help to their community (Maurya, 1982). A brief review of the studies on tribal education and related topics justifies the need for the present study. There has been a good deal of anthropological studies on different tribes of India by both Indian and foreign writers. But the studies are not enough compared to the great number of tribes (about 300) in India. Some of the studies in sociology and psychology (Srivastava, 1968; Rath et al 1979; Nayar, 1975 and Sinha, 1980) are mainly confined to the study of tribal, non-tribal attitudes, stereotypes, intelligence, cognitive development and the impact of education and modernization on tribals. Most of the studies done on the education of tribals are confined to the socio-economic aspects of the problem and reveal an interest in observing how far the gap between the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and the higher classes of the society has been bridged and the idea of equality achieved. They analyse the family and socio-economic background of students, their educational and occupational aspirations, study habits and performance, problems of interaction with teachers, their attitudes to their status and to government concessions. Some of these studies (Adiseshiah and Ramanathan, 1974; Dubey, 1974; Sachidananda, 1974; Rath and Mishra, 1974) deal with the problems of both SCs and STs in education and are confined to Lessons. On the positive aspects of tribal life and cultures will help the tribal learners see themselves and their group in a positive light.

#### **NEED OF OWN LANGUAGE IN TEACHING SECOND LANGUAGE**

There was hardly any achievement between 1882 and 1902 on the issue of adopting the modern Indian languages as media of instruction at the second stage. The idea of developing high school teaching through the medium of the mother tongue was definitely abandoned, and by 1902 the teaching of English came to be regarded as the prime object of secondary course. (Nurullah and Naik, 1951: 304) Love for their people, language and culture will enhance their self-esteem. Self-esteem will, in turn,

motivate learning. Using ELT techniques which go well with their culture will enhance the tribal learners learning of English. Training in tribal life and culture will make the teachers of English more tolerant to their tribal learners and will help them understand better the educational problems of their tribal pupils. Positive attitudes in learning English, and English teachers will enhance the tribal learners; reading skills in English should be developed in order to make learning goal oriented. Government taking the indigenous group into consideration should develop a conceptual frame work for learning English.

The term tribal generally refers to the member of a racial group united by a common language and customs and living as a community under one or more chiefs. In anthropology; the term has more or less the same meaning as it defines a tribe as 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 traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration (Naik, 1968:86). Psychology as an affective factor play crucial role in learning; and it is now commonly accepted that no learning can take place without emotional involvement. A teacher from the same ethnic background would help the learners relate, connect and correlate to what is to be taught. Necessary measures are to be adopted as the non-tribal teachers mostly look down upon the tribals and can hardly connect and teach them. This void is to be filled. Hence, the need of teaching through the child's own culture would fetch positive results.

Language skills are not language specific but universal skills; and once developed in one language; they can be transferred to other languages. Mother-tongue is the best medium for initially developing these skills. Researches strongly believe that mother-tongue facilitates the learning of other languages as well.

Some educational programmes like Bilingual and Bicultural Education and Humanistic Education, form the immediate source of the

present study. These programmes originated in America did much work on them has been done in the U.S.A. While these programmes are highly relevant for the ethnic minority children, some of them have been implemented specifically to cater to their needs.

#### **BILINGUAL AND BICULTURAL EDUCATION (BE)**

Although currently Bilingual and Bicultural Education programmes are found all over the world, it originated and developed in America. The United States Office of Education defines BE in these words: Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one of which is English as medium of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organized program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures.

#### **ELT in Collaboration with Bilingual and Mother-Tongue Education**

The Indian system of education considers school as a part of community. For Gandhi school is an extension of home and there must be in concordance between the impressions which a child gathers at home and at school if the best results are to be obtained. Almost all Indian educationists insisted on education through mother-tongue -- a major link between the school and the home of a child. The school, according to them, is basically a community linked to social achievement (Cenkner, 1976). This link between school and community is now being stressed in Bilingual and Bicultural education in America.

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