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## Sharing the Future: The Language Situation in Manipur

N. Pramodini, Ph.D.

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### Abstract

The configuration of Manipur's ethnic, cultural and, above all, linguistic diversity is not only a unique asset for the state but also for the nation. Though small in size, there are thirty-three recognized distinct languages besides Manipuri, spreading over the entire geographical area of Manipur. The management of linguistic, cultural pluralism and other diversities has become the focus of attention because of their increasing importance.

This article is primarily concerned with the role of policy and education in language rights and revitalization efforts in Manipur. As part of the study, a brief account of globalization and its impact on languages is given. Next the complex linguistic situation in Manipur is being explored. The correct language situation would eventually help us in forming a correct language policy which will promote the development of our society and prevent us from making mistakes that will lead to the waste of money, manpower and materials.

### Background

Manipuri is a principal language in the state of Manipur, the area under study. Going back, it is observed that since the ancient times Manipuri has a rich literary tradition associated with it and its own ancient script. It is the only language which has a script developed on its own among the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in India. Manipur is a rich melting cauldron of linguistic and cultural diversity. The configuration of Manipur's ethnic, cultural and above all

linguistic diversity is not only a unique asset for the state but also for the nation. Though small in size, there are thirty-three recognized distinct languages besides Manipuri, spreading over the entire geographical area of Manipur.

The population of these ethnic communities differs greatly. Some of them are, however, characterized by declining number of speakers and are on the verge of extinction, for example, Thangal and Tarao (spoken by a few hundred persons). The situation is apparently no better with languages of larger ethnic communities.

Indigenous languages around the world are under attack subject to seemingly irresistible social, political and economic pressures. Over the past decades minority and endangered languages have received scholarly attention. Attention is given to sustaining the existing pool of diversity of languages. The management of language ecology, cultural pluralism and diversity has become the focus of attention because of their increasing importance.

The plight of the endangered languages is considered to be in crisis. Krauss (1992) estimated that as few as 600 out of estimated 6000 languages on earth will remain through the next century.

In the case of Manipur, although we lack an accurate assessment of situation of endangered languages, we have approximate figures to point out quite convincingly the languages that are confronted with the imminent possibility of extinction.

### **The Trend – Decline in the Number of Speakers of Various Languages**

The trend towards the declining number of speakers is abundantly clear from the attitudes speakers have towards their languages apparently because of the value system and life style they are adopting in tune with the rapidly changing social, political and economic relationship.

Another dimension to this problem is the considerable increase in the number of private schools providing English medium instruction. It is a social demand that forces the schools to start teaching English in early grades. In the process minority languages are under severe onslaught from various social, political and economic pressures.

### **Biodiversity and Linguistic Diversity**

In the powerfully written **Vanishing Voices** (2000), Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine make an explicit link between environmental issues and the survival of languages. They argue that the extinction of languages is part of the larger picture of the near-total collapse of the worldwide ecosystem, and suggest that the struggle to preserve environmental resources, such as the rainforests and unique ethnobotanical knowledge, cannot be separated from the struggle to maintain cultural and linguistic diversity. The causes of language death and ecological destruction, in their view, are political. Nettle and Romaine support their argument with an intriguing correlation: language diversity is inversely related to latitude, and areas rich in languages also tend to be rich in ecology and species. As it has been discovered, both

biodiversity and linguistic diversity are concentrated between the tropics and in inaccessible environments, such as the Himalayan region, while diversity of all forms tails off in deserts.

### **Situation in Manipur**

Around the world, there is a high level of co-occurrence of flora, fauna, and languages, and humid tropical climates, forested areas, and mountainous regions are especially favourable to biological and linguistic diversification. Data from Manipur appear to support this trend as the state falls on the Indo-Myanmar 14th hotspot out of the total world 34 hotspots.

This level of biodiversity is matched by a similar degree of linguistic variation. North-East India is endowed with large number of flora and fauna. The region has been identified as one of the richest biodiversity region in the world. Out of the three Biodiversity Hotspots recognized in India, North East India falls under the Indo-Myanmar Hotspot. The region has been in focus for its rich biodiversity and culture. However, in the last few decades several plant and animal species are lost due to the anthropogenic pressures at an alarming rate.

Considering the speed in which the species are disappearing in North-East India, there is an immediate need to conserve and protect the rich biodiversity of the region. While the language-ecology hypothesis is entirely logical, it remains contentious, with some language activists and scholars arguing that these overlapping trends are

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coincidental and causally unrelated. Whatever one's position on the interrelatedness of biological and linguistic diversity, one result is uncontested: languages are increasingly described as valuable 'resources' to be protected, promoted, and developed by governments.

### **Intangible Heritage**

Distinct from but deployed in a similar manner to discussions about water, fossil fuels, and manpower resources, linguistic resources are an integral component of a nation's rich, intangible heritage. As summed up by UNESCO, in its universal declaration of 2001, "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (UNESCO 2002, Article 1).

### **Focus of This Paper**

In the light of this background, this article is primarily concerned with the role of policy and education in language rights revitalization efforts in Manipur. As part of the study, first I begin by giving a brief account of globalization and its impact on languages. Next I give my own experience as a native of Manipur describing the complex linguistic situation of Manipur. The last section focuses on vision and efforts of language education and language maintenance.

### **Globalization and Multilingualism**

The cliché "the global village" was coined by the Canadian writer Marshall McLuhan in the 1970s with reference to the unprecedented development and growth in information technology and electronic communication systems. Although, it took almost two long

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decades for the term ‘globalization’ to come into existence around 1990, it is a buzz word now that the impact of globalization is felt at almost every aspect of our life. ‘Globalization’ is used in so many different contexts, by so many people, for so many purposes, for example, sociologists, economists, political scientist, social anthropologists and linguists define the notion of ‘globalization’ within the framework of their perspective models. The increasing trend, has, no doubt, enriched and facilitated the life of the people in several ways. However, simultaneously, we also find that it has created other new problems for different societies. ‘Globalization’, therefore, in present scenario has widely been debated often focusing on its economic, political and linguistic issues, among other issues.

In the light of the aforesaid background, we need to examine the multilingual and multiethnic situation in Manipur. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins faster economic globalization is going hand in hand with the growing use of English. Parents and stakeholders feel that education, at least well-resourced education is undoubtedly available only in English, eventually increasing its value. It is often argued that no local languages can match the output of English books and therefore English education is superior (Pattanayak 1991).

The new trend that has been observed is that a person makes a mark through him/her ability to use the most prestigious language. And those who are privileged by English education are naturally clamoring to make benefits secure for their new generations. Thus over several generations in the process the most dominant language would eliminate the other languages. Even though murdering of languages is not carried out intentionally, the increasing importance of English through globalization is one of the tools which help in annihilating the indigenous minority languages and culture.

It would, however, be incorrect again to say that the domination of English is something deliberately organized and supported by the English speaking nations hand in glove with their political initiatives or the penetration of world economy. It is in fact inherent in the process.

One of the major effects of globalizations that we observe today is the growing sharper differentiation between the status of English on the one hand and Manipuri and other languages on the other. This is obviously a consequence of value system and life styles local people have adopted. A rejection of a language intentionally or unintentionally by a community is in the process of consolidation and institutionalization of globalization and it may succumb to it without even knowing it is involved in the process of gradually killing its own languages (which have taken at least thousands of years in the current state in its evolution). In the pursuit of development and advancement of societies, we, in fact, create the space for the loss of our languages. In the process, development has thus, tended to mask and even promote domination.

### **Choice before Communities**

In the prevailing circumstances, communities are left with two choices: either to resist or to adjust, but as we know no community can escape from this huge powerful force and also one’s security lies in the second option, we are, therefore, compelled to go for the second option even though we find simultaneously, it has created new problems. These adjustments demand change in relation to a new order that it is important how the local community adapt themselves. The challenging task ahead of us is how we can encounter globalization

particularly the trend towards unilingualism. It is, however, easier said than done that it must be controlled, regulated and minimized to the extent possible so that minority and less powerful languages are given the opportunity to grow and revitalized.

Now the whole issue of development and progress must be approached with greater vigilance and in a critical spirit. While thinking of development we must not overlook our languages and culture. Intellectuals in our communities have a great task ahead for bringing awareness among the local people. How local people should react as we are confronted with imminent language loss and culture? And they must be made known that the wealth lies in the diversity of languages and treasures that we have must be safeguarded so that they are not further degenerated.

### **Loss of Vitality**

A language disappears or a language loses its vitality not only because it is dominated by another but also and perhaps above all peoples' attitude towards their languages. If we want to preserve and maintain the healthy growth of our languages we should now take up preventive steps. This is important because the extent to which future generation will be able to enjoy their language rights will depend on the moral obligation and intellectual choices made by the present generations on whether we do our duty to our children of future generations. However, language issues, in general, are rarely considered a priority unless problem arises in connection with the implementation of controversial language issues.

So, the aspects of language issues are not given serious attention and generally are left out of discussion.

### **Need to Alert People**

In this context intellectuals and people of good-will without any vested interest must alert the people that in the name of development, to the fact that we, in fact destroy our own language and culture inexorably. It is, therefore, up to the intellectual elites of minority communities to promote their mother tongues and give a new impetus to their languages and adapt them to the changing modern world.

The local people, as they are the bedrock of language preservation and revitalization, must decide on a dynamic response for the language problems, old and new that beset them. They must be sensitized that they are the only right people who will study and seek solutions to these problems that are consonant with time. They are the ones who have kept the languages alive and must continue to do so. It is pertinent to quote N.M. Dauenhaur and R. Daurenhaur, historians of Tlinget oral tradition (Alaska)<sup>1</sup> "preservation is what we do to berries in jars and salmon in cans. Books and recordings can preserve languages but only people and communities can keep them alive".

### **Responsibility of Minority Language Speakers**

So, speakers of minority communities must realize and prepare to undertake this task without falling back on alien models that distort their language and cultural heritage. They must realize that destruction of human culture and language is

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very devastating in the long run. The loss of languages is occurring in an unprecedented and disastrous rate, at a rate of ten every year somewhere in the world<sup>2</sup>. It is even predicted that 50-90% of today's spoken languages will disappear during this century. Therefore, their preservation must be done on a war footing.

But the crux of the matter is how we go about it in such a complex situation where our languages and cultures are at the crossroads of two forces – globalization and persistence of community identity that are both contradictory and intertwined. Along with globalization the increasing importance of English is felt in every sphere of life. Attempts to reduce the use of English would, therefore, be a futile exercise. It is, therefore, imperative that we look for a new order in which globalization and preservation of minority languages and cultures can co-exist and interact dialectically rather than as incompatible opposites. We must intelligently sort the problems out where globalization can be beneficial for local people – how development programs feed on the local soils and on the other hand how local indigenous resources can be of good use for the overall development of humanity.

Development brought by globalization and indigenous culture must be involved in a dialogue that should be of mutual benefit to each other. Therefore, we should get our intellectuals to turn their attention seriously to the dialectic between globalization and preservation of culture and language. This would lead to agreement on some intangible principles which hold good for all communities such as respect for life and man's relationship with nature and knowledge. While maintaining one's language and culture with knowledge of globalization the reality must be improved – it must benefit at home, at work, etc.

### **Multilingual Situation and Policy in Manipur**

Manipur's linguistic situation reflects its diverse complex history. Although, Manipuri by its continuous use as lingua-franca from the time immemorial retains its eminent position among other languages, language issue in Manipur has often been politicized where we find tensions and conflicts on linguistic and communal lines came to the surface. Government of Manipur, for example, apparently in view of its status and function as a lingua-franca introduced it as one of the compulsory subjects among the diverse linguistic communities.

A clear example of manifestation of this conflict and tension is the outright rejection of Manipuri by the non-native speakers of Manipur when the government made the learning of Manipuri mandatory in all the hill districts of Manipur in 1980s. As the attempt was not successful following a strong objection from the people of hill areas the government ultimately had no choice but withdrew its stand as it was against the wishes and aspirations of hill people. It is unnatural and inconsistent and useless effort on the part of the hill people to have Manipuri as a compulsory subject at any level of education. Keeping in view of the vehement opposition and tense situation the government decided that it should continue its earlier status quo to be taught as an optional subject.

The learning of Manipuri in schools in the hill districts of Manipur could mean two different things. In one case, it would be clear that the implication of imposition becomes evident or otherwise a weaker version of the same interpretation. The imposition of Manipuri has created an undesired byproduct: the ignorance of other ethnic languages that their languages have been devalued implying a devaluation of their culture as well which would add to the animosities between the two broad communities Meiteis versus other communities. Another interpretation could be that it is taken as an assertion of Meiteis who would become an undeservingly privileged group at the expense of other communities by using language as an instrument.

### **The Status of Manipuri**

This has brought into question the status of Manipuri and the relationship of Manipuri language with those of other languages. It is, however, open to interpretation whether this will make it possible for other communities who speak varieties of languages which are mutually unintelligible promote and develop their ethnic cultural linguistic and religious identity in a state with many languages. Therefore it is felt that by not regarding all citizens as equal and privileging certain communities over others breed discontent and potential social conflicts by uniting all other ethnic groups. It is apparent that Manipuri in this context is being seen as threatening the existence of other languages.

This is, however not unique to Manipuri, other major communities are being accused for suppressing other minor languages too. The situation that has prevailed in the state is being felt as one of a single language policy where non native speakers of Manipuri and other ethnic communities at a disadvantage position in education. Language conflict as we know does not occur in peaceful harmoniously co-existing communities. They are accompanied by varying degrees of tensions, resentment and differences of opinion, which are characteristic of every competitive social structure.

### **Government Policy**

It is abundantly clear that the policy of the government was to promote the use of Manipuri in education. The implementation of the policy was not successful apparently because government could not recognize the reality and sentiments of the hill dwellers nor have they taken any measures to promote other languages of the state. This was largely due to the lack of the absence of a clearly defined language policy and therefore the government's failure to implement the program of language planning in the state.

In a situation such as Manipur it is but natural to find cases of language dominance and positive and negative attitudes towards one language or the other. It is quite a paradox to see Manipuri in spite of its status as a lingua franca it is apparently seen as a dividing force. As this situation is a very complex situation it requires an accounting of socio-religious factors which apparently acted as divisive force in the co-existence of Meiteis vis-à-vis other communities (hill- dwellers).

### **Impact of Hindu Practices on Meitheis and Language Attitudes**

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A case in point worth mentioning here is even though Meiteis (speakers of Manipuri as a native language) and other communities have been living together since the time immemorial, the cultural unity and integration was severed largely due to the Hindu influence of Meiteis. While Meiteis became Hindus most of the other communities adopted Christianity. Apparently because of the faith in Hindu religious practices Meiteis' attitudes towards other communities changed over time that there developed a gap between Meiteis and other communities. This relationship continued over three centuries. Although there has been some promotion of integration of Meiteis and other communities, (of late, a close interaction between Meiteis and other communities has taken place to a reasonable extent), this apparently will take more time to heal the relationship between the two communities.

It is important for the government to recognize the reality for educational purposes. It is also important that sociolinguistic study of different languages must also be conducted in order to ascertain the attitude of the hill people towards Manipuri language. This will enable the planners to execute the policy much more effectively.

### **Ineffectiveness of Uniform Policy**

Further, policy makers have fixed ideas on the role and function of languages. They created a uniform policy for the entire country which proved ineffective given the diversity of situation in North-East. Such policies are applicable only for more developed and accessible languages of the country while the languages in the remote areas of North-East and others parts of India remain marginalized. However, it is relevant to point out here that, the Three Language Formula is not a goal, but a strategy. It does not aim a limit to learning but aims at minimum required for identifying oneself with the immediate group, with the nation and with the international community (Pattanayak 1994:94).

### **Inadequacy of the Three Language Formula for Language Maintenance**

In this connection, it seems urgent how to provide relevant education in this new world in order to preserve and promote linguistic diversity in the multilingual situation of Manipur. Constitution envisages that conservation of minority is to be through community action and not directly by the state with its resources through state aid should be available in minority schools. However, it is very important to note that the mother tongues of linguistic minorities do not find a place in the ambit of Three Languages Formula. Therefore, a conflicting situation between minority languages and state language Manipuri seems evident. There has not been any effort to resolve this problem either politically or pedagogically. Therefore, education planners today face new issues and questions with fresh urgency in the emerging new order.

### **Functions of Language Use**

The issue of language maintenance is closely linked with functions of the languages in different domains. This determines their relative power and status. Keeping in view the multilingual character and different ethnic communities, the Government recognized ten languages.



The nine tribal languages that have been approved by the state government to study as Modern Indian Language (MIL) up to the tenth standard are Tangkhul, Paite, Hmar, Mizo, Kom, Vaiphei, Zou, Thadou and Mao (Board of Secondary Education Manipur 2009<sup>3</sup>). It is learnt that another language Rongmei has been added to this list. Besides these languages, Manipuri, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese are also offered as Modern Indian Language papers in schools. In the eleventh and twelfth standards, however, only six tribal languages viz, Mizo, Tangkhul, Hmar, Zou, Thadou-Kuki, and Paite are offered (Council of Higher Secondary, Manipur 2008<sup>4</sup>). The list, however, includes other languages Manipuri, Hindi, Nepali, Assamese and Bengali totaling the number of languages to eleven. This language policy suggests that language education can serve as vehicles for promoting the vitality, versatility and the practical use of these languages. In line with this, Tribal Research Institute, Government of Manipur, has organized series of workshops to produce primers. It is already yielding good results as is evident by the enthusiasm and response shown by the forward-looking tribal leaders who came to participate in the workshops<sup>5</sup>.

However, it is quite disturbing and alarming to learn that a number of other state's ethnic mother tongues are severely endangered, and will likely be reduced from communicative vernaculars to symbolic identity markers within a few generations (Tarao, khoibu, etc., as these languages are spoken by few hundreds). As the extinction is imminent in the near future, linguistic activists within these communities should embark on the process of documenting and promoting their mother tongues through cultural awareness campaigns, ethnic heritage programmes, etc.

Given the situation, the remaining languages not part of school curriculum are in serious danger of becoming extinct. If they are given the status of teaching they may be rescued from the verge of extinction, revitalized and developed. In order that the minority languages are a part of the school curriculum we must first ascertain the language situation in Manipur.

### **Two Contrasting Situations: Mutual Unintelligibility vs Mutual Intelligibility**

The linguistic situation in Manipur is quite complicated in that we find two distinct contrasting situations. In one situation, we find that the people comprising a tribe who apparently have different background became a single entity in consciousness and characteristics after a long period of living close to one another. Though willing to be recognized as a single tribe, the languages they speak are still distinct and mutually unintelligible as in the case of Tangkhuls in Ukhrul district. It is apparent that some historically weak tribes gradually merged into larger tribe due to long period of political control or cultural influence by larger and stronger tribes, the smaller tribes losing all their unique characteristics other than language. Since the population in Ukhrul district seems a conglomeration of different tribes, there is naturally multiplicity of languages. We have a whole collection of Tibeto-Burman languages. Broadly speaking realizing the situation in Ukhrul, the most important speech forms the variety spoken at Ukhrul town. Even though these languages belong to one language family these varieties are highly diversified forms that mutual intelligibility is out of question. This is an important question because there are fundamental differences and vocabulary among these languages but contact among them for centuries and more particularly through masses of different communities who speak different speech forms might have led to the imposition upon each other or to a common characteristic

which may be specially called Tangkhul. And as a result the Ukhrul variety of Tangkhul apparently evolved as a lingua-franca of all Tangkhuls in Ukhrul district. The complex interrelationship of the varieties aroused a curiosity in the minds of linguists and other scholars as to whence this complexity originated.

Even though we have difficulty in tracing the development of the complex situation it appears that they were different and distinct communities who settled in the hilly terrain of Ukhrul district. The inhabitants of this district had a sufficient social consciousness to fuse themselves into one homogenous tribe called Tangkhul, but kept their separate culture and languages and customs alive, even if there were changes in their lifestyles. So it is possible that more advanced Tangkhuls of Ukhrul town were superior in organization and stronger numerically welded all other smaller communities into a united whole and the Tangkhul language is one of the important factors in the evolution of Tangkhul culture and language which became the vehicle, the symbol as well as the expression of composite culture that grew upon the soil of Ukhrul. There are more than two hundred fifty dialects (to name a few Somdal, Phadang, Aleinem, Lamlang and Krihang). It is probably because linguistic change proceeds more slowly than change in other characteristics of tribe. Working on language recognition can help us solve some of the “historical puzzles” in the relations between different speakers of these languages and gives us clue to the evolution of certain other tribes. Such kinds of works are also very important because scholars working in history and trying to solve historical problems particularly look for such living materials from the study of languages which they cannot obtain from historical records. The historical reasons for this phenomenon require further study.

Another strikingly contrasting situation is the language of Thadou-Kuki people who live in the Churachandpur district, in the southern part of Manipur, straddling the boarder of Manipur and Mizoram. The languages spoken in this area are Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Simte, Ralt and Vaiphei etc. Even though these are languages mutually intelligible with one another, each group asserts its identity. However, just from the list of several hundred commonly used words and dozens of sentences, the similarities among these languages are clearly seen.

It is possible that when a tribe splits up and apparently because of different migration timings of different groups who eventually had no contact with each other for a long time, by then the languages they speak might have followed different paths of development and eventually become separate dialects. Even though these languages have diverged not to the extent that it would be difficult to say that they are dialects of the same language but the matter of the fact is speakers of these languages assert their identity as distinct from one another. Here it may be relevant to talk of the concept of *speech community* defined by Labov (1972).

“The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect of particular levels of usage”

As the speakers of minority languages such as Hmar, Paite, Thadou and Vaiphei are mutually intelligible to one another there is very little difference with respect to the Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 413

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characteristics of these languages except for the fact that they see themselves as different and distinct tribes and so they have the autonyms. Such a situation involves a complex historical, political, economic and social factor. Since this is the case, does this mean that they are to be identified as a cohesive ethnic group, we should consider all these languages spoken by the minorities to be dialects of the same language? What is surprising is not the multiplicity but the common linguistic elements and affinities amongst the different tribes. This is evident from the fact that we, more often than not, find for example, a situation where a Paite speaker speaks in his or her language and a Hmar speaker replies in his or her language. Without any problem communication takes place smoothly between the two language speakers. What is interesting is, this is the case for other language speakers in this area too. The multiplicity and the variety of speech forms can be accounted for if we view the different communities from a historical perspective. The resulting diverged ethnic elements and socio-cultural forces apparently emerged due the different migration periods of different groups, which of course, need further investigation. In the present scenario it may be assumed that these tribes did not come to Churachandpur in single time, probably clan after clan or tribes speaking related and mutually understandable dialects.

### **Factors that Help or Hamper Development of Languages**

Given this situation, aside from having different autonyms do the people using these languages have any other unique characteristics? What are the social, political and historical factors that led to the linguistic differences? It is necessary to analyze how much and for how long these factors have influenced the development of the languages and what the direction of that development has been. It is also essential to analyze and compare the structures of neighboring languages of the same stock, family and branch to determine the differences among them. From these differences we can establish the levels of classification which allows us to ascertain whether the form of speech under investigation is an independent language or not.

In recognizing a new language or in identifying a language in Manipur we need to base our work on the facts of language and extent, type and form of the differences among the languages and dialects of the family. Only in this way will our results conform to our reality. In setting standards for language recognition work we can achieve correct results only by a scientific examination the reality of the situation in Manipur not from some general theory.

Taking into consideration the complex situation that is currently prevalent in Manipur, whatever the status of the individual languages it will be necessary for a government agency or university to undertake sociolinguistic survey on a regional basis to determine the intelligibility ratings between different languages and nature of multilingualism in each area. Thus the underlying parameters such as social, political and historical which are responsible for language recognition work can be identified. Only then we will advance our understanding of the importance of the language situation. In view of this complex situation linguists must not in a hurry express their viewpoints without proper justification. He or she must clearly delve dig into the language to ascertain its basic features comprising its phonology, morphosyntax and lexicon with those of related languages to determine the closeness of their relationship. Only such a process will determine scientifically whether or

not one is dealing with an independent language. The correct language situation would ultimately help us in solving the problems such as which script to be used in education in developing bilingual education and improving the quality of education in minority areas. It will also help us in forming correct language policy which will promote the development of our society and prevent us from making mistakes that will lead to the waste of money, manpower and materials.

### **Language Revival and Education**

In a multilingual perspective, language in education, medium of instruction in education, mass communication, administration etc., are some of the important issues. Protecting linguistic diversity and encouraging bilingual education are two closely-related goals. To achieve this goal a strategy may be worked out to incorporate these languages into their education system. As strategy of bilingual education produces better learning outcomes and higher rates of internal efficiency school when the first language instruction is already understood as a subject to be taught and learnt; and becoming the language of instruction in the later years. There are several types of bilingual educational programs with a variety of goals, approaches and methodologies. Two options are available for the implementation of bilingual education .The first option may be designed in such away that all courses are conducted in minority languages such as Tangkhul, Mao ,Hmar ,Thadou-Kuki and Maram, and Manipuri or English (whichever language deemed fit for the program) may be offered only as one of the courses at least in elementary schooling. And second option may be English is the language of instruction alongside minority languages are offered as subjects, or as an auxiliary language of instruction. For the effective implementation of bilingual education the positive aspects of bilingual education which have been useful and fruitful, in short, success stories of this program may be made available to the speakers of minority languages. These experiments can be instrumental in convincing the speakers removing negative perceptions about mother tongue education in elementary schooling which may help in shaping a new world order.

The speakers of the languages, keeping in view of the changing scenario, they must change their mindset and devote themselves to highlighting the development issues and creating social awareness and political consciousness. They must realize that the precarious conditions of these languages have been created by the unbridled use of other languages. This is a very serious issue how speakers knowingly or unknowingly because of increasing prevailing situations that is, globalization continues to the gradual loss of the language. A number of solutions have been in discussions for quite a few years now and many of them are quite a *prima facie* doable .With reference to the prevailing situations in Manipur, it is imperative to suggest some feasible pathways so that an imminent ecological disaster is averted well in advance. Unfortunately, the academic community which is all too familiar with the solutions does not see implementation as part of its job description nor does it have any power of implementation. It is also important to know that preventing an ecological meltdown does not lie as much in the hands of cutting –edge science as is the ability of the academic community to educate society at large. Policy makers in coordination with academia must put a collective effort to save and maintain our languages that they are not further degenerated.

## Relevance of Mother Tongue Education

An awareness of the relevance of mother tongue education should be created among speakers of different languages in order to attract greater number into appropriate studies. In order to have a new perspective created for the learners' language prejudice and negative perceptions should be removed from the minds of the learners. Speakers, for example, may be told success stories of reviving and revitalizing languages such as the one mentioned below with reference to Sanskrit. They may also be sensitized by telling them that a strategy of bilingual education produces better learning outcomes and higher rates of internal efficiency in school when the first language of instruction is already understood by the learners and second language is introduced as a subject to be taught and learnt: and becoming the language of instruction in the later years.

There have been suggestions that varieties of different languages are necessary for solving the problems facing the world today as it is well understood that speakers of different languages do not perceive the same world. Instead different languages emphasize and filter various aspects of multi-faceted reality in a vast number of ways. As language is regarded as the wealth of long evolving history of human endeavors we see more than ever why linguistic diversity is an invaluable resource rather than an obstacle to progress. Different languages communicate different perceptions of reality in a number of ways. These include differences in vocabulary and differences in grammatical information etc. language diversity, therefore, is often considered ideas diversity. It is generally agreed that the language actually helps us in shaping our views of the world and our perception. It is clearly a repository of cultural experience, we exist in and through this medium we express our ideas.

The involvement and initiatives of indigenous/local communities are very essential for providing the impetus and sustenance of execution of the plan as the preservation and regulation of languages is undoubtedly one of the most urgent challenges facing us today. For example, the state of Kerala achieved universal literacy target through a combination of official and community action<sup>6</sup>. Speakers of different languages must be made known that the wealth lies in the diversity of languages and the treasures that they have must be safeguarded so that they are not further degenerated. The culture or life style of people may be decisive in language survival if minority groups are conscious of their history or ethnicity and are determined to preserve and promote their linguistic and cultural diversity.

The revival and revitalization of Sanskrit in Mattur or Mathur village in Karnataka presents an excellent case in this regard. This community has practically shown to the world that a language which is dead can be revived, revitalized and developed as mother tongue. Sanskrit is the primary tongue of the villagers in Mattur or Mathur village in Karnataka. The village, which is about 10 km from Shimoga, has been making sure that the ancient language flourishes in their village. Subha J Rao writes in the Magazine section of *The Hindu* about this interesting village and effort the villagers are taking in keeping Sanskrit alive. The seed for change was sown in 1982, when the organization Sanskruta Bharati got together for a 10-day program to teach the villagers spoken Sanskrit. And, people in this primarily agricultural society took part eagerly in this unique experiment. Now Sanskrit has become the primary tongue of many residents. This village and the neighboring Hoshalli are mainly populated by

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Sanketis, who speak Sanskrit at home. And it is not just them who speak the languages. The village has a fair share of people from other communities, and all of them are exposed to Sanskrit. Local teachers contribute the fluency to the education with which new language was learnt. Now Sanskrit has become the primary tongue for many of the residents. In the local Sharada Vilasa High School, Sanskrit is compulsory till Class VII. It is the first language from classes VIII to X. So, the present generation too has learnt to speak it. Another village that converses in Sanskrit in India is Jhiri village in Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh. This was reported in the visual media a year ago (NDTV Kumar Sekhar, reported in *The Hindu* 28th October 2007). Kaladi in Kerala, Mathur in Karnataka, Jhiri in Madhya Pradesh, Ganoda in Banswada district of Rajasthan are a few places in the country where everybody (*The Hindu* online edition, Friday July 31, 2009), whether he is a vegetable seller, a milkman or a grocer, speaks flawless Sanskrit. Taking insight and inspiration from these communities, speakers of other minority communities should not lose heart and they should think positively to revitalize and develop their languages.

### **Fighting Against Language Loss**

It is now very important to realize that language disappears not only because it is dominated by another but the speakers themselves decide to abandon it and do not pass it on to their children. Speakers of minority languages do not see any economic value for their languages. As a result, the trend of languages getting lost is incredibly increasing. Attention must be given to sustaining existing pools of diversity within the state. Fishman (1992:112) calls such activities as “Reversing Language shift” and he argues that Reversing Language shift cannot be successful without intergenerational Language transmission. Appropriate planning of the above is required to enable interaction appropriate monitoring and evaluation system and the introduction and trends and progress of Mother tongue education in the present scenario of Manipur. Resourcing these key areas would be an important future consideration in determining the feasibility, scope of programs and activities related to languages. The recognition of roles of languages should be given a platform ultimately advocating for the promotion of languages in question. The promotion of languages should not merely be for equity reason but rather for empowering minority languages so that they can help solving numerous problem of underdevelopment which currently remains unresolved.

Successful language maintenance efforts ideally combine literacy and education with an improvement in the economic and political standing of the minority language community (Nettle and Romaine 2000). It is, therefore, suggested that the challenges posed can be partially solved by a judicious combination of two approaches, that community action program to sensitize the speakers and documentation of the languages and writing of texts books for the schools, colleges or university which is deemed fit for the set purpose. A dialogue between linguists and native experts needs to be established, in order to decide the gradation of the lessons, for example, how much and what types of terminologies can be introduced in a particular curriculum.

It is also important that educators and text book developers must not work in isolation. They must work together towards the targeted goal of development of the languages. Sometimes some text book developers do not want to share their materials as they

fear that they will be severely criticized and some others for the fear that their work will be plagiarized or may be used for other wrong purposes. However, in such an urgent situation of language revitalization, the need to share should be more important than the fear of criticism.

The last but not the least recommendation for these languages, for text book developers it will be a lot easier to develop materials departing from a closer language, for example Manipuri than it is when they depart from English or any other languages which are not close to these languages. The reason being these languages are strikingly similar in their structures to Manipuri as they are of the same language group. As they have not been codified in language academic or authoritative text books or dictionaries, whenever, there is any problem or controversy regarding the language structure or usages it may cause a lot of hurdle for the development of languages. Like all speakers of languages, the speakers of these languages do, of course, have an intuitive, largely unconscious knowledge of the rules of the languages. For the revitalization and development of the languages, to begin with linguists with the help of natives must try to codify the dictionaries, grammars of the languages.

### **Some Recommendations for Manipur to Follow**

Currently the issue language loss is one of the important foci of linguistic research. A government sponsored or university sponsored venture concerning languages of Manipur should be established in order to look after language matters such as compiling vital information and data on the languages of Manipur - particularly for the preservation, promotion and development of the minority languages. In the light of the above discussion – step strategy may essentially be adopted to change the present scenario – the steps are as follows.

- 1) A linguistic survey of Manipur in order to identify and determine the actual number of languages spoken in the state.
- 2) To promote the languages of the state through codification and linguistic study and description and to develop the uses of these languages in education.
- 3) To identify the endangered languages and take steps for their preservation.
- 4) To use the services of trained linguists to ensure more reliable compilation of language statistics in future census report.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the linguistic diversity and complicated multilingual situation in Manipur different pathways towards the goal must be charted out. The policy will require a targeted approach in order to maintain and develop the minority languages of Manipur. For this comprehensive transformation of education including incorporation of minority languages alongside English, Hindi, Manipuri as subjects and media of instructions in schools must be initiated. In order to rescue them from the verge of extinction and make them alive a strategy of bilingual education is imperative for addressing the language issue of minority languages particularly to cater to the needs of the indigenous population. The planners and decision makers, therefore, must develop new directions in order to quicken the mind, the heart and soul of the learners so that they might develop attitudes and behavior for a pluralistic world view of tomorrow.

The research focusing on identifying the minority languages of Manipur, assessing their ethno-linguistic vitality and discussing patterns of language use may be applied to planning appropriate language development program activities. In doing so we are preparing our children for technical advances of the future, we are showing them that the languages have a proper place in it. It is clear that in order to differentiate the strands or streams of plural society we need to find out separate tradition of culture with their different histories and different prospects, so as to make an inventory of locally distinctive condition of the perpetuation and change and thus interdependence and dynamic. If we take a dynamic and positive view of ethnic linguistic and other forms of diversity as an invitation for people to interact, to celebrate and to learn from the differences rather than a passive acceptance of the fact that diversity simply exist, it can make an important contribution to the balanced development of linguistically plural society such as Manipur. The lessons drawn from this study reach far beyond the Manipuri context and may be applied to other multilingual societies across other diverse multilingual states.

This paper demonstrates that linguistic and cultural diversity, a characteristic feature of Manipur, is an important asset for sustainable development. Given the high level of current interest in ethnolinguistic issues in Manipur, it is hoped that this article will contribute to further policy developments which acknowledge that cultural and linguistic diversity enrich society. To conclude , as the article provides accounts of communities and geographical areas which need further serious attention in the study on language and education, it is believed that this article will contribute to the on-going debate on the ecology of language and its interconnectedness with education and lead to further critical reflection.

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### Notes

<sup>1,2</sup>The Unesco Courier, April 2000

<sup>3</sup>Board of Secondary education,Manipur, 2009. Curriculum and Syllabus Volume1 ,For class 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> .

<sup>4</sup>Council of Higher Secondary School, Manipuri.2008.Curriculum and Syllabus Volume 2 Arts Commerce For classes 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The author was a resource person in several workshops organized by Tribal Research Institute,Manipur

<sup>6</sup> The Unesco Courier, January 1992 – P20.

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