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Manipuri Language and Its Socio-Cultural Values

¹Dr. M. Ninghaiba Singha, ²Th.Kanchan Bala Singha

¹Lecturer, Patharkandi College of Education (B.Ed. College), Karimganj, Assam, India

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Manipuri, S.S.College, Hailakandi, Assam, India

Email: ¹nmeisanam@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Language may be a social phenomenon and is used for communication. This is a social activity that requires a coordination effort on the part of speaker and the listener. And it is a true that the use of language always involves the meaning of the speaker and the understanding of the listener, in addition, no speech is free of social meaning to the context has a direct relationship with the communicative events and the context of social situation. Therefore even the simplest type of speech or communication act must have a social situation in which time and place go together in a culturally accepted way.

The Manipuri language develops from the traditional Meitei language. The speech of the politically dominant group, the legends, songs and manuscripts found in this language is an ingredient that is part of the Manipuri society and culture, and maintained the social and cultural values of the community. Therefore in this article we try to focus on the socialisation pattern and cultural values of the Manipuri language that are seen in the Manipuri community will be discussed.

1. Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon and is used for communication that is social activity that requires the concerted effort of the speaker and listener. And it is true that the use of language always includes the meaning of the speaker and the understanding of the listener, moreover no speech is free from social meaning, and the choice of the appropriate social meaning for the to the context has a direct connection with communicative events and context or social situation. Therefore even the simplest type of speech or communication act must have a social situation in which time and place are agreed upon in a culturally acceptable way.

The Manipuri language is developed from the traditional Meitei language; the speech of the politically dominant group, legends, songs and manuscripts found in this language evidently demonstrated a long and sustained existence of the language. Since, the Manipuri language is an ingredient that is part of the Manipuri society and culture, and maintained the social and cultural values of the Community.

2. The Manipuri Community:

A community is a social unit of any size that shares common values, or is located in a certain geographical area. It is a group of people who are connected by enduring relationship that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who generally define that relationship as important to their identity and social practice. The Manipuris call themselves by the name Meetei. Etymologically, the term has been derived from the words 'Mee' + 'Atei', 'Mee' means 'man' and 'Atei' means 'other'. The Manipuri community is a heterogeneous community formed by the Meeteis 'which their seven exogamous clans i.e. Mangang (Ningthauja), Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Khaba-nganba, and Sarang-Leishangthem', Manipuri Bramhins (Meetei Bramhon), Manipuri-Muslims (Meetei Pangals) and Lois (slaves or dependent group of Manipuris i.e. Manipuri SC) etc. The Meeteis have the elements- Mongoloids, Australoids, Austro-Asiatics, and stains of Caucasoids, of which the Mongoloid element is the predominating factor. Generally speaking, the characteristics of the Manipuris are Mongoloids. The Manipuri people belong to the *Kuki-Chin* group of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongolian race. But a good mix of Aryans and other blood groups also took place in the mainstream of the Manipuri nation. Due to its special geographic location and as a result of various religious and political interactions, Manipur became the melting point of different ethnic groups and cultures.

3. Manipuri Language (Meiteilon):

The Manipuri language/Meiteilon is evolved out of the traditional Meitei language; the speech of the politically dominant group, legends, songs and manuscripts found in this language evidently demonstrated a long and sustained existence of the language. Manipuri language is a direct descendent of the Kuki Chin group accumulation of the Tibeto-Burman languages family. Among the various Tibeto-Burman language families in India. The Manipuri language is the only language with its own script – i.e. Meitei-Mayek, which has been existence from 1st century A.D onwards. The example is seen in the coins of *Wura Konthouba* (568-658A.D). The state of a language can be determined by its scripts. There is no denying the fact that the Manipuris were familiar with the art of writing by having their own scripts. As other prominent language of India, the Manipuri language has a scientific scripts system. The use of the writing was introduced to the state from earliest times and the facts had also been exposed from the find of coins, inscriptions in stone and metal along with the writing on hand made paper. Regarding Meitei Mayek, Dr M.

Kriti (1980) writes- “ Meiteilon has been the state language of Manipur since 3rd century A.D., coins were struck, royal chronicles recorded, edicts and copper plates issued in this language.” (Devi Chanambam Sarajubala 2002:4). The ancient Meitei records were only at Meitei-Mayek. The Manipuri Language is the lingua franca of the state. In Manipur, there are 29 different tribal ethnic groups recognized by the Government of Manipur. Since these tribal groups have their own language, they used Meiteilon as a lingua franca for the purpose of communication between tribes. So, most of the tribal people living in Manipur speak and understand Meiteilon. It seems that although Manipuri language was the lingua franca of the different groups, each spoke a separate dialect, and as a result of proximity to each another or subsequent fusion, many words from those dialects have been incorporated and introduced into the main language. However, parts of this rich heritage of the Manipuri language was destroyed as a result of Hindunisation in the 18th century; it has been influenced and enriched by Indo-Aryan languages of Sanskrit origin from the 18th century onwards and by the English language from the 19th century respectively.

4. Manipuri Language and its socio-cultural values:

Manipuri language has a long literary tradition. Its literature dates back to the first century A.D. So far around a thousand ancient manuscripts have been discovered which consist of varied subjects like pure literature, historical accounts, theology etc. (Sanajaoba, N, 1991:281). The classics of high literature books such as ‘*Nummit Kappa*’ (O. Bogeshore, 1977), ‘*Poireiton Khunthokpa*’ (M. Chandra,1979) described ethical values as truth, goodness, excellence, honesty and modesty, spiritual equality, egalitarianism (gender as well as social) etc. as prevails in the Manipuri society.

The Manipuri faith has a strong association with religion, which is essentially an ethics. Manipuris defended that the highest ethics is the religion of devotion to god. The Manipuris are perhaps the most God fearing people. The God in Meiteilon is understood by three terms: (a) *Chingu* ‘who see the universe by his divine eyes’, (b) *Khoyum* ‘whose abode the naval’ and (c) *Lai* ‘capable of his will with ease’. In ‘*Langol*’ (W.Yumjao, 1924) it has been said that *Korau nongja khudingbu tauja matik sintha laure* ‘our actions are recorded daily by the Almighty for evaluation’ the same phrase exemplifies how the Manipuris visualize God. Also, there are saying like *Laina yadaba* ‘that is not accepted by God’, *Laina warakpa* ‘to punish by God’, *Dharma leiba* ‘religious; in the sense that one should never comment mistakes or evils of others’, etc which reflects that the Manipuris pay a great reverence to the Almighty.

The Manipuris has a concept of *Lairamlen* ‘Kingdom of God’ and is one of the guiding principles of the Manipuri concept of goodness, which is an essential value. The God according to the concept of Manipuri is the truth and is always good and immaculate. The one who has achieved his goal by the right means will win everywhere as exemplified in the saying- *achumbana mai pak-i* ‘truth always triumphs’ *Lairamlenda yaibi thawaina hainam leinam oina tinba* ‘to mingle in the air of heaven by the soul’ it is also a concept of the Manipuris to

let people go the right way and God. In N. Khelchandra Singh's 'Chainarol'(1968) portrays that the Manipuris are highly patriotic and courteous. In the book he writes, "if an unarmed man is challenged, he would reach for his arms and arrange a day for the fight." The stories of Paona Brajabasi, who died in Khongjom War (1891) are worth mention as an example of recent sacrifice. M. Kriti Singh (1991) advocates that the Manipuri concept of 'Ahimsa' extend to the plants and even tiny insects. But it is allow to kill and assailant by self-defiance. The Gaudiya Vaisnavism religion of the 18th century cultivates humility and modesty among the Manipuris. Being the persons *thaugallon* 'etiquette' people in the King's court, courtesy and respect for people of all status are precious as ornaments in personal and social relationship. Rude manners and harsh language are considered uncivilized by them. Manipuris concept of charity is based on sharing possessions with those in need. One can mention the Manipuri saying *arei leita tathok tasin panminnaba* 'to sharing the belongings between rich and poor' *yenna yenna duna* 'to share the eatables', etc.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion of the study, we came to know that the Manipuri language is one of the most insistently an advanced Modern Indian literature and its socio-cultural values are highly remarkable. In the above discussion, we have seen that both the ancient and modern literatures of Manipuri language which has flourished since time immemorial have described its relationship to Manipuri society. All the socio-cultural events and facts narrated and described in the previous literatures came to know that this language has a close relationship with the Manipuri society and it always participate in all the affairs of the people. The Manipuri language is a component part of the Manipuri society and culture; and itself maintain the social and cultural values of the Community.

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