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The Linguistic and Cultural Identity of Lambada in Andhra Pradesh: A Sociocultural Study

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Abstract:

This paper discusses various linguistic components of Lambada language to make out their linguistic identity. This paper also investigates cultural festivals, religious practices and etc to distinguish their cultural identity from Indo-Aryan culture. This community has been under the influence of the local dominant cultures for a long period of time as they migrated from Rajasthan to other states of India. The objective of the study is to trace out the identity of Lambada and the influence of the dominant culture on their culture in Andhra Pradesh. Data for this paper has been convinced through interviews and with researcher own encounter.

Key words: Linguistic identity, cultural identity, dual identity

1. Introduction

Lambada is a nomadic tribal community that migrated from Rajasthan to Andhra Pradesh and other parts of India. The Lambadas speak Lambadi which belongs to the Indo-Aryan family. It has no script and independent history. Though it does not have script it keeps them culturally and socially united. Wherever they live, they understand their language without any difficulty though their language comprises of many loan words and expressions from other languages. Though many linguists have tried to unravel the origin of the language, some aspects of the language pose challenges to the linguists.

When Lambadas speak to non-Lambada people, they exclusively use local language. But when they speak to their kith and kin, they speak Lambada language. When we observe from the point of view of the vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar system, it certainly belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages. It has been influenced by Sanskrit, Hindi, Rajasthani, Marathi, Gujarati, Kanada, Telugu, and Persian and also by other local languages. The trail of the Lambadi/Banjara can be verified from their language. Lambadi borrows words from Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi and the local languages of the area they belong to.

If we take the Lambada community into consideration, they have dual identity such as linguistic and cultural identity. Lambadas linguistically belong to Indo-Aryan family and culturally to Dravidian family in Andhra Pradesh. To examine Lambadas' linguistic identity, we should talk about some features that Lambada language shares with Indo-Aryan language family i.e. kinship terminology, some grammatical features and etc. In the same way, when we talk about their cultural identity, we should also observe the influence of Dravidian cultural (i.e. Telugu) on the community.

2. Linguistic Identity

Though the Lambada language has been influenced by many other languages, still it has retained its own identity. In this language we find many words that are not found in the languages listed in the Indian constitution. Some words are spoken by all Lambadas irrespective of their places of residence. For example: *Goar* (Lambadas), *Koar* (non-Lambadas), *Koari* (non-Lambada woman), *Chora* (Lambada boy), *Chori* (Lambada girl), *Vatadu* (bridegroom), *Navalveri* (bride), *Hansalo* (necklace), *tandro* (husband), *gonni* (wife), *malav* (assembly), *vansali* (flute), *Geriya* (youngster), *Gerani* (young girl), *Yadi* (mother) etc. There are various grammatical, phonetically, kinship terms and other characteristics which witness the linguistic identity of Lambadas in Andhra Pradesh. They are discussed in the given sections below.

2.1. Grammatical Features

We find exceptional grammar operations in Lambadi language (Naik, 2003). They are:

- Sometimes the verb patterns do not change in feminine and neuter genders which are exclusively Indo-Aryan language family characteristics. For example:
Wu piroch: he is drinking; *wu pirich*: she is drinking/it is drinking
Wu aroch: he is coming; *wu arich*-she coming/it is coming
- We do not find any difference in third person singular masculine, feminine and neuter genders as in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan language family. For example:
Wu: he, she it
- There is tradition of affixing ‘Singh’ with the names of men under the influence of Rajasthani. For example:
Dhansingh, Ramsingh, Lalsingh
- A phonetic difference brings about change in meaning and the words ending in consonants which come from Indo-Aryan language family. For example:
Jad – fat/*jad* – molars
Jhad – sweep/*jhad* – tree
- In Lambada language, there are two genders – one is masculine and the other is feminine. Masculine gender can be transformed into feminine by adding “I” at the end of the word as it is in Hindi. For example:

Masculine	Feminine
Beta (son)	Beti (daughter)
Chora (boy)	Chori (girl)
Tander (husband)	Tandri(wife)
Mitaka (male frog)	Mitiki (female frog)

- In this language nasalization of sound is very common. For example:
Khas – cough; *Dhas* – run
- Aspiration is also one of the Indo-Aryan language family features that Lambada language shares.
Ex. *Dhaan*- rice
Bhand-scold
Dhani-pop corn
Bhai –younger brother
Bhiya –elder brother

These facts indicate that the Lambadi language has independent existence. It has been influenced by other Indo-Aryan languages and even Dravidian languages. In spite of this influence it has retained its distinctive character as it belongs to a group of Rajasthani languages. The script is very necessary for the overall development of this community as it is spoken by three Crores of people.

2.2. Kinship Terminology

Some of the kinship terms that Lambada shares with Indo Aryan languages. Lambada community has rich kinship terms. Paternal side kinship terms are used to address father’s father and mother as *daada* and *daadi* and uncles and aunts as *motaap* (father’s elder brother) and *motyaadi* (father’s elder brother’s wife), *pupa* (father’s sister’s husband) and *phupi* (father’s sister), *kaka* (father’s younger brother) and *kaki* (father’s younger brother’s wife), *phupa* (father’s sister’s husband), *jet* (husband’s elder brother), *jathani*(wife of husband’s elder brother), *devar*(husband’s younger brother), *darvani* (wife of husband’s younger brother), *nanad*(husband’s sister), *nanadoi*(husband of husband’s sister) . Maternal side kinship terms are used to address mother’s father (*nana*) and mother’s mother (*naani*) uncles and aunts are addressed as *maama*(mother’s brother) and *maami* (mother’s brother’s wife), *maasi* for both mother’s elder and younger sister and *maasa* for both mother’s elder sister’s and younger sister’s husband (Upender, 2012). These kinship terms are also found in other languages of Indo-Aryan Language family.

3. Cultural Identity

As the sources reveal, Lambadas are culturally influenced by the dominant cultures where they settled in and they started pursuing the dominant cultures. According to Sutton (1991), cultural identity is related to ethnic and ancestral background, but when it comes to Lambadas, they ethnically belong to Rajasthan and migrated all over India. Therefore, they are mostly influenced by the dominant cultures. As per Dorian (1980), people of a particular community can be identified by their dress, diet, location etc. same case with Lambda community, Lambada used to be identified by their appearance as they used to wear their traditional dresses earlier. Now they have been influenced by the dominant culture i.e. Telugu. People of Lambada community tend to adopt the dominant culture for prestige. Few of the acculturation characteristics would be discussed below.

3.1. Cultural Festivals

Lambadas have distinguished cultural specific festivals to remember their forefathers, i.e. 'Bhog' and 'Dado', They are also engaged with various seasonal festivals such as teej, 'bar rand kayero' (picnic), 'kadau', 'attam' and so on. Some of the above mentioned festivals are not performed among this community now days such as 'teej' and etc. If we have to reflect the culture of Lambadas who have settled in the cities, they are away from these festivals since they are completely prejudiced by the dominant culture. They always feel privileged to perform dominant cultural festivals in the city environment. Both in rural and urban situations, dominant cultural festivals are executed in this community.

3.2. Religious Practices

Most of the Lambadas belong to Hinduism in India. As sources disclose Lambada have numerous Gods and Goddesses such as, 'Sevalal baba' Bhav Singh baba, Hathiram Baba, Tolaja Bhavani, Merama Bhavani, Panni daadi and so on. Apart from their cultural specific religious practices they also take part in the dominant religious performances, such as 'lord Venkateshwara' 'Veerabhadra Swamy', 'Lord Vinayaka', 'lord Ram', 'yallamma, Uppalama Maremma etc. These religious performances also state that Lambada are culturally influenced by the dominant culture.

3.3. Dress

Lambadas were well known for their embroidery fancy dress in ancient days. Women were known to wear colorful and beautiful costumes like *phetiya* (as ghagra) and *kanchalli* (as top) and had tattoos on their hands. The dress was considered as fancy and they attracted Western cultures as well. They used mirror chips and often coins to decorate them. Women put on thick bangles on their arms (*patli*). Their ornaments were made up of silver rings, coins, chain and hair pleats were tied together at the end by *chotla*. Men used to wear *Dhoti* and *Kurta* (short with many folds). These clothes were designed especially for the protection from harsh climate in deserts and to distinguish them from others.

These traditional dresses are not found in the community in the present situation. They have switched to the dress which the dominant community uses. In this present scenario, we will not be able to find people wearing the traditional dress.

4. Identity Crisis

Lambadas have been going through identity crisis for a long time in India. They are identified through their local dominant identity first than their own cultural identity where they live in. Even though the Lambadas have dual identity such as linguistic and cultural identities, they are viewed as Telugu in general in Andhra Pradesh. Their identity comes out when they are specified as Lambadas in a particular situation in Telugu society. For example, Lambadas are intended to exhibit their cultural identity as Telugu most of the time than Lambada due to prestige dilemma. Most apparently Lambada is judged as caste rather than a community in Andhra Pradesh. One more cause of identity crisis is education where Lambadas' mother tongue is considered as Telugu instead of Lambada at schools and colleges. Even in certificates where the column of mother tongue is replaced with Telugu as a substitution of Lambada.

5. Conclusion

This study has been carried out with sociolinguistic and socio-cultural interest. This section recapitulates the observations and findings about Lambadas' linguistic and cultural identity in a dominant society. Some linguistic and cultural aspects have been discussed from various perspectives that provide evidence of their linguistic and cultural identity. The features which Lambada language shares with Indo-Aryan language family say that Lambada linguistically belongs to Indo-Aryan family. It has been observed that Lambada community has been influenced by the dominant culture linguistically and culturally in the multicultural society. This study has also explored the changes that have been taken place in their culture. This has also clearly discussed that most of the Lambadas from cities as well as rural area prefer the dominant culture due to inferiority complex.

It has been examined that the Lambadas have dual cultural identity in Andhra Pradesh such as Lambada (within community and for specification) and Telugu (to be included in the dominant culture). This study has also found that education system also plays a role in deciding once cultural identity.

6. References

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