
Kashmiri Language and Literature: Issues and Perspectives

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Abstract:

Language and literature reflect the identity, ethnicity and social milieu of a particular society. Great civilizations of the world have flourished because of the rich traditions of their language and literature. History is witnessed that nations who have preserved and promoted their language have achieved great success than the nations who neglected their language. In this age of globalization, the widely spoken languages like English is attracting large number of speakers due to its scope in jobs, business and the language of internet and social media. English being the language of internet and technology has made available the world knowledge and information in different fields and disciplines. This has created myriad issues and challenges for regional languages which are lagging behind in making use of AI to promote their languages. Kashmiri language and literature also lack in using technology for its development and promotion. Currently, the corpus of Kashmiri language in the digitized form is very less available for readers. Hence, the need of the hour for the government, academicians and the speakers should be to take different initiatives for digitizing the Kashmiri language corpus on the internet. So that the speakers around the world can access to the language and literature of Kashmiri language. In this context, the present paper aims to highlight the issues and challenges which Kashmiri language and literature is facing today. The paper also explores the reasons for the growing number of speakers towards English and Urdu in the valley. Finally, the paper provides some preventive measures for the promotion of Kashmiri language and literature.

Keywords: Challenges, Digitizing, Globalization, motivation and Promotion.

Introduction

Kashmiri language is an Indo-Aryan language and is placed under the Dardic subgroup of Indo-Aryan language family. As stated by Koul, "Grierson has placed Kashmiri under the Dardic group of languages. He has classified Dardic languages under three major groups: 1. The Kafir Group, 2. The Khowar or Chitrali Group, and 3. The Dard Group. According to his classification, the Dard Group includes Shina, Kashmiri, Kashtawari, Poguli, Siraji, Rambai, and Kohistani-the last comprising Garwi, Torwali and Maiya". (Kashmiri Language...6) Kashmiri language is recognized as the 22 scheduled languages mentioned in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution. Kashmiri language is spoken mainly in Kashmir valley and also outside the valley.

As highlighted by Raina in his book A History of Kashmiri Literature, “Kashmiri is the language spoken in the valley of Kashmir and in the adjoining Pir Panchal belt of the Jammu province from Poonch in the West to Kishtwar in the east, and the dialects spoken in this belt are Kishtwari, Siraji, Pogli, Rambani and Pirs”. (1) Moreover, Kashmiri spoken in the valley is divided into three regions Maraz, Kamraz and into Srinagar. In this context, Koul Highlights, “Kashmiri speaking areas in the valley of Kashmir is divided into three regions: (1) Maraz (southern and south eastern region), (2) Kamraz (northern and northern-west region, and (3) Srinagar and its neighboring areas. (Koul, 7)

Kashmiri language and literature are very rich in poetry and short story. It has produced great writers in poetry like Lal Ded, Habba Khatoon, Sheik-ul-Alam, Mehjoor, Abdul Ahad Azad, Rahman Rahi, Shaad Ramzaan, Shahnaz Rashid etc. The themes in poetry highlight the Sufi and mysticism in Kashmiri tradition. It also delves into the cultural ethos of Kashmiri people and society. In short story, we can boast of great short story writers like Akhtar Mohi-ud-din, Amin Kamil, Hari Krishan Koul, Shankar Raina, Hriday Kaul Bharti, Farooq Masoodi etc., have written short stories which provide deep insights into a Kashmiri psyche and cultural ethos. These writers present universal themes which are deeply rooted in Kashmiri culture and society. Kashmiri short stories have their unique flavor.

Issues and Challenges in Kashmiri Language and Literature:

In his article, Come Let Us Embrace Kashmiri, the author states, “the real challenge now comes from the Kashmiri society itself. Our homes are far away from the language and we prefer to speak in Urdu with our children, whether wrong or right” (Bukhari 7). It clearly reflects the present status of Kashmiri language which is suffering at the hands of its own speakers. The hypocrisy is that our educated community who claim to be the saviors of this language are themselves creating the same situation in their homes. They speak Urdu and English with their children as they want to excel them in academics. They feel proud if their children speak English or Urdu. At the same time, they are embarrassed when their children speak in their mother tongue (Kashmiri). Now this tendency is increasing very fast among the uneducated people in the rural and urban areas who also prefer to speak Urdu rather their own mother tongue during their daily conversation. It is more disappointing when you see the younger generation prefer to speak in Urdu in colleges and universities. Therefore, the serious challenge for Kashmiri language is that children are being deprived of speaking their mother tongue which should be of great concern of academicians and lovers of this language. However, one should not discourage the children to learn any other language like Urdu and English but not at the cost of mother tongue.

The apathy of the government has also done a great loss to the Kashmiri language. The fact is that there is no proper policy and planning on the part of the government for the promotion of Kashmiri language. For instance, there is no use of Kashmiri language at the road side hoardings, public places, for instructions in institutions and government offices. During my recent visit to Hyderabad and Mysore, I have observed that the use of mother tongue appears in every public and government places.

Everywhere at the ATM, Banks, Governments offices, instructions are written in their mother tongues like Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. This clearly shows their love, commitment and efforts for the promotion of their mother tongue. While as in Kashmir there are no such signs in Kashmiri language in these places. Either English, Hindi or Urdu is being used to convey all the instructions/information required for the public. This apathetic attitude of government to promote Kashmiri language is an injustice on the part of the government. Sadaf Munshi also points out that “Because of the dominance of languages other than Kashmiri and lack of institutional support (at least until recently when the language was added to the school curriculum in Kashmir), younger generations are rapidly shifting to other prestige languages. Native language literacy is dismally limited.”

One of the problems which Kashmiri language is facing today is that the majority of the people are unaware about their rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. The main reason behind is that majority of the people in Kashmir are unable to read and write Kashmiri. Consequently, they remain far away from the treasures of the Kashmiri language, culture and literature. Only those people who are connected to the literary circles get an opportunity to study Kashmiri literature. But ironically, the younger generation is crazy about other literary works written in English by Kashmiri writers. You will be surprised to know that there are thousands of readers who have read the recent literary narratives of Kashmiri writers like Mirza Waheed, Basharat peer and Shahnaz Bashir, Natasha Koul and Sidhartha Gigoo. But it is very unfortunate to know that there are so many award-winning writers in Kashmiri literature like prof. Mohi-ud- din Hajini, Akhtar Mohiuddin, Amin Kamil, prof. Rahman Rahi, prof. Shafi Shouq and prof. Aziz Hajni, Prof. Shaad Ramzan etc who have meagre readership outside the literary circles in Kashmir. There are many writers in Kashmiri language who are equally as good as any other good writers in English or any other Bhashas.

So, the problem of readership is also a big issue for Kashmiri language and literature. Kashmiri language suffers from the lack of its readers. There are less number of population who are able to read and write Kashmiri. In one of his interviews prof. Shafi Shouq says “I have written about 50 books but I am yet to find a reader even though I have got recognition and awards. Even writers don't read other writers” (qtd. in Mir). Even the educated people are not able to read Kashmiri. In this context Dr. Maroof Shah states “It can be safely concluded that 95% of literate Kashmiris can't write Kashmiri and less than 5% can read it fluently. And fewer still are comfortable with the highly Sanskritized or Persianized language of Kashmiri poetry.” (qtd. In Mir). This should be indeed a great concern for different organizations in Kashmir who are working for the promotion of Kashmiri language. They should set up different organizations to help the people who are unable to read and write Kashmiri. Kashmiri language and literature should not only remain confined to the literary circles. It should find its way to reach the common masses. Moreover, it is very unfortunate that Kashmiri language is neglected in print media. There are few newspapers Koshur Akhbar, Sangarmaal which are being published throughout the Kashmir valley. Among these only Sangarmaal has some circulation among the masses.

Only a smaller number of population is motivated to read these newspapers. The Journals like Sheeraza, Son Adab and Prave also raise so many questions about the readership outside the literary circles of these Journals. The only reason to read newspapers in Kashmiri language is either for an academic purpose or because of the deep love towards this language. So, it is a great challenge for the Kashmiri language and literature that very less readers are motivated to read its literature and also to use it for their information about their own society. The reason behind this unfortunate history is directly or indirectly linked with the indifference of the government towards it. It is a fact that lack of funds is also a great impediment for organizations to work for the promotion of Kashmiri language.

The real challenge for this language comes when the government is not able to create jobs in this language. There are insufficient job opportunities for the educated youth which creates a disappointment among the younger generation to take this subject in their academic field. The government and the different organizations are not paying attention to create the opportunities for the youth in different sectors like tourism, business or print and mass media. The other languages like English and Urdu are hugely preferred.

Kashmiri language is still to produce good translations in Indian languages and in English. There are very few translations in English which can represent us at the national and international level. Also, the receptions of these translations are very disappointing. It can be suggested that a good translation can play a significant role in motivating the young generation of Kashmir towards Kashmiri language and literature. We have equally great literary giants in the genre of poetry, drama and short fiction but unfortunately no writer has been translated so far completely in any Indian languages and English. So, if there are quality translations of Kashmiri literature available in the market, this will help learners to read their literature and can develop interest towards the Kashmiri language and literature. Undoubtedly, we have translated some of the important writers in poetry and prose but there is a need to produce quality translations which will catch the attention of readers. Thus, the role of translations in promoting Kashmiri language can be instrumental to motivate readers towards the Kashmiri literature. For example, I have seen so many people getting attracted towards Urdu and Hindi literature after reading their translated texts in English. I got myself attracted to read some of the Urdu texts of Premchand and Qurratulain Hyder after reading their translated works of Godaan and Aag ka Darya in English.

Preventive measures

Presently, there are so many organizations working for the promotions of Kashmiri language and literature. They have achieved an amount of success in their mission. But the following measures can be taken further to strengthen their mission in future.

1. In this globalized world, the use of technology can be a useful tool to preserve and promote Kashmiri language. There is a dire need to digitize the Kashmiri language by having a huge corpus that will help learners to motivate them and give them an easy access to the language and literature of Kashmiri language, history and philosophy etc. In this regard, there is a need to have serious research in the language technology to prepare a corpus for the preservation and promotion of Kashmiri language and literature.

2. The use of Broadcast media can play an important role in reviving the ethos of Kashmiri language and literature by telecasting some interesting programs. To reach the maximum audience, it is the duty of Doordarshan Kendriya to broadcast some interesting and enlightening programs on radio and television which will be of great interest and benefit to the audience, particularly for the younger generation. Although there are some interesting programs on TV and Radio but in very less number.

3. Government policies can also play an important role in promoting this language by opening different incentives and schemes like creating jobs in different sectors for the educated youth in Kashmir. This will not only develop an interest among the younger generation towards Kashmiri language and literature but will also sensitize them about the lost glory of Kashmiri language and literature.

4. The teachers in schools, colleges and universities should also be trained to develop among the students the spirit of love towards their mother tongue. Trained teachers should be appointed for designing the syllabus according to the modern needs for the students.

5. In schools, colleges and universities, Kashmiri subject should be given an importance. The special cultural and literary programs should be organized to aware the students, scholars and teachers about the importance of their mother tongue.

Thus, it is the responsibility of every Kashmiri to preserve their mother tongue as it is the future of their identity. It is high time to aware people about the importance of Kashmiri language and literature and break the patterns of society which have become hindrance in the development of Kashmiri language. Moreover, there are very least chances of Kashmiri language will become the dead language. But efforts should be made to promote this language by opening up the new ways in the form of different educational programs like seminars, conferences and other literary gatherings to make the hope alive for the lovers of this language.

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