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**LANGUAGE AN IDENTITY VIZ-A-VIZ KASHMIRI  
LANGUAGE: CHALLENGES IN THE CHANGING  
SCENARIO**

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**Abstract**

*Language is not only the medium of communication but is also the identity of the people who speak it. It connects its speakers with their history, traditions and culture. It can rather be termed as the carrier of the culture of the people. Kashmiri is the mother tongue of majority of people in the Kashmir valley of the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It is also spoken in the Chenab valley (Jammu) and in Azad Kashmir (Pakistan). Being the mother tongue of the people of Kashmir, it has a rich cultural heritage and history. It is the identity of the Kashmiri speakers of Jammu and Kashmir. However, at present, the Linguistic scenario is a bit alarming viz-a-viz the present generation is gradually shifting to Urdu and English languages and is leaving behind their rich cultural heritage and identity which is embedded in their mother tongue, i.e., Kashmiri. The prevailing situation is an indication that the present generation has developed negative attitude towards Kashmiri and have developed more affinity towards Urdu and English languages. In this backdrop the present paper aims to throw light on the challenges being faced by the Kashmiri language in the given situation. The challenges range from the negative attitude of younger generations towards Kashmiri language, role of parents, administrative policies regarding Kashmiri language and lack of subject specific teachers in Kashmiri Language.*

**Keywords:** Language, Identity, Kashmiri, Culture, Challenges.

**Introduction**

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, If you talk to him in his mother language that goes to his heart.” – Nelson Mandela

Identity is the distinguishing character or personality of an individual, which helps a person to know who he/she is and what is his/her relation with the outer world. In fact, the search

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for identity begins at the age of adolescence when a person questions himself about his identity and his relation with the people around him. In this stage, the identity crisis occurs. Man is recognized in the society by means of different identities like social identity, national identity, racial identity, religious identity, ethnic identity and one of the most important identities is the Linguistic identity. Linguistic identity is the identification of person on the basis of the language(s) he speaks. Linguistic identity is the most important identity of a person, like people in Wales speak Welsh and hence they are identified as Welsh. Language is not only the medium of communication but it gives a person a distinct identity indicating the person belongs to a certain linguistic community and speaks a distinct language. Language and identity is the most important research field in linguistics (the scientific study of language) and is a growing and demanding field, which studies the relationship between language and identity.

Language is a complex system and it has not only the function of communication in our lives but it also functions as the carrier of one's culture, it connects one with the history, traditions, politics, and folklore and transfers these elements from one generation to the other. Losing one's language means losing one's roots, losing the identity and losing our culture. According to an estimate since 1950, 250 Indian languages have gone extinct and over 40 languages are endangered. One of the famous linguists, Joshua Fishman comments on losing the language, "When we take away the language of a culture we take away, its greetings, its curses, its cures, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its rhymes, its proverbs, its wisdom, and its prayers". It is the responsibility of the people who speak a particular language to preserve and remain loyal with their mother tongue so that they may not lose their cultural roots and the linguistic identity. According to an education specialist, Hurisa Guvercin, "When a person speaks his mother tongue, a direct connection is established between heart, brain and tongue. Our personality, character, modesty, shyness, defects, skills, and all other hidden characteristics become truly revealed through the mother tongue because the sound of the mother tongue in the ear and its meaning in the heart give us trust and confidence".

## **Kashmiri Language: An Important Identity of the Kashmiris**

Kashmiri is the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Kashmir region in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiri language is among one of the twenty-two scheduled languages mentioned in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian constitution. Kashmiri is called /kə:ʃur/ or /kə:ʃir zaba:n/ by its native speakers. According to the 2011 census there are 7 million speakers of Kashmiri language in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiri is an Indo-Aryan language and falls under the Dardic subgroup of Indo-Aryan language family. Kashmiri language has a very rich cultural and literary heritage but unfortunately the new generation has developed a negative attitude towards this language and is shifting towards English and Urdu languages. It is a matter of great concern for the people of Jammu and Kashmir to preserve and save their mother tongue Kashmiri from the danger of extinction because if the same situation continues, the day won't be far, when the Kashmiri language will disappear and Kashmiri's will lose their rich cultural and literary heritage along with their Linguistic identity. Taking these things into consideration the present work primarily focuses on the problems and challenges being faced by the Kashmiri language, which may become the reasons for the people of Kashmir to lose their Linguistic identity if the remedial measures are not be taken on time to preserve this language. The paper focuses on three main aspects which are considered as the main challenges for the Kashmiri language.

- Attitude of new generation towards Kashmiri language
- Administrative policy towards Kashmiri language
- Problems regarding the teaching of Kashmiri language

### **Attitude of New Generation towards Kashmiri Language**

India is a multi-lingual country where people speak different languages belonging to the different language families. There is unity in diversity but there are many elements which are apparent in our society and which are dangerous for our cultural and linguistic diversity. One of the biggest challenges has been posed by globalization; rather it has become biggest threat to the local cultures and languages in the world. The global language like English has become the lingua franca of the world in which people communicate with the people from the different languages and cultures. In fact, this language has

revolutionized every field but at the same time we can't deny the importance of the mother tongue and local cultures. Kashmiri has a long history of contact with many languages like Persian, Sanskrit, Urdu, Arabic and English language. These languages have enriched the Kashmiri language from time to time but the languages like Urdu and English have gradually started to dominate the local languages including the Kashmiri language. In Kashmir, the new generation is heading towards the Urdu and English languages and has left behind their mother tongue that is Kashmiri language. If the same situation continues for some time, the time is not far when Kashmiri language finds itself in the list of near extinct languages. There are several reasons for this shift of Kashmiri to English. One of which is the parents who feel ashamed when their children speak in Kashmiri and not Urdu or English because in Kashmir, English is considered as the most important attribute of the social status, income, prestige and employment. Several schools in Kashmir prohibit the students to talk in Kashmiri and they are allowed to talk in Urdu and English only. These and several other reasons in the Kashmiri society are responsible for the reason that the new generation has developed a negative attitude towards Kashmiri language and are learning Urdu and English at a very fast speed. Research shows that the younger generation uses Kashmiri language most of the times in the home contexts and outside the home only Urdu and English languages are used for the communication. English has marginalized the local cultures and languages and Kashmiri is not any exception to it. There are many studies which show how the younger generation has developed a negative attitude towards the Kashmiri language. According to the study conducted by Sheikh et al (2013) about the language preferences in Kashmiri youth, it was found in that study that most of the Kashmiris are not able to read and write in Kashmiri language. Supporting this view a famous Kashmiri writer Maroof Shah commented "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". This translates, Shah says, into "great cultural illiteracy of Kashmiris" although this time people are able to speak and understand the Kashmiri language. It was also found in the study that females are mostly shifting from Kashmiri to Urdu and English. The youth of Kashmir have a belief that English is the global language and language of opportunities. Urdu and

English are used in every context be it administration, hotels, business, universities etc. But unfortunately, people are forgetting the historic and cultural value of their mother tongue, Kashmiri. It is the time for the people of Kashmir to think and act to preserve their cultural heritage and their identity, i.e., Kashmiri language.

### **Administrative Policy towards Kashmiri Language**

The administrative policies are very essential for the preservation and development of any language. It is the government which gives the patronage to a language and provides financial assistance for its preservation. But when it comes to Kashmiri language, it has always been given less preference from the rulers of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. There is no mention from the political parties in their manifestos regarding the planning and development of Kashmiri language. Kashmiri being the mother tongue of majority of the people of Kashmir region was not given the official status until 2020. But the other languages like Persian, Urdu and English were enjoying the status of official languages in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir from time to time. In 1889, the then Dogra ruler Sri Pratap Singh adopted Urdu as the official language of erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, replacing Persian. Urdu was among one of the regional languages of the erstwhile constitution of Jammu and Kashmir along with Kashmiri, Dogri, Balti, Dardi, Punjabi, Pahari, Ladakhi and Gojri. Soon after the independence, Kashmiri was introduced as a subject of study upto the primarily level but the Indian administration discontinued it in 1955. Urdu continued to enjoy the special status in administration, the subject of study as well as the medium of instruction at the school level. But Kashmiri was always neglected. After the long demands and agitations by different scholars, academicians, experts and social and cultural organizations like Kashmiri Language Union (KLU) Kashmiri Language department was setup in the University of Kashmir. Later, Kashmiri was introduced as an optional subject at the undergraduate level and then in 2008 Kashmiri was made a compulsory subject in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir up to class 8<sup>th</sup>. Recently in 2020, the Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages bill was passed in the parliament, which included Kashmiri, Dogri and Hindi in the list of official languages of Jammu and Kashmir. But mere giving the official status to any Language doesn't work. Government has to provide full support and patronage to the Kashmiri Language for its

planning and development so that this language will remain alive with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and they will not lose their cultural and Linguistic identity. There should be both the social and political environment which encourages the use of mother tongue, Kashmiri. There should be a Kashmiri language commission, which should be given the responsibility of the research in this language and which should suggest measures to the government of Jammu and Kashmir for the protection and the preservation of the linguistic identity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Looking at the recent developments in the protection and preservation of Kashmiri language from the government, it is evident that Kashmiri language was introduced at the middle level as a compulsory subject by the government of Jammu and Kashmir, but mere introduction is not enough as it needs full support and planning from the administration for implementing it at the grass roots level. Talking about giving the official status to the Kashmiri language, the government must provide full patronage and support for different educational, cultural and non-government organizations which can act as the best medium for the preservation and protection of linguistic identity of Kashmiri people.

### **Problems Regarding the Teaching of Kashmiri Language**

Although the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Kashmir region is Kashmiri but until 2020 it was not given the official status and then due to the long pending demands of different social, cultural and political organizations, it was included in the list of official languages of Jammu and Kashmir in 2020. Also, in 2008 the Jammu and Kashmir Government introduced Kashmiri as a compulsory subject upto class 8<sup>th</sup> but without any proper research and planning regarding the teaching of Kashmiri language, teacher training and syllabus and that is why this move highly pressurized all the stakeholders like the schools, teachers, academicians and students as well. Teli and Jan (2021) highlighted the issues and challenges faced by the teachers and students in the Kashmiri class, which range from the lack of motivation of students towards the Kashmiri language to lack of subject specific teachers who can do justice with the students while teaching Kashmiri language. Developing the skill of reading and writing among the students of Kashmiri is the major issue before teachers. Teachers who teach Kashmiri are not from Kashmiri background which becomes a big hurdle for the teaching and learning of Kashmiri Language. Now it's the joint responsibility

of the government, parents, schools and cultural organizations to organize such activities and programs for the younger generations which will develop the taste of Kashmiri language among them. Government should make the rules flexible so that subject specific teachers and the teachers who are competent enough to teach Kashmiri language should be recruited specially for the teaching of Kashmiri language. There should be a continuous process for the professional development of these teachers by different training and educational institutes of the valley. So that they would be equipped with the latest developments in the theories of language teaching and language learning. Workshops should be organized for such teachers in order to equip them with recent methodologies in language teaching. Parents have also the responsibility to encourage their children to speak in their mother tongue.

### **Conclusion**

Losing one's mother tongue means losing one's identity. Kashmiri language is not merely a language for the Kashmiri's but this language is embedded with rich cultural heritage and is the identity of the people of Kashmir. The present situation is alarming for the Kashmiri language because the new generation is rapidly shifting towards Urdu and English languages. This is a matter of great concern for the Kashmiris and their rich cultural and linguistic heritage. There are various reasons for this shift which include the negative attitude of the new generation of Kashmir towards the Kashmiri language because the new generation is much more inclined towards the English and Urdu languages as they believe English is a language of opportunities and they can secure their future by learning this language. But they seem to be unaware of the fact that they are losing connections with their history, literature, traditions and are losing their linguistic and cultural identity. The government is also responsible for this onslaught of Kashmiri language because do not provide full support and patronage for this language. Students are also not motivated to learn the Kashmiri language because of their negative attitude towards this language and there is also the dearth of teachers who can teach Kashmiri language in the schools. Government has the responsibility to recruit the subject specific teachers who can teach Kashmiri language. There is also responsibility on the social and cultural organizations including Kashmiri language Union (KLU) to organize seminars and conferences to make the people of Jammu and Kashmir aware about the importance of

their mother tongue, Kashmiri. Cultural events can be organized by various government agencies to develop the taste of Kashmiri among the younger generation. Parents have also the responsibility to encourage their wards to speak in Kashmiri. So, that the Kashmiri language and its identity remains alive with the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

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