

Emergence of Malayalam as an Independent Classical Language-An Overview

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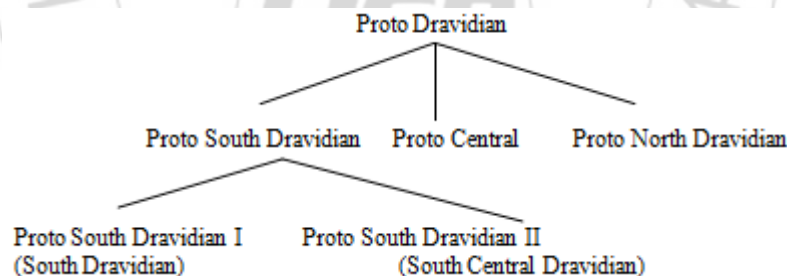
Abstract: In South Asia, an area of staggering linguistic diversity are found languages spoken by nearly one quarter of the world's population representing at least five major language families and its sub families. Among them Dravidian is the second largest language family spoken in South Asia and it is the fifth largest linguistic family in the globe. Dravidian family consist of more than twenty six languages in which Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada have been recognized as classical languages. This paper is about the development of Malayalam language as an independent one from the Proto Dravidian family. Throughout this paper it is attempted to give a simple and brief idea about the historical development and periodisation of Malayalam language. Hence this will be useful for both native and non-native Malayalam speakers who are in the research field.

Keywords: Dravidian, sub groups, Malayalam, Periodisation, classical status

1. Introduction

India is a Nation of Nation with twenty two major languages recognized by the Indian constitution which have been referred to as scheduled languages and given recognition, status and official encouragement. Among the twenty two languages, Government of India has awarded the distinction of classical languages to Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Odiya.

The languages of India belong to several language family. With this bewildering variety, five major distinct language families are predominant. They are (a) the Indo European languages which consist of two groups Indo Aryan and Iranian, Dravidian languages, The Austro Asiatic languages, The Tibeto Burmese and the Semito- Hamitic languages. Language out of the above mentioned five language families, Dravidian is the second largest. Malayalam is a member of the Dravidian family of languages mainly spoken in South India. There are over twenty six Dravidian languages known at present. They are classified into four genetic sub group:-



- South- central Dravidian (SDIst): Tamil, Malayalam, Irula, Kurumba, Kodagu, Toda, Kota, Badaga, Kannada, Koruga, Tulu.
- South-central Dravidian (SDIInd): Telugu, Hindi, Konda, Kui, Kuvi, Pengo, Manda.
- Central Dravidian (CD): Kolami, Naiki, Parji, Ollari, Gabada.
- North Dravidian (ND) : Kurux, Malto, Brahui. (Krishnamurti, 2003)

Presently, around 20 percent of the Indian population, about 215 million people speak Dravidian languages (Census, India, 2010-11). The present paper focuses on the Malayalam language, which come under South Dravidian (SDI) sub groups. The paper gives a clear idea about origin and development of Malayalam language.

2. Origin of the term 'Malayalam'

The term Malayalam was the originally a name of a place. When we say Malayalam language, we mean the language of Malayalam land. There was a time when the land was known as Malayalam and the language 'malayaanma' or 'malayaayma' (Roy, 1999). The first part of each word is not the Sanskrit Malaya, a range of mountains, but the Dravidian mala, a mountain. The second part of the alam is an abstract neuter noun. (Caldwell, 1987). It is with the advent of modern Malayalam period, the place name began to be used for the language as well.

3. Different Myths Related to Malayalam Land

The extent and divisions of the land Malayalam were different in different times. Presently, the name stands for the area comprising Travancore, Cochin and Malabar

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district. Native Tamilians used to refer to the hilly areas west to paanti and Madurai as 'malanaatu'. The Aryans who migrated to the south from Aaryaavarta called this area as keeralam. The term indicates the abundance of keeram, the coconut tree. Its boundary is supposed to be from Kanyakumari to Gookarnam. According to the legends Parasurama captured this land from the king of the seas and gifted it to Brahmins to free himself from the sins he had acquired through his killing of heroes. So the land is referred to in Sanskrit as 'bhaargavaksectram'. Arabs and other foreigners who came for traders used to refer to the countries broadening the Arabian sea as Malabar or malibaar. Europeans used to refer to Tamil language also as malabaar. The Greek termed this land as Dimilike, a changed form of Tamilakam.

4. The Proto-Tamil-Malayalam

The early inhabitants of the Malayalam land known as malanaatu were Tamilians and their language was Tamil. As in the case of other living languages of all times, there was in it difference between literary or written language and talk or spoken language. Tamil scholars have termed the literary form as chentamil and talk language as kotumtamil. It was stated that early form of Malayalam is kodumtamil. It has to be decided to which language family even chentamil belongs. Tamil is the language of a separate family called Dravidian. (Roy, 1999).

The members of this family are as given below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tamil	Kannada	Tulu	Kurukh	Gondi	Telungu	Brahui
Malayalam		Kodagi	Malto	Kuyi		
		Toda				
		Koda				

Among these it is understand that Tamil and Malayalam are variants of the same language. Karnataka also is very close to Tamil. The Kodagu group consisting of Tulu , Kodagu and Toda has a place between Tamil and Kannada. The position of the languages Kurukh and Malto also is more or less like that of the four languages mentioned above. Malayalam and Tamil remained as one language (which may be called as Proto-Tamil-Malayalam) for a long period even after the separation of Tulu and Kannada from south Dravidian. The glottochronological calculations reveal that Malayalam and Tamil branched off as different languages during the 7th century A.D. However, the actual split between Tamil and Malayalam occurred even centuries before it , because a parent language does not split into two languages all of a sudden , but first diverges into two dialects and these dialects take centuries to develop into separate languages. The dialects spoken in Kerala were different from those of Tamil Nadu even before the century.(Namboodiri, 2004)

5. Periodisation of Malayalam Language

Malayalam was a spoken not a written language before 832 A.D. This period is called the Pre-history of Malayalam language. The history of a language can be studied through written records. The study of prehistory is based on certain assumption of the principles of linguistic changes and

comparison with other related languages. The history of Malayalam language begins with 'Vaazhappalli inscription', the first Malayalam document written in 832 AD under the auspices of Sree Raja Sekhara Varma, the king of Kerala. There are more than half-a-dozen inscriptions written in that century. The prose and poetical literature begins gradually from the 12th century. The development of Malayalam can be traced in four periods.

- (a) Proto-Tamil-Malayalam (till 800 AD)
- (b) Old Malayalam (800AD-1300 AD)
- (c) Middle Malayalam (1300 AD-1600 AD)
- (d) Modern Malayalam (1600AD-Present)

It is believed that patiRRupattu,ainkurunuur,Chilappati kaaram, verses of Tolkaappiyam etc written in Proto-Tamil-Malayalam Classical period

Old Malayalam period includes written texts from AD 800 to 1200. Paaattu schools Manipravaalam genres and Inscriptions represents the Old Malayalam Classical period.

Niranam poets, Chambukal and Krishnagadha are the major literary composition of the middle Malayalam classical period. The Modern period of Malayalam literature commences with Thunjath Ezhuthachan's Kilippattu.

6. Classical Status

Malayalam has a history of around 2300 years. Malayalam exhibits a proportional development in language and literature. This language has contributed a unique culture and life value to mankind in each period. Malayalam language and literature is developing day by day. Contemporary Malayalam language and literature with its roots in antiquity is a vibrant presence in the history of world literature. As such ,with its multitude of literary genres and themes it was recognized as a classical language of India. Malayalam has secured around five 'Njaanpiit awards' already. Malayalam language, which keeps intact the Proto Dravidian gramatic essence and a powerful literary style substantiates clearly why it got the classical language status.

7. Conclusion

Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada are independent languages of the great Dravidian language family. Each has its own following periods. Eastern part of Kerala contributed Tamil and western part, Malayalam. From the evidences it is clear that Tamil and Malayalam are sister languages now. It only means that each has an independent existence. Linguistics evidence of the Malayalam language agreed the fact that Malayalam had an independent existence as early as the 9th century AD.

8. Area of Specialization

Historical and Comparative Linguistics, Tribal studies and Speech Sciences

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