LITERARY QUEST

Language, Religion and Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Arabuttamil and Arabi-Malayalam

Mr. Yunush Ahamed Mohamed Sherif

Researcher, Department of Cultural Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Abstract

Before the colonial intervention there were no standardized languages and each community had their own way of writing system according to their own convenience. This was the case with the Muslims who settled in the Southern part of India during the seventh and eighth century. The Arab traders were in contact with South India well before the advent of Islam and when Islam started spreading around the world, the Arab traders brought Islam to the shores of south India too. Many Indians started converting to Islam and Arab traders started inter-marrying the local people thereby converting them to Muslims. Earlier those who were two different communities and were brought in contact for trade purposes now are united by a common religion. Now a necessity for a common language arose and thus giving birth to a link language which we identify today as Arabi Malayalam and Arabuttamil. The Muslims living around the western coast or the Malabar region started using Arabi-

Malyalam and the people living around the eastern-coast started using Arabuttamil. Though the circumstances that gave rise to these link languages are similar, because of their regional and cultural differences, it gave rise to two different link languages. It must be kept in mind that before the 12th century Malayalam and Tamil were not identified as two different languages, instead they were identified as Tamil despite their internal differences. Therefore it can be said that identifying these two different link languages as Arabi-Malayalam and Arabuttamil must be a recent phenomenon and during the early stages of its development these languages might have been known as another way of writing Tamil.

Keywords

Arabi-Malayalam; Arabuttamil; Language; Religion; Politics.

◆

> Traditional Indian society thus had a highly literate culture, but inside it literacy was guarded with great jealousy through institutional arrangements which strictly prevented its extension, so that it was always a strong sellers' market in literacy. Ordinary unlettered people carried on their daily existence through spoken vernacular dialects. In the nature of things, these vernaculars varied a great deal, and in most cases did not have standardized written scripts of their own before the tenth century. (Kaviraj)

Before the formation of the modern nation state that is identified as 'India', the linguistic scenario of the Indian subcontinent was enormously diverse. Even in the modern India the linguistic diversity is very much visible and plays a major role in the social, religious and political discourse. But before the colonial intervention, each and every community in the Indian subcontinent had their own way of writing and speaking. The two major groups under which these languages can be categorised are the Indo-Aryan and the

Dravidian group of languages. The Indo-Aryan group of languages are found in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, and the Dravidian group of languages are found in the southern part. Among the Dravidian group of languages, Malayalam is the most recent language to emerge as a distinct language with its own writing system and grammatical pattern and it also remains very close to the Tamil language.

Before the colonial intervention there were no standardized languages and each community had their own way of writing system according to their own convenience. This was the case with the Muslims who settled in the Southern part of India during the seventh and eighth century. The Arab traders were in contact with South India well before the advent of Islam and when Islam started spreading around the world, the Arab traders brought Islam to the shores of south India too. Many Indians started converting to Islam and Arab traders started inter-marrying the local people thereby converting them to Muslims. Earlier those who were two different communities and were brought in contact for trade purposes now are united by a common religion. Now a necessity for a common language arose and thus giving birth to a link language which we identify today as Arabi Malayalam and Arabuttamil. The Muslims living around the western coast or the Malabar region started using Arabi-Malyalam and the people living around the eastern-coast started using Arabuttamil. Though the circumstances that gave rise to these link languages are similar, because of their regional and cultural differences, it gave rise to two different link languages. It must be kept in mind that before the 12th century Malayalam and Tamil were not identified as two different languages, instead they were identified as Tamil despite their internal differences. Therefore it can be said that identifying these two different link languages as Arabi-Malayalam and Arabuttamil must be a recent phenomenon and during the early stages of its development these languages might have been known as another way of writing Tamil.

The Arab traders who might have had the necessity to record the name of places and persons of the region might have recorded it using their own script (Arabic) but many sounds that were found either in Malayalam or Tamil are not available in Arabic and therefore they might have felt the necessity to add some more letters to the existing letters in order to denote the regional sounds. This is how Arabuttamil or Arabi-Malayalam might have come to existence. The necessity that gave rise to a link language later might have become so common that they felt it natural to use these varieties for their day-to-day activities including producing literatures and religious tracts. The table 1 contains the alphabets of these varieties.

The table 1 contains all the alphabets of Arabi-Malayalam and the table 2 provides the Arabuttamil alphabets. As analysing the origin or the special characteristics of these varieties is not the focus of this paper, I have just provided the alphabets and discussed briefly about the origin of these varieties. The focus of the present paper is to analyse the changes that these two varieties underwent during the colonial period and the socio-cultural context that facilitated that change.

The advent of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent changed entirely its historical trajectory. The earliest colonisers who came to India were the Portuguese people and they were completely against the Muslims both on religious ground and trade grounds. Many scholars who talk about either Arabuttamil or Arabi-Malayalam have recorded the destruction wreaked upon the Muslims and they claim that almost all the documents produced in these varieties were destroyed by the Portuguese colonisers. But later when the British colonisers came, the situation calmed down and revival efforts in these varieties were taken up. It is generally considered that the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries to be the golden period for these varieties.

Sudipta Kaviraj in his article titled The Imaginary Institution of India mentions "In less than a hundred years an area which was covered by a mass

of small dialects gets restructured linguistically into two or three regions using the highly self-conscious languages of their respective high cultures" (Kaviraj 24). He talks about the colonial period during which because of the standardization process, many dialectal varieties were either assimilated into the dominant language or not recognized as a proper or a standard language at all. The introduction of print in colonial India necessitated the standardization of a language and the particular variety used by some powerful elites and recognized by the British colonizers was set as the standard language. While talking about language in the Bengali context, Sudipta Kaviraj points out, 'Ironically, the way generations of modern Bengalis would read and write their own tongue was fatefully decided by choices made by a peculiarly skilled Englishman' (Kaviraj 145) and more or less this was the case in almost all the prominent languages in India.

In colonial India around the 17th century, print was introduced by the British in order to aid their proselytizing as well as administrative process and they didn't allow their Indian subjects to freely use the printing press. But after 1835, when the restriction on print was lifted, the Indians took to printing enthusiastically.   They started producing their own printed materials and the Muslims of South India also started using print for their purposes. Though the earliest known written works date back to the 16th century in both the verities such as the *Ayiramacala* in Arabuttamil written in the year 1572 and *Muhyadheen Mala* in Arabi-Malayalam written in the year 1607, as mentioned earlier, the literary production in these varieties increased during the late colonial period. The most popular work published during the 19th century was *Chahar Dervesh* (1883) a translation of a Persian work and is considered to be the first novel in Arabi-Malayalam. Similarly, in Arabuttamil, the earliest and popular work during this period was the translation of the Qur'an published in the year 1876.

The Mappila Muslims are known for their political involvement during the colonial period and they used Arabi-Malayalam to show their resistance against the colonial administration. During the Khilafat movement a district magistrate in his Fortnightly report to Madras mentions "A search was made in different Khilafat offices to find copies of proscribed Arabi-Malayalam pamphlets and the opportunity was taken to look into the accounts of the Chief Khilafat centres while the searches were being made" (Bahauddin) this shows the involvement of the Mappila Muslims in the Khilafat movement and their use of Arabi-Malayalam during the anti-colonial struggle. But the Tamil Muslims were late to enter into the political field, though they were active in the field of literary productions. They published many journals in Arabuttamil apart from other literary productions. But their actual involvement in the political field came only during the Khilafat Movement and even during this period they were not conscious about the uniqueness of Arabuttamil and they considered Arabuttamil as Tamil unlike the Mappila Muslims who considered Arabi-Malayalam as different from Malayalam language.

From the earliest colonial period till the end of the colonial regime, the Mappila Muslims were actively resisting the colonial masters, and they have a history of resistance independent of the pan-Indian National movement. But the Tamil Muslims became politically active only during the early twentieth century influenced by the pan-Indian national movement as well the pan-Islamic movements. One of the major influences upon the Tamil Muslims was the Dravidian movement or the Self-Respect movement initiated by Periyar during the 1920s. The Tanittamizh Iyakkam or the Pure Tamil Movement was also a part of the Dravidian movement and it advocated a Tamil which is devoid of any influences or corruptions of other languages. Any deviation from the standard Tamil were not considered as Tamil and therefore the Arabuttamil was also not recognised as Tamil or even as another variety of Tamil. Dawood Shah, who is identified as 'Muslim Periyar' and praised as the father of Tamil

Muslim reformation, was completely against the use of Arabuttamil and urged the Tamil Muslims to switch to the Tamil script.

During the same period, i.e., the early 20th century a pan-Indian Islamic movement was gaining momentum and it tried unite the Muslims of India under one organization. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) which was initiated in the year 1906, slowly became the sole representative of the Muslims of India and as a counterpart to Congress which is dominated by Hindu ideology. During this period, the language question also became a major issue and the Hindus were increasingly identified with Hindi and the Muslims were identified with Urdu. The Muslims those who don't speak Urdu were not identified as 'Pure' Muslims (Hardy). But even this movement didn't deter the Muslims of South India and they remained more or less disaffected from the pan-Indian debate particularly in the language issue.

Though the Muslims in the southern part were not attracted by Urdu, the unique varieties used by them started losing its shine and they slowly started abandoning their usage of Arabi-Malayalam and Arabuttamil. But the Mappila Muslims are comparatively better in this regard, because they have a consciousness to preserve their language and though Arabi-Malayalam does not have the same reach among the Mappila Muslims, at least in the Madrasas Arabi-Malayalam is being taught till today and an effective community of researchers and scholar are working on Arabi-Malyalam in order to preserve this variety. But among the Tamil Muslims, Arabuttamil lost its hold completely and today not many people know that there was such a variety. Except some elderly scholars who still hold on to their Arabuttamil works and the tradition related to it, other Tamil Muslims are not much interested in this variety.

In this paper, I have tried to trace similarities in the evolution of Arabuttamil and Arabi-Malayalam, the unique verities used by Tamil Muslims and Mappila Muslims respectively. Despite the similarities in the evolution of

these varieties, the attitude of the communities towards these varieties and the socio-political situations that these communities underwent were different and this lead to two different outcome. The Tamil Muslims who were influenced by the Dravidian movement and the regional developments slowly abandoned the usage of Arabuttamil in their day-to-day life and adopted the standard Tamil. The Mappila Muslims who had their own political trajectory were also influenced by the regional and national development, but still are conscious of their unique identity. Though they abandoned the usage of Arabi-Malayalam script, they still maintain their unique variety of Malayalam and which is identified as Mappila Malayalam today.

أَ	അ	آ	ആ	اِ	ഇ	اِى	ഈ	اُ	ഉ	اُو	ഊ	رُ	ഋ
أَ(إِ)	എ	آَى	ഏ	آَيْ	ഐ	أَ	ഒ	أَو	ഓ	آَوْ	ഔ		
كـ	ക്	چ	ച്	دِ	ഡ്	ت	ത്	پ	പ്	يِ	യ്	ش	ശ്
كه	ഖ്	چھ	ഛ്	دھ	ഢ്	تھ	ഥ്	پھ	ഫ്	رِ	റ്	بش	ഷ്
گ	ഗ്	ج	ജ്	ڈ	ഡ്	د	ദ്	ب	ബ്	ل	ല്	س	സ്
گه	ഘ്	جھ	ഝ്	ڑھ	ഢ്	دھ	ധ്	بھ	ഭ്	و	വ്	ه	ഹ്
غ	ങ്	چ	ഞ്	ب	ണ്	ت	ന്	م	മ്	ض	ള്	ڑ	ഴ്
گ	ക	کِ	കി	كُ	കു	اٍگ	ക	گَ	കൊ	گِّي	കെ	كُر	കൃ	كَبْش	കഌ
ك	കാ	کی	കീ	كُو	കൂ	کِ	കേ	گُو	കോ	گَمُ	കം		

Table 1. Arabi-Malayalam alphabets

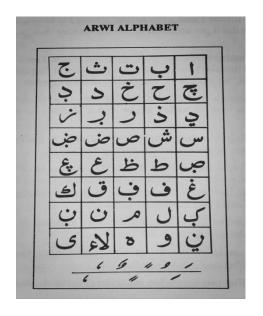| Tamil Equivalent	Arwi Letter	English Equivalent	Pronounciation	Unicode
ச்ச	چ	chā	'chā' in 'chance'	0686
ட	ڈ	dā	'dā' in 'dawn'	068A
ட்ட	ۃ	tā	'tā' in 'top'	068D
ற	ڔ	Ra	'R' (soft ر)	0694
ழ	ض	'zha'	Unique to Arwi	06FB
ப	ڢ	pa	'pa' in 'pause'	06A3
ண	ں	nā	Unique to Arwi	06B9
ஞ	ݧ	gnā	Unique to Arwi	0767
ஒ	ٗ	o	'o' in 'pot'	0657
ள	ڝ	Ḷā	Strong L	
ங	ع	'nga'	'ng' in 'bang'	Work in Progress to Encode these 4 characters
க	ك	gā	'go' in 'gold'	
எ	ٖ	e	'e' in 'men'	

ARWI ALPHABET

Table 2. Arabuttamil Alphabets

References:

Alim, Tayka Shuayb. *Arabic, Arwi and persian in Sarandib and Tamil Nadu.*
    Colombo: The Ministry of State for Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs,
    1993. Print.

Anwar, S. "Tamil Muslims and the Dravidian Movement: Alliance and
    Contraditions." Jairath, Vinod K. *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim
    Communities in India.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2011. 199 - 219. Print.

Bahauddin, K.M. *Kerala Muslim History: A Revisit.* Calicut: Other Books, 2012.
    Print.

Bevinje, Ibrahim. "Contribution of Muslims in the Development of Malayalam Language and Literature." 16 March 2011. *www.ummid.com.* Online. 12 November 2014.

Caldwell, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages.* London: Trubner & Co., 1875. Print.

Edwards, John. *Language, Society and Identity.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985. Print.

Hardgrave, Robert L. Jr. *The Dravidian Movement.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965. Print.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas.* New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.

McPherson, Kenneth. *'How Best Do We Survive?': A Modern Political History of the Tamil Muslims.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Saleem, CMN. *Seramaan Perumal: Thenninthiyavil Islattin Arimugam (Seramaan Perumal: The Introduction Islam in South India).* Chennai: Samooga Neethi Trust, 2012. Print.

Sarangi, Asha. *Language and Politics in India.* New Delhi: OUP, 2009. Print.

Tschacher, Torsten. *Islam in Tamil Nadu: Varia.* Halle, 2001. Print.

MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Sherif, Yunush Ahamed Mohamed. "Language, Religion and Politics: A Comparative analysis of Arabuttamil and Arabi-Malayalam." *Literary Quest* 1.11 (2015): 99-109. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.