

Editorial : M.K.Raina
Milchar March-April 2011

Our Mother-tongue & Our Apathy Towards It

Kashmiri language, our mother-tongue is really in a bad shape. Firstly, we reduced it to a third category language, taking pride to speak in English (followed by Hinglish or Hindustani) most of the time and with most of our intimates, even with our spouse and children. Our logic is simple; what use is the language which cannot give us degrees and livelihood? What use again when it is not spoken anywhere in the world except Kashmir where our chances of going back are remote. Arguments may sound convincing but we conveniently forget that a language (read mother-tongue) not only acts as a binding force for a community, but also confers upon it a distinct mark of identification. Shri A.K.Misri of Bandra, Mumbai advocates speaking in Kashmiri not only because this way we can keep our mother-tongue alive, but we can also secretly communicate with each other if cornered in an alien atmosphere. Apart from spoken words, literature is a vast medium which nurtures and promotes a language and preserves it for posterity.

Till 1990, most of the literary works created in Kashmiri language, whether by Kashmiri Muslims or by Kashmiri Pandits, were in Nastaliq, the Persio-Urdu Script. This script was the officially recognized script for Kashmiri language (and still is), recognized not only by the government of Jammu & Kashmir but also by the Government of India. One could claim government grant for a publication only if his/her creation was in this script. This treatment discouraged those who wanted to write in Devanagari Script.

Post 1990 exodus, there was a big change. KPs started writing in Devanagari Script in a big way and plethora of literature got churned out in community magazines throughout the country. While, this was considered a good omen for the Kashmiri literature, it brought to notice another big challenge in the shape of varied scripts adopted by the writers. Every writer had his/her own way of writing, using dots, lines, circles etc. at will. There was no coordination and no conformity in writing. Koshur Samachar of New Delhi assumed central importance in this regard. It used a set of diacritical marks to indicate vowels peculiar to Kashmiri language with the Nagari letters, but devising a universally acceptable uniform script remained a problem. In December 1995, a committee of the editors of Koshur Samachar (New Delhi), Kashyap Samachar (Jammu) and the Secretary of the Vikalp (Delhi) met and agreed on adopting certain diacritical

marks for the peculiar Kashmiri sounds. The linguistic experts however were not fully satisfied. They wanted to do some more work to upgrade the script by modifying the already employed symbols and diacritical marks, to suit requirement of the language. This led to formation of an expert committee led by Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat, which organized various workshops to finalise the Script. The experts who worked hard along with Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat included Dr.S.N.Bhat Haleem, Dr. S.S.Toshakhani, Dr. O.N.Koul, Prof. C.L.Sapru, Prof. R.L.Shant, Dr. S.N.Raina, Dr. R.K.Bhat and Dr. Raj Nath Bhat. As a software expert, Shri Sandeep Bhat of Pune was closely associated with the Committee. Shri M.K.Kaw, the then Secretary, Ministry of Human resources, Government of India also showed keen interest in devising this material in the interest of Kashmiri language. Subsequently, a Primer and a Reader, edited by Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat were released by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore in association with Samprati, Jammu in August 2003, thus providing a complete Standardised Devanagari Script for Kashmiri. Project ZAAN of Mumbai also released the revised version of 'Basic Reader for Kashmiri Language' employing the Standardised Devanagari-Kashmiri Script, in June 2004. Shri Sandeep Bhat developed the exclusive software for the language named 'Arinimal' around the same time. In due course of time, an upgraded software namely Akruti-Kashmiri-Arinimal Engine was developed by the Cyberscape Multimedia Ltd. at a cost of about Rs. 75000.00. This software was made available free of cost at the All India Kashmiri Samaj, New Delhi.

There are only a few KP journals in India which include Kashmiri Sections. It is very unfortunate that all of them are not employing the Standardised Devanagari-Kashmiri Script for the Kashmiri language. Koshur Samachar of New Delhi, which is a prestigious magazine of the KP Community, in particular has been using the same old scripts, varying from author to author, thus nullifying all the good work done by experts over the years. In spite of the software made available free of cost by the All India Kashmiri Samaj, New Delhi, one fails to understand what prohibits a prime magazine of the community to switch over to new Script. All those who love this language and who want this language not to perish but to flourish along with its scripts, need to come forward and impress upon the authors, printers, editors and proof readers of all the community magazines to switch over to new Script so that there is uniformity in writing which in turn will make it easily comprehensible. This will be a small but an important step in the direction of preserving and promoting our mother-tongue.

It is worth mentioning here that non-Kashmiris like Pravin Satpute of Maharashtra and Anshuman Pandey of University of Michigan, USA have been working on technical aspects of the Kashmiri Scripts for a long time. Pravin Satpute is labouring hard with the Commission of Scientific and Technical Terminology, Government of India to get the special characters of the Standardised Devanagari-Kashmiri Script included in the UNICODE and Anshuman Pandey has already submitted (and reportedly accepted) a proposal to Encode the Sharada Script in ISO/IEC. There are some more from our own biradari involved in the process at various levels who deserve kudos but lack of interest of the general masses in their own mother-tongue is a matter of great concern. It is still time we ponder over it.

