

EPILOGUE

Language is as much a social phenomenon as it is a mental phenomenon. It is shaped by developments in society, whether they relate to technology, social structure or social movements, and also by social players, whether they are creative writers, media content generators, political leaders or educators. Transformation of a language is basically the non-grammatical changes of it as distinguished from change in the language, which is accumulation of grammatical changes induced internally by the structure of the language or externally by contact with another language. The non-grammatical, often called sociolinguistic, changes include changes in the lexicon, preferences in style, forms of discourse or text and functions of language in society. Transformation of a language is thus not grammar-driven, but is use-driven. In other words, the engine of language transformation is its use. The use is determined by the demands made on the language by users, i.e., by the society. The transformation of a language therefore is shaped by the social forces and social philosophy of the language community, as the preceding chapters described. The transformation may be natural in the sense that the language responds to the social needs in an evolutionary fashion. The process may be accelerated and given specific direction through deliberate action by influential individuals, by mass movements, by central bodies usually sponsored by the government, or by the government itself. The result of this process is called language development differentiating it from language change. Governments differ in taking up agency for language development. Some governments take active responsibility for language development, as they do for economic development, rural development, education development and such other enterprises. The Government of Tamil Nadu, for example, has committed itself to the development of Tamil, which is not the case with the US government with regard to English

The written history of the Tamil language is almost 2500 years old, starting with the earliest Brahmi inscriptions in India. Tamil grammar has changed over the period of this time and the changes are evidenced by the literary works, grammatical works and inscriptions; the history of grammatical changes has been written by linguists. But the development of the Tamil

language, i.e. the history of its use, has not been so well documented. It is self-evident that Tamil was used throughout the period for creative literature, grammatical treatise, philosophical and moral literature and for commentaries on them. It is also self-evident, through the inscriptions, that it was used in administration, particularly for recording the decrees, victories in wars and other acts of governance and benevolence of the royalty, people connected with the royalty and the ruling elite at the lower levels, and for land records. There is also some evidence, through later day reference, to works like *kuuva nuul*, *kutirai nuul*, etc., suggesting that Tamil was used in some fields of material culture like creating water resources, raising cavalry, etc. It must have been used in education and commerce and probably in architecture, navigation, irrigation, revenue and astrology, though there is no direct documentary evidence in the sense that until very late there are no written treatises in Tamil on these subjects. (Treatises on these subjects were written by Tamil speakers probably in a language other than Tamil, such as Sanskrit). Tamil was most certainly used orally in these fields for training through apprenticeship.

It is well-known that from the beginning of its written history, and throughout its long history, there were other languages – Prakrit, Pali and Sanskrit during the earlier and medieval periods and English in the modern period – used in the Tamil country by a section of its population. Tamil was, of course, dominant in the oral domain, as bilingualism was restricted to the elite. It is not clear what functions the other languages performed and what social demands they met, as we are clear about the role of English in the present-day Tamil society.

Though we have a fairly good knowledge of the political history of the Tamil country, we do not have knowledge of social developments that had a bearing on language development. We do not know much, for example, about the history of literacy (though we have some information on literacy in the early period), about the system of education, about scientific and technological developments, about modes of production, about trade networks, about social upheavals and about the social philosophy of the political systems of different periods, all of which have a bearing on language choice and use in the different facets of society.

It can be surmised that, until the modern period, Tamil development was evolutionary, responding to social forces; development did not happen through any overt planning at the political level (which is different from patronage) or through social movements on language. The European contact and its political form of colonial rule made Tamil society aware of the

importance of the role of language in its political, social and cultural life and also brought into existence organised efforts to shape the language for its role in these domains. One of the reasons for organised language development was the introduction of modern education, which went beyond the study of literature, grammar and philosophy, for which old Tamil was sufficient, and which included the study of history, geography, new mathematics and science. Another reason was the introduction of industrial development and new technology into the Tamil traditional society, which brought new social and economic opportunities. All these made new demands on the language. Combined with these demands was the political awareness about the otherness of alien rule and the need to develop oneself on par with the other, that is, to develop Tamil on par with English, the language of the rulers. Development of Tamil (and other Indian languages) thus became an integral part of the political, social, economic and educational agenda during the colonial rule for those who opposed it.

The social and political ethos regarding language during the colonial rule imparted two dimensions to language development in the country, including Tamil. One is modernisation and the other is, for want of a better term, 'ethnicisation'. The efforts of modernisation looked at Tamil as a tool for progress and emphasised reforms in the script, relaxation of spelling rules with regard to occurrence of consonants in word clusters and in word initial and final positions, simplification of *sandhi* and syntax, narrowing the gap between speaking and writing, and new vocabulary and writings in science. They developed new means of information dissemination like posters, hand bills, newspapers, magazines, books and cinema and made use of printing and other technologies for this purpose. The efforts of 'ethnicisation', on the other hand, looked at Tamil as a symbol of cultural distinctiveness and political mobilisation and they focused on continuity with the past with as few changes as absolutely necessary in the language, resisting and eliminating the influence of other languages, eschewing of spoken Tamil, promotion of past literature, through publications and public lectures, and political protection of the interests of Tamil.

Works on both modernisation and 'ethnicisation' were done, by and large, during the colonial period independent of the government through private initiatives by scholars and activists, through group initiatives of associations and academics and through mass movements. The mass movements were only with reference to 'ethnicisation'; there was, for example, no mass movement for science in Tamil; science in Tamil has remained a group initiative from the top by the modern educated.

There is an inherent conflict between the agenda of modernisation with its emphasis on liberalisation of Tamil and the agenda of 'ethnicisation' with its emphasis on preservation and protection. This conflict continues to date with very little compromise, weakening the process of development of Tamil. There is a third group, that may be called anglicists, which commits itself to modernising Tamil society, but considers English as the instrument to achieve it. In other words, it advocates that the demands of the modern society can be met through English, and Tamil can continue to play the traditional role in the area of non-material culture. This programme resolves the above-mentioned conflict in a perverse way. It continues and reinforces the unsustainable dichotomy that Tamil is for maintenance and promotion of culture and English is for scientific and economic development. It ignores the fact that development of Tamil is impossible by delinking Tamil from scientific and economic development. This dichotomous role allocation for Tamil and English also helps strengthening the present elite in their position of power and prohibiting the population at large from participating in and benefitting from scientific and economic development. As a result, Tamil society will remain divided and undeveloped universally. In a divided society, the fate of any language development will be determined by the elite.

There is a major shift after independence in the role of the government in Tamil development. The government became the primary agent, which means the ideology of the ruling party defines what constitutes Tamil development. Further, as in other areas of development, language development also came under the process of bureaucratic planning through statutes, institutions and resources provided by the government. This planning paradigm of Tamil development has some characteristic features. The pressure for protectionism from the 'ethnicists' at the political and policy level and the preference of the anglicists for English to implement the political decisions in administration and education create a conflict between policy and programmes of implementation for Tamil development. This results in symbolic gestures and statutory provisions for Tamil development sidelining the substantive works needed for development.

Another characteristic is that Tamil development is divorced from educational, scientific and economic development of society and Tamil development programmes are conceived and carried out in isolation of other development programmes. No language is developed for its own sake and in isolation. Language is developed to achieve some larger goals. Development of Tamil through its use in education is for providing creative and meaningful learning, and in administration for transparent and responsive bureaucracy

and for free access to people to governmental and legal systems. By delinking Tamil from societal development, Tamil development becomes a programme of Tamil welfare. Welfare programmes make the recipient dependent on the donor for ever, which means that Tamil is ever dependent on the government and its predilections for its development. The political and bureaucratic exercise of developing Tamil makes active involvement of the people in it sectarian and remote. Planning for development by the government becomes a top-down exercise leaving the people at the periphery with regard to inputs for development. For example, scientific terms are created by committees constituted by the government and not by the practitioners of science in their laboratories; the language of the text books is determined by the government and not by the teachers. It is not conducive for empowering Tamil (excepting the use of it as a tool for political power) in order for it to realise its creative potential.

Typical of this planning paradigm is the fact that in spite of the policy and legislative acts and government orders, education through Tamil medium remains unpopular, the text books in Tamil in all subjects at the tertiary level remain unwanted and the estimated 300,000 technical terms created by various expert committees remain unused by the practitioners in their fields. Conceptualisation of Tamil development remains narrow in this paradigm. Government patronage is equated with development. Tamil development in the modern period has to be multifaceted and multiagencied. The agency of Tamil development should rest with scientists, industrialists, engineers, lawyers and other professionals, writers, journalists and others through their use of Tamil in their fields. Use of Tamil by these people in their fields will develop the content of Tamil, their goals and attitudes towards Tamil will determine the nature of the form of Tamil. The form and content will not be shaped by the literary scholars alone, in spite of their political influence.

Broadening the agency of Tamil development does not by itself take away agency from the ruling elite. But it opens the way to bring the common people into the development process. Their stake in Tamil is larger than that of the elite. To ensure that they are not mere consumers of language, new developments in Tamil should be anchored in the language they use. Modern Tamil, for example, should not be made so anglicised by the English-speaking elite or classicised by the traditional Tamil elite that it becomes incomprehensible to the common people. Without the common people comprehending the new developments in Tamil, it will end up as a high-brow language. This is not development in any social sense.

The challenges to Tamil in the twenty-first century will have to be faced with a new paradigm for its development, given the inadequacy of the present paradigm described above and the enormous changes that are coming into force in the world. The later part of the twentieth century initiated an era of information revolution and free trade explosion. Information itself has become a commodity and the control of information is a crucial ingredient for leadership in the trade of all goods and services. The societies which control the means of information and communication will have a better chance of prosperity. The languages in which the information is stored, transmitted and used will provide a competitive edge to the societies that speak them. Tamil, therefore, should equip itself to be a language of information and communication. Another feature of the twenty-first century is the globalised free market. In the borderless, market-driven economy, the government will have a different role to play. It will be a role of facilitation and intervention and not of control and subvention. If Tamil development is going to be left to the market forces, the government's role in it will have to be different. It cannot be the controlling role of development. New strategies are to be charted out for developing Tamil and for its progress in the twenty-first century.

Globalisation increases centralisation and in a centralised system smaller entities, including smaller languages, are marginalised. Free market is not friendly to them. Tamil development must take place in such an economically and geopolitically unfavourable environment. Survival of Tamil may not be a major problem given the size of its population, the pressure of its historical legacy, the need for cultural rootedness and cultural communication and emergence of ethnic assertion globally as a reaction to the steam-rolling forces of the globalisation. For the development of languages like Tamil, political, economic, scientific and technological openness and restructuring is essential. But the forces of the twenty-first century are moving in the opposite direction of pushing one winner, who takes all. To ensure Tamil development in such a context, one basic requirement must be met: to find ways to give some edge to Tamil in both the economic regeneration of Tamil society and in information generation, both of which are interlinked. This will necessarily involve using Tamil in science and technology, which will be the support systems for economic and information development.

To get an economic edge for Tamil, to locate globally competitive production of goods and services in Tamil Nadu is not enough in itself. The market managers, the trade negotiators and industrial investors should recognise the value of understanding the nuances of Tamil communication in economic

transactions. For this, industrial and commercial activities must be carried out in Tamil, as in Japan, for example. But the opposite is taking place now. When a traditional industry becomes successful and modern, the language also changes to English. To continue the use of Tamil along with modernisation will be the first step towards giving some economic value to Tamil. The industrialists will be making a big contribution to economic value to Tamil development in this way. The beginning may be trade with exportable products in which Tamil Nadu has an advantage like textile, leather goods, jewellery, etc. Within the country, the increasing participation of the middle class in economic investment through stock market, marketing, etc., may be utilised to give the economic edge to Tamil by bringing out information and guidance materials in Tamil in this area, going beyond what half-a-dozen trade and investment magazines in Tamil are doing now. Tamil should be used in new, emerging areas like the stock market from the beginning lest it should end up in a situation similar to modern science and technology, where Tamil is a late comer and is frightened by the enormity of the problem of catching up. When a language has an economic edge, there is an assurance for its language-based, non-material, literary, cultural and intellectual products. The enhanced purchasing power of Tamil speakers with a positive attitude about Tamil because of its new economic value will ensure the economic viability of these soft products.

In the field of information, generation of globally usable information and application of technology for its storage and dissemination are essential. The one-way traffic of information flow from English to Tamil will change when new information is generated in Tamil. For this to happen, new knowledge, including revival of traditional knowledge for modern needs, must be created. Generating new knowledge means that research in both hard and soft sciences should be conducted in Tamil. There are formidable problems in giving effect to this move, some of which like international reach, absence of foundational work etc. are real, but some, like non-existence of technical terms, are spurious, as terms are the result of research and not the cause. The strategy should be to start with areas of science which are new and give a natural advantage to new comers like solar energy, wave energy, green technology and with areas where traditional knowledge is valuable like native health-care practices including knowledge of medicinal plants, protection of environment, parapsychology, etc. With old areas of science also, the sense of intimidation will be lessened if it is recognised that growth of scientific knowledge is not always linear but is often cyclic. Any new knowledge created in areas where Tamil has an edge of tradition will be internationally in demand

and it will enable the direction of flow of information to become multilateral. The advance in information technology will reduce the problems of exchange of information generated and stored in one language into another.

The other area where Tamil will have an edge with regard to information is its aesthetic, grammatical and philosophical literature of two millennia. Machine-readable and codified corpus of Tamil literature will increase the use of Tamil for research in various disciplines, particularly in social science, when scholars use the information available in Tamil literature for their research. From the point of view of Tamil development, this programme will bring modern information technology to Tamil with many beneficial spinoffs to the language itself, just as the technology of writing, printing etc. contributed to Tamil development in the earlier periods. This is done by private initiatives such as Project Madurai, CreA Corpus and as collective efforts by interested people mostly on volunteered time. Private foundations in Tamil Nadu need to give financial support to such projects.

It will be clear from the new areas for the use of Tamil described above that the role of the government as an agent of Tamil development will be qualitatively different and limited. Use of Tamil will have to extend to domains, of which, unlike administration and education, the government has less or no direct control. Its roll will be to facilitate language development by creating the right environment through material and policy support. The primary agent for language development will be the society itself, making use of the opportunities available in the new economic and technological environment. Entrepreneurs, traders, technologists, scientists and others connected with the creation of the new economic and information age will have a leading role to play in the new paradigm. Tamil development in this paradigm becomes the society's agenda and not the government's.

This societally motivated new paradigm will focus directly on enhanced use of Tamil. The form of the language will follow use and it will take a shape to fulfill the needs dictated by use. The nature of the form of the language will be shaped by the nature of the use of language and not by any predetermined ideology of political parties. The language will have the freedom to emerge to meet the demands of use on it. The traditional ideology of Tamil as a maiden, docile and domesticated, in need of protection, will change with this freedom.

Tamil should make use of some advantages that it has to bring about the new paradigm. It is a transnational language, being an official or national language in four countries. Tamil communities who migrated during the

colonial period live in many countries and have gained new cultural, social and intellectual experience. The newly migrated Tamils to the American, Australian and European continents also have this asset, besides having access to economic resources. The efforts of Tamil development in the new paradigm should be transnational, which should be able to give multiple perspectives to development and provide alternatives to the dominant values of Tamil Nadu about language and culture. With transnational cooperation and coordination, the use of Tamil in the economic and information fields will be facilitated.

Tamil development should go beyond what is achieved through dependence on government programmes. It should be societally motivated, transnationally based and integrally linked with economic opportunities available in the new economic order and information revolution through participation in science and technological development. Tamil is a modern language owing to the societal forces described in the preceding chapters. To vitalise and sustain its modernity, its political rise in the last century must turn into epistemological rise with the material benefits that knowledge offers.