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Swaraj in ideas and freedom of will: A weapon against linguo-cultural domination

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Abstract:

In the era of globalisation, language and culture play an important role in the distribution of ideas and values. It is commonly accepted that culture is a primary component of a nation. Culture and language have a reciprocal relationship. So, language can also be a component of a nation. However, a nation or a national culture may provide room for various subcultures. India is an example in this context. In the political sphere, through colonialism, a dominant nation controls the weaker nation by imposing its culture and language. Language allows people to create cultural identity. If a person loses his or her language, he or she loses cultural identity. Also, in Africa, a systematic domination occurred throughout the colonial period, particularly in the 19th century, after the Scramble for Africa. The assimilation of a new culture is not always a bad thing, and as a matter of fact, no culture is immune to the influence of other cultures. But it will become a kind of domination when a culture is imposed on a particular nation! It is not a natural interactive process but a kind of domination, which is imposed intentionally. We need to escape from this kind of domination that especially takes control of people's minds. This paper argues that cultural domination, particularly through language, can be resisted by reclaiming native cultural identity. Drawing on K.C. Bhattacharya's 'Saraj in Ideas' and Kant's theory of the 'Freedom of Will,' I will explore philosophical resources for resisting such domination.

Keywords:

Language, Culture, Swaraj, Ideas, Freedom, Domination

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Introduction

Globalisation refers to interconnected relationships between economies and cultural values among nations. It is a process that includes cross-border trade, technological discoveries, and intercultural relations, linguistic influences through sharing ideas and information. Through globalisation, we interact with different cultures, which helps us understand the language, cultural values, beliefs, and ideology of a particular nation. A powerful nation or state always tries to dominate the world by spreading its ideologies, cultural values, and language. Through Colonialism, powerful nations like England forced their language and cultures on weak nations around the world. There are good and bad effects of Colonialism. In this paper, I will mainly discuss the bad effects on the culture and language of a nation that occur due to Colonialism.

Culture is an important aspect of a nation. Through the culture, we distinguish one nation from another. Culture gives identity to a nation and also to a person. Cultural identity is a fluid process that is changed by social and historical experiences. A person makes up his or her cultural identity through cultural knowledge, social position, and social connections. Language plays an important role in establishing that type of identity, because language is a main component of cultural identity. Losing someone's language can be a cause of losing personal identity. If we look at the historical instances, we can find many events where cultural and language imperialism have occurred. Also, in the present time, we see many powerful nations want to exert control over other nations through their global economies and strength. Such a control paves the way for linguistic and cultural domination. Such a process is also observed within a country with many states! In India, powerful states try to dominate other states through their cultural influence. Language, here, plays a dominant role. This domination or influence can be possible only through control over culture and language. A powerful nation tries to control the linguistic world by gradually bringing changes in culture. Apparently, it may seem that there is nothing to worry about. But there are really bad effects that need to be worried about for a society.

This cultural and linguistic domination acts like a parasite that gradually challenges the development and the very existence of a specific culture. It may be invisible from the outside for a long time, but internally, it affects a particular society and its people. The people of that society, being unaware of the effects of that dominant influence, may accept it as good for the individual and the society. Over time, this domination ceases their mind and has control over how to think and how to act. Such a domination cripples their own cultural and linguistic innovations and forces them to act according to its own ideology. The whole machinery can wipe out a culture and its language, also, if the people of that particular culture lack concern about their own culture.

For example, under the control of British colonialism, many states and nations had to surrender their own cultural and linguistic identity. Of course, the main reason behind

such domination is economic. The more a country or nation loses its cultural and linguistic identity, the more it will be vulnerable to colonial exploitation! Through colonialism, England took over the nation and spread their ideas, religion, and especially language.

Nowadays, many nations use English as a main language or as a second language. It may be interpreted as an example of cultural imperialism. Many people would say English is now a global language. This is true, but if any nation cares more about English than their language, then that is bad for that nation and its culture. Because language is the conveyor of cultural ideology, if language cannot be saved, then how will the culture be saved?

My question is, how can we free ourselves from this domination that not only occurs outside but also inside people's minds? How does culture affect our minds and our society? How are language and culture connected? How does colonialism affect Indian minds? Why and how did English achieve the status as an essential medium of instruction?

At the very outset, I will present a brief review of the relation between culture and language. Then, the domination of culture and language through Colonialism will be focused on. How can we free ourselves from such domination? This question will be dealt with by analysing the views of K.C. Bhattacharya as reflected in his *Swaraj in Ideas*. Besides this, how the idea of Freedom of will, as explained by Kant, bears the hope for helping us to free ourselves from such domination will be addressed.

In the conclusion, I will demonstrate how the writings of K.C. Bhattacharya and Kant can help us build a society where our identity, rooted in our culture, will not fully reject the influence of other cultures, but rather, embrace their positive aspects. We need to carefully assess alien culture and establish an ethical framework where every culture and idea is judged according to its social and global needs. Through free will, we can make a decision about our society that is good for us. We always need to be bias-free about any alien culture. We may hope to build a healthy and ideal culture that will be good for us and also for others.

Section I. Language, culture, metaphors

Generally, we all agree that language is a part of culture and plays a crucial role in structuring a culture. Many socialists consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Language shapes culture and reflects it. Also, language is the symbolic representation; it includes historical and cultural backgrounds as well as the thinking and way of living of a person. If we try to separate language from culture, then we lose either

linguistic values or cultural values. It can be said that these two are intrinsically related to each other.

The structure of a language determines how a speaker views his or her world. Similarly, the culture of a person finds reflection in the language they use, because they do certain things according to certain values. This determination also explains in two ways: firstly, in strong determinism, language determines our thoughts, and secondly, in weak determinism, our thought is merely influenced by language. This is known as linguistic determinism (Campbell, 1997).

When we learn a new language, we have to be concerned about that particular culture, because it is always in the background; we relate to the world around us through language.

There are many metaphors about the relation between language and culture. Some people say that language is a mirror of culture, because we can see a culture through its language. Another metaphor is the iceberg, where the small visible part is language, and the hidden greater part is culture. From the pragmatic view, language is compared with a vehicle, culture with traffic lights, and transportation is compared with the communication process. Language makes communication easier, and the culture regulates and sometimes hinders communication. Language and culture seem different, but both form a whole (Jiang, 2000).

Language and culture are social phenomena. Human activity cannot be understood if we separate language and social activity; also, we cannot know the culture if we are not engaged in cultural activities. Culture is not such an activity and values that anyone can change when they want. Also, this is akin to language because both are determined by social acceptance.

A person is distinguished by his or her culture and language. We can know whether someone belongs to which nation or place by their behaviour and language use. Every culture and person carry a different identity. Cultural identity is a part of a person's identity and is related to nationality, religion, and social class. It is a fluid process that changes by time and place. Language allows a person to discuss their values, beliefs, and ideologies that help to create cultural identity. So, we can say that a person and their culture are intrinsically related to each other to form identity. If a person loses his or her language, he or she loses his or her cultural identity. Also, if a society loses its cultural values, then the person of that society also loses his or her identity.

Through cultural domination, a powerful group advocates its own ideology and controls another group. The two groups may share the same native language. But when their languages are different, it often happens that the dominant group imposes its language

on the weaker and thus suppresses the cultural identity of the latter! But what machinery is used for such domination? I will discuss this in the next section.

Section II. Cultural hegemony as a form of domination

The tools of domination may be multiple. They are invented according to the needs and intentions of the dominant group. However, in this context, I am going to concentrate on the two most relevant forms of domination. They are Cultural and Colonial. I will focus on the former in this section and on the latter in the following section.

Cultural domination refers to the process of controlling the weaker group by the powerful group through cultural norms, values, and practices. It is related to power dynamics. The powerful groups often use their cultural norms and ethnocentric perspective to promote their own ideology. The process of such domination goes on in various ways. Language, religion, customs, lifestyle ---all can be used as tools for domination. They are even sometimes used with coercive forces! The coercive measures taken by Pakistan to impose Urdu on the people of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, are one such example.

Through cultural domination, the powerful mainstream classes often replace the culture, beliefs, ideology, and entire knowledge system of an indigenous class with their own and challenge the very existence of the latter! Because such domination deprives them of their natural habitat and natural livelihood. The process of cultural domination follows a gradual process. However, it may take an intense form when the aims of economic profit have full control over the matter. The tradition of British colonial rule is still being continued in this context. This domination is also known as cultural imperialism, as culture is being used here to have possession of land, mountains, rivers, forests, and so on.

An instrument of imperialism is imitation and assimilation. Imperialistic policy may be actualized through imitation, adaptation, and assimilation. But it is not any reciprocal assimilation of two cultures! Here, the so-called 'weaker' group adapts the values, beliefs, and sometimes, the religion of the dominant group, even when the former is demographically larger than the latter! Such adaptation is projected and even viewed as for the benefit of the weaker group, but actually, the soft power, working behind the process, serves the imperialist interest.

However, the assimilation of culture may also occur for some other reasons. Those are migration, crisis, economic opportunities, and social acceptance. But in most cases, there is a craving for power. Assimilation may be said to have two forms: one is full assimilation, which is spontaneous. The weaker group adapts to the everyday practices of the dominant culture through language, lifestyles, and customs. The other is forced

assimilation. Coercive forces are used here for religious conversion, the imposition of languages, and the separation of families. I have already given an example of the second. religious hegemony may be exemplified by innumerable instances in daily newspapers.

If we look at the history of the Indian sub-continent and also of the world, we can notice that cultural imperialism, along with economic imperialism, played an unprecedented role during the colonial period between the 18th and 20th centuries, under the Rule of the British and other colonial rulers. So cultural imperialism, as we see, is deeply associated with colonial imperialism.

How did they dominate other countries through colonialism? I am going to discuss this point in the next section.

Section III. Domination through colonialism: multiple dimensions

Colonialism has its roots in the socioeconomic history of the world. A complicated causal network of history, economics, sociology, science, and technology played its role behind colonialism. The network may be claimed as a partial result of the Renaissance. The socio-historical ethos of nationalism, developed in Europe after the Renaissance, gradually took the form of colonialism and expressed itself as an exploitative power. That is why the term 'colonialism' is most commonly associated with the European territories. But we should not forget the colonial powers of Asia. Japan exploited Korea as a colonial ruler from 1910 to 1945!

Colonialism is a kind of domination. Through this, a powerful country or nation extends its control over other nations by ideology and exploiting resources, and uses the labour of the people of their colonies for their own benefit. Through colonialism, the cultures and languages of the rulers were forced upon weaker classes or nations. It involves political, cultural, and economic dominance. The effects of colonialism can be long-lasting. Even in the 21st century,

Many countries are seen to fail to do away with the cultural influences, languages, beliefs, and ideologies of the nations by which they were once dominated. However, it is also observed that those ruling countries also, to some extent, adopt the vocabulary, culture, and cuisine of their colonies! Indian words and Indian cuisine have been infiltrated into British life. So, some kind of reciprocity has to be accepted in this context. Moreover, it is also a question whether it is possible at all for the colonial countries to completely do away with the influence of their ruling nations and to go back to their precolonial state. Because the colonial era and its influences are now a part of their natural history! Can we deny our own history? Again, is the denial of every influence beneficial for those countries? The very question invites fierce debate. However, if being

influenced is interpreted in terms of blind subordination to the abusive influence of the ruling power, a war against that influence must have a universal ethical support!

In the process of colonialism, the dominant class uses its ideology on the weaker class, projecting it as normal and natural. The weaker class spontaneously accepts those ideologies, as they think that those ideologies and thoughts are beneficial for them. Thus, the dominant class challenges the indigenous psychology.

Uichol Kim and John W. Berry defined 'Indigenous Psychology' as the scientific study of human behaviour and mind that is native, not imported from other regions, and specially designed for the people of a particular culture. It emphasizes understanding behaviour within its specific cultural context, focusing on the interplay between individual actions and the surrounding environment, including family, social structures, cultural values, and ecological factors (Kim & Berry, 1993).

The colonial subjects lost their identity in the process of colonialism. They lost their linguistic, cultural, and personal identity. They had to act like slaves, and gradually they accepted their slavery as a 'natural' fate! Such slavery is not only from outside but also from within! It is a kind of Repressive tolerance, as named by Prabhat Patnaik in the context of the Dalits of India. The powerful rulers imposed their exploitative ideology on their subjects to control their thinking and actions. A divide-and-rule policy was often used in this context.

We can notice that the colonial British rulers subjugated a fraction of the Higher caste, educated Hindus both politically and psychologically by their ideological influence and provision of opportunities, and, at the same time, exploited and subjugated the lower and indigenous classes by coercive measures. They used the traditional hatred of the higher castes against those poor people for their own profit and employed them in the services to exploit the people of their own country!

The focus on the colonial influence on the higher-class Indians began in the first decade of the 19th century, with the primary role taken by Thomas Babington Macaulay. He was an influential English historian, politician, and essayist. He is also known for his role in establishing the Western-style education system in India through his 1835 "Macaulay's Minute". He says "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect" (Macaulay, 1965). It reflects his desire to create a class of Indians educated through the British colonial education system and to employ them to serve as middlemen between the British rulers and the general population. This is the time when English was forced on India as a medium of instruction. And that effect is also visible in the present time. Implementation of a foreign language for the benefit of the masses is not bad, but forced implementation of a language at the cost of the native mother tongue, satisfying the vested interest of the implementer, is ethically wrong!

We Indians often accept Western cultural values as ideal. We accept Western cultural ideas as modern and more valuable than ours. Thus, we often fail to differentiate between the universal humanistic philosophy and ideals of the Western scholars and the colonial ideals of the Western rulers! Such confusion not only affects our values and culture but also challenges our rich heritage and civilization! For example, it is a common practice to accept the random use of English vocabulary as a symbol of social and educational status.

Colonial slavery is reflected in our attitude towards people! Who speaks English is more educated than the person who cannot! Also, those who follow the Western fashion and beliefs are called modern, and those who do not are often labelled as 'backdated'! such a mindset is an example of cultural domination rooted in colonialism.

English is now a global language. We know that we will personally benefit if we learn it. However, it will not be beneficial for us if we are deprived of our right to our mother tongue in our own country! Such a right is attached to each and every sphere of our lives, including the social, the educational, and the occupational. The same philosophy is to be maintained in case of imposing a particular native language on people who use a different native language. People from the southern, northeastern, and eastern Indian states now feel the forceful promotion of Hindi as an imposition that dismisses their cultural and linguistic identities.

To protect our linguistic and cultural identity, we must ensure that we remain connected to our indigenous culture. But how can we do that, and make ourselves free from cultural domination? I will discuss this in the next section by analysing the idea of Swaraj by K.C. Bhattacharya.

Section IV. Establishing swaraj in ideas

Swaraj is a Vedic term that comes from the Sanskrit words 'Swa' and 'Raj', meaning self-rule. It indicates the highest spiritual state of mind. The idea of Swaraj, as the goal of Congress, was first introduced by Dadabhai Naoroji in his presidential address in the Calcutta session of 1906. He claimed that he had learnt the word 'Swaraj' from the Satyarth Prakash of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The idea behind Swaraj is to achieve complete freedom. 'Complete freedom' means freedom for the individual as well as on the societal level.

The expression 'Swaraj in ideas' was first introduced by K.C. Bhattacharya in a lecture delivered in October 1931 under the Sir Asutosh Memorial Lectures series, organized at Chandernagore by Charu Chandra Roy. The lecture remained unpublished during his lifetime.

In his lecture, K.C. Bhattacharya appealed for liberation from cultural subjection. 'Cultural Subjection,' as defined by him, is a subtle and nearly imperceptible form of intellectual servitude. It has a character that can hide its maladies and impose slavery on people in a disguised form from the very start. In cultural subjection, one's ideas and values are suppressed to the extent that they follow the alien culture without comparison and criticism! If someone accepts this as good, it becomes slavery. In other words, acceptance without criticism means slavery. We, as he highlighted, often underestimate our own culture and assume that foreign cultures have a more vibrant and stronger way of living. Our educated men do not care to know about the indigenous culture; they do not feel that it will help them find themselves.

Literary appreciation is difficult without a sociolinguistics connection. For example, a Frenchman would not appreciate Shakespeare as much as an Englishman would. Proper educational goals cannot be fulfilled through a curriculum that has no link with the language and culture of the learners. Bhattacharya shows that our education system has largely been imparted to us through English literature, which has minimized and suppressed our own tradition and history. This appears to us as a great danger. We can grasp foreign ideas that are embodied in language only when we can express them in our own way.

K.C. Bhattacharya comments that we can think effectively only when we think in terms of the indigenous ideas that pulsate in the life and mind of the masses. So, he feels the need to firmly dismantle the barriers of that new caste system! A return to the cultural foundation that is truly Indian and an effort to develop a culture on the basis of the same seem imperative. Such a culture will reflect the contributions of both our contemporary time and our inherent genius. Only then will we be able to feel the swaraj in our ideas.

How can we reach the actual state of Swaraj if our will is not free? How can we make our will free? I will discuss this in the next section by analysing the freedom of will by Kant.

Section V. The way to the freedom of will: A Kantian approach

Freedom of the will is a part of the three postulates of morality as presented by Immanuel Kant. Postulates of morality contain three fundamental principles: freedom of the will, immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. These are not things to be proven, but rather presupposed to function as a system.

Immanuel Kant's discussion of the postulates of morality is found in his Critique of Practical Reason, which was published in 1788. Kant argued that for morality to be meaningful, individuals must have the freedom to choose between right and wrong. This freedom is not only psychological, but also a metaphysical one. In other words, there are two types of freedom: one is empirical freedom, which belongs to the realm of experience

and is subject to natural laws, and the other is transcendental freedom, which refers to the ability to originate actions independently of external causes or prior events.

Reason and nature appear to be the sole factors that attempt to determine the will. Our freedom consists in being able to act on maxims that are both firm and rational. Maxims are claimed to have no exceptions, because they are rational: as rational beings, we have to act on an appropriate maxim in every situation. We have the radical capacity to choose the principle of our actions.

A free will chooses to act by reason and sense of duty, originating from that very reason, rather than being driven by desires or external forces! In other words, free will is self-legislation that allows us to hold moral responsibility for our actions.

To free ourselves from the barriers of cultural domination or colonialism, we must act rationally and morally. Because morality is embedded in rationality. Rationality encourages us to treat ourselves not as mere means but as ends. It helps us to reach a common platform from where we can decide our priorities and necessities, and how to develop our cultural values without losing our indigenous soul. Morality teaches us that we must value other cultures with all their heterogeneity and respect them, and at the same time, it dictates to us to treat others, including the rulers, as ends, not as mere means. We are free, so we can choose what is good and what is bad for our society. If we cannot free ourselves from inside, we can never call ourselves 'free'!

Therefore, we may claim that in order to make oneself free from cultural dominance, we must attain psychological and empirical freedom. It is possible only when we have command over our own will.

Conclusion

We have explored how language and culture are closely related. Our thoughts, our cultural values, ideologies, and beliefs, are communicated through language. If we are deprived of the right to express our thoughts and feelings in our own language, the right to practice our own culture and social practices, and the right to be educated through a curriculum founded on our native culture, we will be alienated from the society that surrounds us. Gradually, we will be alienated from ourselves. So, we can say that Cultural identity and language are interrelated.

We see how colonialism often uses cultural hegemony as a tool for its economic and other kinds of exploitation. However, cultural exploitation is not confined to colonial exploitation. It has nuanced dimensions that are parts of our dynamic natural history! So, it seems impossible to present a straitjacket description of the concept.

However, there are some foundational ingredients of cultural domination, like ethnocentrism, power play, violation of human rights, or discrimination. These ingredients overlap or crisscross. Every battle against cultural hegemony, either theoretical or practical, has to face those fundamental maladies. Bhattacharya's *Swaraj in Ideas*, in spite of its principal concern about the Indian linguo-cultural crisis, reflects a universal concern about those foundational issues. Kant's moral philosophy may be claimed as a supplement to his idea of *swaraj*. Also, we can say this: both K.C. Bhattacharya and Kant supplement each other in the context of cultural freedom. And thus, the boundary between the East and the West is blurred in the context of universal morality. It questions any kind of domination. Such a universal moral perspective, with its context-sensitive concern, may be a weapon against any kind of linguo-cultural domination at any time in any place.

We must respect and accept new ideas, but not with a submissive attitude. To protect our positive cultural contributions in human history, we have to measure the contents of a foreign culture, compare those with ours, and accept or reject them only after a critical analysis. At the same time, we need to uphold the unique cultural values that have been developed through the historical journey of Indian civilization. When we can resolutely think and act by our free will, we will feel as though the scales have fallen from our eyes! Only then will we experience a rebirth, and that is our actual *Swaraj*.

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