

Language and Ideology: *Deiyannewela* Under-caste Community

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Marginalization and oppression in a discipline like Sociology would often be traced to the beliefs, routines, behaviour, education, and other social practices of the oppressed community. However, according to sociolinguists, an analysis of the language practices of a community would provide a more accurate understanding of the class, caste, ethnic, and other struggles in society. Language is considered as a site of struggle where these entities meet in conflict. The oppression of a community through language as ideology comes in two forms: through the language of the outsider, and through the stigmatization of the insiders' language. Oppressive ideology of a language is not only harmful to an individual, but it also contributes to a history of subjugation and oppression that spans generations. Within Sri Lanka, Telugu is considered a dying language, and the fragments of this language can only be found within certain social groups and castes (i.e., the gypsy community). Telugu within the country functions as a proxy indicator of under-caste and low class, and the mere fact that the language is alive within a community, places them by design in an unfavourable position. Within the 'Deiyannewela Patu Maga' community, Telegu lingers on in the spoken form, while writing has become a lost art. The younger generation, however, has given up Telegu in an attempt to shed the "under-caste" identity that comes along with the language. Through a series of discussions with those within and without the community, this paper attempts to understand language as ideology in reference to the creation of the Deiyannewela community as undercaste. Being a Telugu speaker in Deiyannewela automatically binds you to the "Dobhi" (washer) caste. Thus, the death of the Telugu language is not resisted by these residents because its death would mean their liberation from their caste based position and oppression.

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