

Variation in Dialect and Usage of Specific Vocabulary among Different Castes in the Jaffna Peninsula

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Abstract

Jaffna peninsula, the Northern part of Sri Lanka is predominantly Tamil speaking with a population of around 583 thousand. The "Diglossic" nature of Tamil is clearly visible and the form used for writing is highly codified and universally accepted as 'standard' Tamil, while there are various dialects found in Sri Lanka and India. The caste system among Tamils play a pivotal role in the evaluation of various dialects since social segregation is very rigid among Tamils 'the caste dialects' are mostly found in India where the cast system is strictly followed when compared to Sri Lanka. However usage of specific vocabulary and sentence patterns specific to each cast could be found in sri lanka. This study is participatory in nature. Direct participation observation interviews and group discussions were used to obtain information.

This paper explores the nature of language usage in Jaffna peninsula with special reference to three marginalized castes namely Paraiyar (Drummers), Ambattar (Barbers) and Vannar (washer men).

Paraiyar caste still retains several "Prakrit" words and archaic words which are not used by other castes in Jaffna. Similarly Ambattar and Vannar use several words which could be understood by only by the people of their castes.

Key words : Jaffna Tamil Casts, Paraiyar, Ambattar, Vannar