

## LANGUAGE POLICY PRACTICES AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION OF SRI LANKA

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### **Abstract**

*Language is one of the most important elements to representing the national identity. Tamils is the sufficient second major racial group in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a society that has produced one of the most intractable ethnic conflicts in the modern world, and there is no straightforward scheme of the island's majority-minority relations (Uyangoda 2001:1). After end of the civil war, government has introduced some instruments to the language policy. Thus, examining the Language Policy practices in public administrative institutions and, its impact to the national integration of Sri Lanka is very important. Research was selected 100 respondents covering public servants and Tamil publics using random sampling method. Questionnaires, interviews and key informants were used for quantitative and qualitative data as primary data in divisional Secretariat office in Balangoda division, and secondary data was also used. Key finding of the research are (01) Inability to receive the public service and documents in Tamil. (02) Government's second language training program is unsuccessful. (03) Public servants' Tamil language proficiency is low. (04) No sufficient awareness on language policy of publics and public servants. (06) Attitudes and solicitudes of public servants on training program are minor (05) Tamils have to receive third person's support to fill their documents, letters and, pay them. (06) No attitudinal change program for public servants. Overly, although Sri Lankan government has implicated lot of language policy circulars and programs to ensure the language rights and national integrity, there is no successful manipulation of language policy in administrative institutions, and it has affected to the violation the national integration of Sri Lanka.*

**Key Words:** Human Rights, Minority rights, Tamils, Language policy, Administrative Institutions, National Integration.

## **Introduction**

Rights are not possible without democracy (Rajan 2002:13). Every democratic country has accepted to ensure the human rights. Today, There is lot of legal instrument for the protection of human rights and minority rights such as Universal declaration of Human Rights, The United Nations Minorities Declaration 1992, The Durban Declaration 2001, The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Fundamental rights in Sri Lankan government universally and nationally (International Human Right Act 2003: 5- 11), (Wanasundara et al 2004: 15-23). The broader approach is reflected in UN declaration on the rights of minorities adopted by the General Assembly in 1992 (Wanasundara et al 2004: 23). Theoretically, all democratic states are respected to the multiracial and multicultural groups and they try to protect all of their identities and rights. Even political systems of countries such as unitary and federal, have created, to respect to the multiracialism. Minorities as based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity and States should be protected their existence.

In Political Theory, the language policy is an issue of considerable ethical, political, and legal importance in jurisdictions around the world (Patten 2001: 691). Among the gamut of functions of language society, the crucial ones generally regarded as justifying state policy decisions are administration, justice and education. One of the most vexing issues in many of the world's so-called ethnic or minority conflicts is the question of language use by the State and its citizens. Historically, there have been cases of persecution, systematic and widespread violence, atrocities, sexual violence, or acts of genocide perpetrated against minorities (Vareness 1996: 522) Language policy should aim to ensure equity for all language groups (Phillipson 1999: 25-29).

Sri Lanka is a society that has produced one of the most intractable ethnic conflicts in the modern world, and there is no straightforward scheme of the island's majority-minority relations (Uyangoda 2001:1). After the independence of Sri Lanka in the past decades, Tamils have discriminated by the Sinhala only language policy (Coparahewa 1999: 199) and Sinhala ethnic identity has affected for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka (Dharmadasa et al 1996: 163). The article of constitution that Buddhism is the national religion is also affected to suppress the minority's religions. Language became an exclusive marker of ethnicity particularly in the case of the two dominant groups in the country, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural society in the sense that it contains a number of different ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and regional groups (Perera 2008:07). Sri Lanka has a population of about 20 million with a mixture of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Burghers and others. About 74% of the people belong to the Sinhala community while Tamils and Muslims form 18% and 7% respectively. The others form the remaining 1%. Seventy seven percent of the Sinhalese are Buddhists. The language of the Sinhalese is Sinhala and that of the Tamils and Muslims is Tamil. A small percentage of these two communities have adopted English as their mother tongue (Census of Population and Housing: 2001).

There are many language policies followed by the Sri Lankan government Since British colonial period. When considering the history, it was failed to fulfill the national equality and build up the social integrity, and it has caused to the ethnic conflict since British colonial period. Tamils as minority has discriminated by the majority Sinhalese by divide and rule theory of British rule. Enough representation was not received for the Tamil minority representatives in the state council. Until the passage of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 introduced by the Prime minister S.W.R.D.Bandaranayake, the Sri Lankan government was followed both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages (Gunasekara et al 1996: 75). After the official Language Law, Sinhalese was the official language in Sri Lanka. The Act No 28 of 1958, prescribed Tamil as a language of administration in the North and Eastern Provinces. An official language commission was appointed on 23 May 1951 to consider ways and means of implementing the recommendations made by the select committee and to plan such strategies needed for the task (Gunasekara et al 1996: 92). The constitution of 1972 clearly secured the 'Sinhala Only' policy of the 1956 and emphasized the essentially subordinate role of the Tamil language. The 1972 Constitution provided that Sinhala be the language of

legislation with a Tamil translation. In 1978, the second republic constitution in Sri Lanka was also accepted again reiterated that the official language should be Sinhalese. According to the chapter IV of the Sri Lankan constitution in 1978, while maintaining Sinhalese as the official language (Article 18) recognized Tamil as a national language (Article 19). But these changes to the Language policy in Sri Lanka were temporary treatments.

After 1985 internal conflict and continual ethnic conflict, although government tried to settle the problem, they failed to give fixed solution for the language problem. They establish equal position for both languages in administration. According to the 16th amendment passed in 1988 that the Sinhalese and Tamil are the languages of administration of Sri Lanka, and Tamil shall be used in Northern and Eastern provinces. All laws and subordinate legislation shall be enacted or made and published in Sinhala and Tamil together with a translation of in English. After the 16th amendment, language policy of Sri Lanka was put the new step on national integration. As in 1951 and in the mid-1990s of the provision of staff able to work in both official languages in the regional sectors of administrative and in the administration in general is a crucially important requirement (Gunasekara et al 1996 : 107). On 17th June 1991, the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs issued Public Administration Circular Number 22/91 under the title 'Implementation of the Official Languages Law – Trilingualization of Forms' which forms of all government institutions should be made available in the three languages, Sinhalese, Tamil and English in one printed paper ( Perera 2008: 10-11).

After the end of ethnic conflict through the military action, Sri Lankan government tries to build up the ethnic equality and national integration and it is a new step to language policy in Sri Lanka. The government gave equal position to the both languages rectifying past lapses with establishing the both Sinhalese and Tamil as national and official languages. In addition to, According to the public administration circular, Public Servants should able to carry out their functions and duties both in Sinhalese and Tamil (Public Administration Circular 07/2007). There is a Minister and ministry for National Languages and Social Integrity in Sri Lanka. According to this circular, every public servant should obtain their language proficiency within a period of 5 years. The public officials at government institutions, receptionists and other personnel interacting with the public should be bilingual. The government believes knowledge to communicate in all three languages Sinhala, Tamil and English will aid the reconciliation process between the communities easier (<http://www.dailynews.lk/2011/12/12/news50.asp>). The ministry of education has started to increase the number of periods to teach Tamil language in schools. Therefore Tamil language proficiency has become a major extra qualification of public job opportunities. There are language training programs and workshops for language proficiency of public servants in administrative institutions. The Department of Official Languages contacts the 25000 teachers were trained during this year to teach Tamil and promote equality, unity and fraternity among all the nationalities.

Therefore, after ending the civil war in Sri Lanka, government has crucial responsibility on re-building the equality, social integration and fraternity in Sri Lanka, through comprehensive policies and successful programs. Otherwise if government fails to safeguard the equality among the ethnical groups, another internal conflict can be re-raised in Sri Lanka. Thus, to examine the language policy practices and its impact to the national integration in Sri Lanka is very important.

### **Methodology**

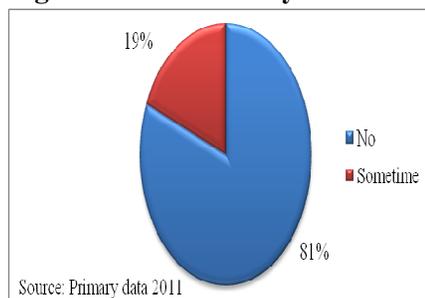
The study has been conducted in *Balangoda* division of *Rathnapura* district. This is a one place which is high rate of Tamil population in the *Rathnapura* district. In *Sabaragamuwa* province, Tamils are widely live in *Rathnapura* district. More plantation Tamils are widely live in *Balangoda* area of the *Rathnapura* District. Research was used both primary and secondary data for qualitative and quantitative data. Primary

data was in divisional Secretariat office in *Balangoda* division of *Rathnaupa* district. Research was selected 100 respondents covering public servants, officers and Tamil publics using random sampling method. Like wise 10 responsible officers were used as key informants from the Ministry of Language policy and Social Integrity for qualitative data. SPSS Package and EXEL software was used for analyzing data. Tables and charts were used to present data.

## Results and Discussion

According to the Language policy circular, the key advantage to the Tamils, are able to obtain service and documents in Tamil Medium. When we consider about availability of the service and in Tamil medium, majority of respondent (81%) is unavailable service in Tamil medium.

**Figure 01: Availability of the services in Tamil**



(Source : Feild Survey, 2011)

Majority (60%) officers agreed that there is unavailable service in Tamil medium and there are no sufficient Tamil officers in the institute and Sinhalese Officers unable to provide service in Tamil. And also Tamils can't be received every document in Tamil medium because of lack of sufficient documents in three languages, inability to provide documents in three languages, inability of understanding and speaking Tamil by Officers, inability to provide Tamil typist and translators.

But according to the Official Languages Law – Trilingualization of Forms in 1991, all government institutions should be made available in the three languages in one printed paper. But in practically, most of the Tamils have to fill their document and letters in Sinhalese. Therefore in one hand Tamils are faced problems in front of public service of government and other hand, official Language Law has questioned in the public institution. As this problem, Tamils have to get third person's support to fill their documents. Tamils get assistance (15%) from officers in this institution, and they get third person's support (78%) from outside. Main issue is to majority Tamils get help from 3<sup>rd</sup> person as a translator and writer. Only 7% publics fill documents and letters in Sinhalese themselves. Although Tamils can speak in Sinhalese, their literacy level is low. When they (15%) get help from the officers, they have to suffer unkind treats. Even Tamils talk about public servant unfavorably. When Tamils go to receive service from the secretariat office, they have to waiting more times. Even this situation is created a negative image about the public service directly. According to their idea, they faced any discrimination by the public officers, and this situation has been motivated to build up a consciensness, that they are an isolated minority group in the country. This situation can affect to infraction of national integration directly.

74 per cent said that they aren't happy on the language right practices. 69 per cent hasn't awareness on language rights that mentioned in the 16th amendment. The main one reason for the inability of Service in Tamil is to inability use the Tamil language by Officers. Although government has implemented The Tamil training program, it is unsuccessful. According to the Public Administration Circular 07/2007, the

Government implements the programs to the Public Servants to carry out their functions and duties both in Sinhalese and Tamil. Majority of officers (74%) are unable to carry out their duties in both languages. 26% officers can provide some time. Overly, their Tamil language proficiency is low. According to The Official Language Commission's Memorandum of Recommendations (2005) makes some observations on the present Second Language Training Programs are not at all sufficient to meet the challenges relating to the implementation of the Official Languages Policy (Perera 2008: 11-14).

There is a training program with a language course at secondary level examination conducted by the Department of official languages. There are 100 per cent of public servants participated for the training and secondary language courses and workshops conducted by the local government administration in *Ratnapura*. When we consider the success of this program, 70 per cent of public servants said that, they are poor influenced the Tamil languages because of unsuccessful of teaching methods and inability to do homework with family works and duty. 55 per cent is unhappy and 45 per cent happy with this program. Although 5 years period was over of these public servants according to the circular 2007, Tamil language proficiency is low. Present language policy manipulation is unsuccessful (78%).

Under the manipulations of language policy, administrative institutions is also faced some problems and challenges. Specially, the idea of public servants who was faced to the programs and language policy practices is very important. Only 5 per cent officers' agree with the successfulness of the language policy. but there are 55 per cent is disagree on unsuccessfulness of the language policy practices and 45% said neutral for the success of the language policy implementations. Another specific reason for the failure of the language policy practices is the inability of receiving printed documents in three languages in one paper from government. Therefore responsible officers should be inspected the provision of the facilities to the institution and they should be inspected and conducted the servants to serve good service to the publics. Another reason is to inability to provide Tamil public servants for typing and translation. When we consider the carder system in the institution, adequate cadre position hasn't for the Tamil officers.

Although government has given affect to the training program, public servants were failed to fulfill their language proficiency. Therefore this program should be re-developed and accelerate. Public servants have failed to familiarize with the training program and there is no good environment and personality to speak in Tamil in the institution. Public servant's attitudes are also negative. In short, they don't like to speak in Tamil like English in the institution. They think speaking Tamil in front of the people is inferior position. Therefore, Language Policy programs should be re-developed can able to motivate the positive thinking of public servants.

### **Conclusion and Policy Implication**

The Language policy in Sri Lanka has put new strong step to the national integration. When consider the past decades, this is the turning point to the address equality, fraternity, national integrity and democracy. Therefore it is better to identify the challenges and problems of language policy by the government. According to the key findings of the research, to provide facilities and documents in three languages to the administrative institutions by government able to provide their good service to the publics, To re-implicate and accelerate the good training programs to develop three languages proficiency of public servants, To motivate the Public servants to provided kind full services to the publics without discrimination, To implicate the program to improve the awareness of Publics, To encourage and motivate the officers and public servants to ensure the minority rights in the institutions, The special thing is to implicate the good attitudinal and solicitude changeable programs of public servants are very important.

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