

## **Historical Importance of Syriac Language and its Condition**

Syriac language is one of the earliest languages in history. Even though it is known as a sister language of Hebrew and Arabic, it has deeply affected these languages. Belonging to semitic language family, Syriac language is an advanced continuation of Aramaic language. Once upon a time it was a commonly used language. Besides, it is known that Syriac alphabet was one of the eighteen alphabets and writing systems that Turks had used in history <sup>1</sup>.

Because of it was the language that Jesus Christ spoke, it had a reputable place in Christian world. It has three similar typefaces (writings) which are known as Estrangelo, East and West. One, who can read one of the typefaces, also can read other typefaces easily. Dialectal differences that are seen in all languages exist in Syriac language too. There are two dialects: East and West. Whereas in colloquial speech East accent is known as “**Chaldean or Ashuri**”, West accent is called only “**Syriac**”. If a pronunciation difference (such as “a” and “o”) is ignored, then there isn’t a significant difference between these two accents.

Syriac language has also a colloquial accent/dialect, except a literary language. Even though regional and local characteristics are present, this colloquial accent/dialect is also divided into two utterances/local languages. Colloquial language that is spoken in Iran, Iraq and in the region of Şırnak (and Hakkari in the past) in Turkey is called “**Ashuri or Suret**”; and colloquial language that is spoken in the region of Mardin is called “**Turoyo or Surayt**”.

Today, Syriac Orthodox Church, Syriac Catholic Church and Maronite Church use the West accent of Syriac language -along with a local language- in their daily prayers and liturgies. Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Church use the East accent of Syriac language. After 7-th century, Melkite Church (both

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<sup>1</sup> - Dr. Nidai Sulhi Atmaca, Journal of Bütün Dünya, Ankara, June 2000, Number: 200006, p. 32, An Article About Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow of the Turkish Language.

orthodox and catholic churches) severed its organic bonds with Syriac language entirely and turned onto an Arabic language.

As it is seen, Syriac language is a bearer and heritor of an organic culture that has been developed in Bethnahrin (Mesopotamia). It is an ancient language that has played role in development of civilization. It has been derived from the heart of the East and it is one of ancient languages of the world. It is a language spoken by Jesus Christ. It is a long history of The Tigris and The Euphrates and has been improved by the birth of the Syriac church of Antioch. The cognitive depth of Syriac language lead the spread of Christianity. Even though there were other factor in social background, Church and rituals in Bethnahrin could not be so advanced without doctrinal concepts and intellectual efficiency of Syriac language.

Through its major contributions to East-West thought, it is a language that has played a pioneering role in the spreading of Christianity, in development of the thought and the philosophy, in reaching of Greek civilization to the Arabic world and to the Europe.

Syriac language and its aroma have great contributions in the transmission of antiquity to Islamic world. In history an initiative-oriented character of the Syriac language has made intellectual contributions to the socio-cultural life of the region, especially to the Arabic language and Islamic philosophy.

Because of its strong concepts in Christian theology, Syriac language can also be characterized as one of the languages of Christianity. The main resource of literary works written in this language is majorly directed to the Word of God and the moral issues. Syriac writers/thinkers who had comprehended beforehand the truth that says, **“Human is a human when he treats the truth with righteousness and the creation with morality”**, have served a development of a social thought and have left a rich legacy in positive sciences.

The thing that provides an organic unity to a language, to a culture is a semantic-moral world of the words/concepts. An extinction will be inevitable, when an attrition and a semantic lost start to arise in that world. An attrition and a semantic loss are like a disease. They will cause the semantic identity of words to die. And this will affect the social relationships negatively.

The semantic identity emphasizes the content and thus the spirit of concepts and words. It explains both the meaning and the value. This content, meaning and the value have vital functions that determine actions and motivations of people. The semantic identity of concepts improves mindscapes and amplifies existing meanings. Even adds new meanings. And this affects positively the interpretation ability and the evaluation system of people. The languishment of interpretation ability is the biggest calamity that could ever happen to a language thus to a nation. This calamity triggers an inferiority complex, leads to depression, sets at odds, drags to annihilation. Conceptual development of a language strengthens vitality of that language and socio-cultural formation, political existence and understandings of people who speak that language.

The death of a language means the extinction of people who speak that language and a heritage created by that language. Because language is not only a speech tool among people. Knowledge in this language is a tool that helps the wisdom to be passed to the future and that improves the relationship between the past and the future.

All languages and cultures communicate the secrets of humanity. But as it is said, one that doesn't reverts to type is bound to be annihilated. No society is able to live long with a mentality that doesn't belong to itself, that didn't come out from its own culture. Social integration and intellectual development will find meaning when every society will be able to improve a thought that came out from its own culture, but also connected with a universal one.

This way of thinking should be developed as an establishing its own dominance and a way of communication that not destroys others, but serves a social justice, rightness, interconverting and existence. Because everything in the universe is useful as long as it supports to understand and to improve the meaning of life.

The condition of Syriac language propounds closeness to the current structure of its speakers. Subalternity, unjust treatment and being dispersed affected Syriac language and its conceptual development negatively. Indeed, the present condition of Syriac language is a continuation of old ages and historical events at different degrees.

Despite all the favorable roles it played in history, Syriac language is an acrid language today. Although it continues its existence in church and literature, its socio-cultural concepts that have spiritual profundity have faded away, its meaning/value contexts have been eroded.

Today, because of changes in road conditions journey conditions have been also changed. And this unsettles the Syriac language. New meetings, new contacts, innovations, different dangers, new perception manners have occurred. Revival of doctrinal, philosophical, political, spiritual-cultural concepts of Syriac language in a manner of thought -with a sociological view- will create a resistance against extinction and breaking the mold. This is essential for not extinction and elimination of an ancient spirit. This will be a vital effort in the period of intertwinement of pursuit of conversion with crises.

In an Syriac culture there is an understanding that says, **“a productive human is compared to a pregnant woman. If she lives, she will live not just for herself. If she dies, she will die not just herself.”** Social adaption and peace depend on emergence of human abilities and individuality and putting them into service of life. All abilities come from God. They are a divine covenant, a

consignation. If they will not act with a motive to enrich the life, then the covenant will be repealed. And abilities will be taken away.

Therefore, Syriac language is an ancient soul, an ancient culture. Different approaches and different efforts are required in order to keep alive this spirit. The main purpose should be to water a drying tree. The main point is to keep alive this ancient soul and culture and bring together with a universal one.

Because an intellectual fund is like electricity, it can't be seen, but it illuminates and leads the way. At new dimensions that knowledge and wisdom gained, an intellectual fund has transformed a world into a gateless and a wall-less market.

Protection and improvement of an Syriac language that has been existing in past historical process of a Mardin and that contributed greatly to humanity and Christianity, is not a responsibility of only those who love and know this language. It is an issue that everyone who bears responsibility towards Christianity, humanity and universal culture, should be sensitive to.

Therefore, trying to keep alive an ancient soul such as Syriac language, encouraging those who make an endeavor for this issue will be a significant and meaningful contribution to future generations.

As it is been said, **“awareness is the mother of an orphan knowledge.”** In literature, a knowledge that exists but not discerned yet is called an orphan knowledge. When we discern and start to use any knowledge, then that knowledge becomes no longer an orphan knowledge for us. So, the main point is not to know, but to discern. Because, if a person doesn't discern what he knows, then that knowledge has no earthly use.

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