



"Recognition of tribal languages and literature" Need for Protection , Preservation of indigenous languages

Dr. Mahipathi Santhosh Kumar

Department of English
Kakathiya University, Warangal.TS.India
Email:santhoshmypathi45@gmail.com

ABSTRACTS:

indigenous languages means losing huge human capital and rich cultural diversity Language is the only tool for expressing identity and culture as well as one of the greatest emblems of human diversity. There are 7,000 living languages in the world and around 3,000 are considered as 'endangered'. 427 groups which have been recognised as "Scheduled Tribes". According to Abbi (2004a) languages spoken by these scheduled communities are considered 'tribal languages'. These languages lack heritage as there is no script for the same. Some languages are written with the help of the script of other languages. Albeit, the languages could not be opulent in case of written literature. Moreover, the languages have much adversity, for which languages face arduous challenges in the path of development. The current unprecedented development of science and technology, the expansion of transportation and communication as well as educational development etc. has made this challenge more forceful. Also the restricted use of the languages has led to their endangerment. At the end of the study we can conclude in at to keep alive these languages, the govt. as well as the integrated tribe should make proper language planning and take all necessary steps. The only appropriate and useful reliable language for present and future will encourage and attract the future generation to use the same.

Keywords: Tribal Language, Recognized, Language Problem, Language Planning, Linguistic Situation, Language Development. Indigenous.

Introduction

India is rich with a diversity of religions, arts, customs, races, traditions, and languages. While the government of India recognizes twenty-two official languages, there are over 880 languages spoken in the country. Until recently, the tribal literature created in non-mainstream languages has not been very recognized or available for an Indian or global audience. One of the primary reasons for this is that tribal discourse, including folktales and songs, is mainly oral in nature. In addition, the communities who produce it tend to be far from developed metropolitan cities, and so their creative works have been largely overlooked. However, the Indian government and prominent personalities, including social activists and politicians, have stepped forward to encourage the conservation and translation of these unheard voices and to share their literary gems with the world.

The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 States/UT's and the number of individual ethnic groups, etc. notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705. To lose these indigenous languages means losing huge human capital and rich cultural diversity Language is the only tool for expressing identity and culture as well as one of the greatest emblems of human diversity. There are 7,000 living languages in the world and around 3,000 are considered as 'endangered'. This means that almost half of the planet's current linguistic diversity is under threat. The situation in India is alarming. Some 197 languages are in various stages of endangerment in our country, more than any other country in the world. Ganesh N Devy, founder-director of the Bhasa Research and Publication Centre, Vadodara and Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat, said, "India may have lost 220 languages since 1961. There were 1,100 languages since 1961, based on the Census number of 1,652 mother tongues. Another 150 languages could vanish in the next 50 years." Linguistic expert Devy documented 780 living languages and claims that 400 of them are at risk of dying. There are five tribal languages that are moving towards extinction in India. Linguist experts say that the most threatened language is Majhi in Sikkim. According to a research conducted by People's Linguistic Survey of India, there are just four people who currently speak Majhi and all of them belong to the same family.

Similarly, the Mahali language in eastern India, Koro in Arunachal Pradesh, Sidi in Gujarat and Dimasa in Assam are facing extinction. Until recently, UNESCO has put Asur, Birhor and Korwa in its list of the world's endangered languages with Birhor being categorised as 'Critically Endangered', with just 2,000 speakers left. According to UNESCO, any language that is spoken by less than 10,000 people is potentially endangered. In India, after the 1971 census, the government decided that any language spoken by less than 10,000 people need not be included in the official list of languages. From 1971 onwards, the Census has been counting only of those languages that have more than 10,000 speakers. It resulted in a decline in the list of languages to 108 languages in the 1971 Census, as against 1,652 a decade ago.

The Governmental definition, finally, is that which provides a list of 427 groups which have been recognised as "Scheduled Tribes". According to Abbi (2004a) languages spoken by these scheduled communities are considered 'tribal languages'. There is no linguistic definition of tribal

languages. Such definitions are not very useful because when the situation of tribes is examined carefully not only do we find a lot of variations in their life styles but also many of these features are shown by the caste people. This raises the problem as to how distinguish them from castes. Bailey (1960) has suggested that the only solution to the problem of tribes in India is to conceive of a continuum of which at one end are tribes and at the other are castes. The tribes have segmentary, egalitarian system and are not mutually inter-dependent as are castes in a system of organic solidarity. They have direct access to land and no intermediary is involved between them and land. Sinha (1982:4) too thinks of tribe and caste in terms of a continuum. For him, the tribe is ideally defined in terms of its isolation from the networks of social relations and cultural communications of the centres of civilization. In their isolations the tribal societies are sustained by relatively primitive subsistence technology such as shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering and maintain an egalitarian segmentary social system guided entirely by non literate ethnic tradition. According to Mandelbaum (1970) one difference between tribal and Jati society is in the equality of interpersonal relations. In tribal life the principal links for the whole society is based on kinship. Individual equality as Kinsman is assumed, dependency and subordination among men are minimized, on the other hand Jati members believe they must have non-kinship relations with others in their society and that these relations must be arranged in an order of domination and defence. He further argues that Jati and tribe are similar units in that each is considered by its members to be an endogamous entity composed of ritual equals. Emeneau (1997) opines that tribes are outside the jati system: they are not jatis. Bhushan and Sachdeva (1958) list three differences between caste and tribe as follows.

- i) Tribe is a territorial group whereas caste is a social group
- ii) Tribe is a political organization, whereas caste is never a political organization
- iii) Caste originated for the basis of division of labour, tribe came about because of the evolution of community feeling in a group inhabiting a definite geographical area.

As Walter (1993: 23) states, "In India hardly any of the tribe exists as a separate society and that they have all been absorbed in varying degree into the wider society of India. The on-going process of absorption is not recent but dates back to the most ancient times." This suggests that since the development of Indian civilization and culture there has been a co-existence of the tribal and non-tribal in India. Ethnographers and anthropologists have used the term "tribe" for certain communities having common ancestry and specific genetic characteristics. Prior to their subjugation the tribes were either unconscious of their ethnic-tribal identities or merely called themselves a "people vis-a-vis others". One important characteristic of the tribal communities in India is their heterogeneity. All tribal communities in India may not be minorities. This is true of some tribal communities in the North East, if the state is taken as the unit for defining a minority. In these states such as Nagaland where tribal population is 85% of the total state population, the tribal language may be dominant language being the language of administration and education along with English. On the basis of Ecology, it is possible to group tribal population into five distinct regions.

The tribal population of the country, as per 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribal's from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males. Broadly the STs inhabit two distinct geographical areas – the Central India and the North-Eastern Area. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central India, i.e., Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%) and Rajasthan (8.86%). The other distinct area is the North East (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh). More than two-third of the ST population is concentrated only in the seven States of the country, viz. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. There is no ST population in 3 States (Delhi NCR, Punjab and Haryana) and 2 UTs (Puducherry and Chandigarh), as no Scheduled Tribe is notified.

This was just an indicative list as there are many more languages prevalent. With this, the first part of Introduction comes to close. In Part II of this four part series, I will cover The Importance of Tribal Languages.

THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE CRISIS

Over the last two decades, scientists have come up with mathematical models for predicting the life of languages. These predictions have indicated that a large part of linguistic heritage is moving rapidly close to extinction. Some of the predictions maintain that out of an approximately 6,000 existing languages, only a small portion of language diversity will continue to exist in the 22nd century. In the absence of a thorough survey of languages, it is difficult to decide how many languages there are really in existence and how many will survive. The PLSI is a snapshot of languages. In GLSR, we are going to do a janampatri of languages, a horoscope. This (PLSI) is about the present of the language ... that is about the future of the languages.

- The 1961 Census recorded 1,652 languages
- Since the 1971 Census, languages spoken by less than 10,000 people have been lumped as "others"
- The language data of 2011 Census, the most recent one, has not been disclosed
- PLSI has recorded 780 living languages, of which 400 are dying.

Why Language Preservation Efforts Need Continued Investments

Because of past federal policies and practices, tribal languages are disappearing. Historically, many people held the idea that tribal languages hindered American Indian assimilation. This led to policies that banned tribal languages in school settings, contributing to language loss today.[6]

Of the more than 300 tribal languages once spoken in the United States, only 175 remain. If no action is taken, experts estimate that no more than 20 will remain by 2050.[7] Montana is home to 12 of these languages.[8] Of those, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, and Montana Salish are critically endangered, meaning that the youngest speakers are elders and that they speak the language partially and infrequently.[9] Despite having a large

number of tribal language speakers relative to other tribal nations, the share of citizens of the Crow Tribe of Indians who speak the language fluently has decreased from about 85 percent 60 years ago to about 30 percent today. The decline has been especially sharp among young speakers.[10] Languages that are not spoken by children are at great risk of becoming extinct, or of having no remaining speakers.[11] Unlike speakers of “world” languages, such as Spanish and French, who can be found around the world, speakers of tribal languages tend to live on tribal homelands, meaning shrinking communities of speakers are not replenished.[12] That means that tribal languages are likely lost forever when no speakers remain on tribal home lands. Under the pressure of globalization, the domains of use of some languages are shrinking with the result that many Indian languages have become threatened and even endangered.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), any language spoken by less than 10,000 persons is considered “potentially endangered”. Not every potentially endangered language necessarily faces the threat of immediate extinction. However, that number indicates a threshold.

- Safe: language is spoken by all generation; Inter-generational transmission is uninterrupted, not included in the Atlas
- Vulnerable: Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g. home)
- Definitely endangered: Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
- Severely endangered: Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
- Critically endangered: The youngest speakers are grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
- Critically endangered: The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
- Extinct: There are no speakers left included in the Atlas if presumably extinct since the 1950s

Why are Indian Languages Facing Extinction?

- In India, English is thriving and is used widely by the emerging generation, which is one of the reasons leading to the threat of extinction of native or regional languages.
- English has become the language of knowledge and employ ability, as well as the primary language of the internet. The major content of the digital sphere is now in English, and, therefore, other languages have been marginalized. People have started considering native languages as kitchen languages.
- Indians do not find it necessary to learn or write in their mother tongue. This means advanced knowledge is not produced in these languages. Therefore, other languages have essentially become languages of translation.
- There is a general understanding that languages without scripts face the gravest threat of extinction.
- A language without a script is not necessarily a dialect. Several mighty languages in existence today do not have their own scripts. English, French, Spanish can all be counted in this class. The difference between the two is more a matter of structural identity.
- According to the People’s Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), “Over the last 50 years, the world’s Hindi-speaking population has increased from 260 million to 420 million. Over the same period, the English speaking population has gone from 320 million to 480 million. However, the growth of Hindi, English and other major languages within India has come at a price: Around 250 languages in India have disappeared in the last 50 years”.
- A language dies when its speakers die. For example, a language of Andaman and Nicobar islands, namely, Aka-Bo has died recently when its last speaker died in 2010.
- Under the pressure of globalization, the domains of use of some languages are shrinking with the result that many Indian languages have become threatened and even endangered. Although, the globalization is not directly killing local languages, but it is affecting languages in the sense that many languages under pressure are losing oral literature and words related to culture, especially, food items, dress and ornaments, rituals, flora and fauna. But globalization is not the cause of language death, says the CIIL.

Protection of endangered languages

The Government of India has a Scheme known as “Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India (SPPEL)”, effective since February, 2014. Under this Scheme, the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore works on protection, preservation and documentation of all the mother tongues/languages of India spoken by less than 10,000 people in the country. The scheme will be implemented by the CIIL in coordination with universities across the country. It will identify, document and take measures to protect the endangered languages.

- As of now, CIIL has identified 520 languages. In the first year, that is 2014, over 20 universities in seven zones of the country will study around 70 languages. The remaining languages will be researched and documented over a decade, as per the scheme.
- CIIL, as part of its Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL), has launched an initiative to document 77 languages. The languages identified have less than 10,000 native speakers left in the country.
- The objective is to come up with works related to basic grammar of identified languages, write a tri-lingual dictionary on words used, and aspects of folklore of the same. A tri-lingual dictionary in English, Hindi and native language will be written by scholars who have selected different languages for the study.
- Studies related to 77 languages will be taken by experts distributed in six zones identified by CIIL authorities. These include Bondo (East Central Zone), Takahanyilang (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Paliya (Southern Zone), Khasa (Northern Zone), Atong (North Eastern Zone), Bharwadi (West Central Zone), and others.

- Preliminary research will involve collection of available data related to these languages from experts and educational institutions around the country.

To keep language alive and the main tool to conserve its history is script. Language is limited in light of time and space. To liberate a language from this limitation, script is of utmost necessity. With the help of script only the language of mind can be preserved giving it a literary form. Literature carries the identity of a particular race. Against afresh with the help of scripture, a language proceeds towards the path of development with a definite identity and the language gets established with the help of the practice of writers or intellectuals. But other than the languages of Thai-Sin neither of the languages has no any script of their own. On the other hand, though the Thai-Sin languages have script, there is no rich tradition of opulent writing. This is the first and foremost problem of the tribal languages of Assam. In accepting a new script, it is necessary to keep relevance the pronunciation rule of the language. In this case, there is the necessity of special study of the languages. For the time being, these languages were tried to be written in amended Roman script or Devanagari script. Well, for the fewer no. of literate people, it could not meet the expected reader society. As a consequence, the people also had to be disappointed by not getting proper response from the reader.

REFERENCES

1. Abbi, Anvita, Ed. (1986). Studies in Bilingualism. Department of Linguistics and English Schools of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi: Bahri Publication Pvt. Ltd., 1st Published.
2. Ball, Martin J. (2010). The Routledge Handbook of Sociolinguistics Around the World. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
3. Barman, Shivanath (2013). Asamar Janajati Samasya. Guwahati: Banalata.
4. Bhattacharya, Pramodchandra (2008). Asamar Janajati. Dhemaji: Kiran Prakashan.
5. Fasold, Ralph (1984). The Sociolinguistic of Society. Oxford : Blackwell Publications.