

Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous endangered languages of Tribes: Role of Academic Institutions.

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Abstract: It is believed that an endangered language heralds the demise of a whole culture on which the life of a community stamps up in terms of its style. In this context, the codification & publication of oral literature shall be in priority. Methodologically this paper is based on the survey of the research, conceptual frameworks and secondary sources related to the Role of Academic Institutions in **Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous endangered languages of Tribes.**

Keywords: Preservation, Promotion, Indigenous, Endangered languages.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part dealt with the conceptual understanding and distribution of Tribal population and the endangered languages in India. Afterwards, it will aspire to look how any language or dialect is to regarded as endangered if children do not learn it thoroughly any more or not at all this will inevitably lead to its death in due course unless the language gets revitalised as a result of new circumstances or successful application of some efforts maintaining it. As UNESCO's report highlighted out of a total number of 5,000 languages that are spoken in the world today, half of them endangered.

Furthermore, it will analyse how interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research related to endangered language help in their preservation carried out various academic Institutions. Moreover, it will highlight the role of multiple strategies and methods ;(viz. fieldwork, research, analysis, archiving and documentation of smaller indigenous/ endangered languages using state of the art speech and language technology, in formats that are universally acceptable viz. digitalised textual, audio & video format. Lastly, analysis and conclusion have drawn based on linkages mentioned above in various frameworks.

Introduction:

“The significance of languages survival is emphasised because of its “strategic importance for people and planet (Promotion, 2012, para 1) and the central aspect of which is the function of languages, both existing and endangered, in integrating human beings in one culture and incorporating cultures in one universal human civilisation. Words, within their limitations, have played essential roles in shaping cultural values across nations and preserving the values from generation to generation. The terms have also developed the collective identities that human beings share to make them equal and respect each other. The development of such collective identities is only possible because deep down in the heart of every human being, there is a need to sustain what he has achieved and expect for a better civilization” (Prasetyo 2013).

India abounds in languages of Indo-European, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Indo-Burman & Austria-Asiatic families. “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”³. 91.7 per cent of these tribal people live in rural areas, mostly in and around forests. India is home to tribal people, i.e. 8.6 per cent of India’s total population; there are about 700 State-specific tribes and 75 Primitive Tribe Groups (PTGs); 91.7 per cent of these tribal people live in rural areas, mostly in and around forests.

The tribal villages and hamlets are small and dispersed, mostly located in remote, forested, and hilly areas. “In India, 427 groups had recognised as scheduled tribes in the year 1981. They formed approximately 8.2 per cent of the total Indian population. In absolute numbers, according to 1981 census, their population was 51,628,638. By 1991 their number reached 67,758,000, around 8.10 per cent of the total population. Their decadal growth during 1981-1991 was 31.64 per cent, which was higher than the national increase (23.51 per cent) Final Population Totals” (Utter 2017).

In the year 2003, there are 533 tribes as per notified schedule under Article 342, with the largest of them being in Orissa. The tribes with less than 10,000 populations tentatively taken as highly endangered. In addition to this, there are more dialects spoken by nomads so far unnumbered. The various studies have revealed by about the depleting dialects of the region.

Conceptual Frameworks:

Tribe:

The word 'TRIBE' has a Latin root. In India the word "tribe" and "tribal's" convey a meaning today of a bewildering and enchanting group of people who have been known by the various names from times immemorial- Vanvasi, Adivasi, Vanayajati and Adimjati. The term "Scheduled Tribes" is defined in Article 366(25) of the Constitution and Article 342 prescribes the procedure to followed for specifying STs.

Although the Constitution does not spell out any criteria, the well-established standards for specification of a community as an ST includes (a) indications of primitive traits (b) distinctive culture (c) shyness of contact with communities at large (d) geographical isolation and (e) backwardness.

Traditional Concept of Tribes:

A group of people who can trace their lineage with a common ancestry Exp: Roman history.

Other definition that can be related to the colonialism: The imperials encountered people who were the very different idea of being "primitive". The anthropologic idea of tribes is more comprehensive. A society of unique people, the tradition of their regulations, of their own culture of their government of their territory of their laws of their own.

The modern sense of tribe: Those who represent communities that are not part of the broader linguistic community. The categorisation of Adivasis has given to the tribes.

Positive Distinction:

“Homogeneity of occupation = hunting, food-gathering, Absence of social differentiation because of which they are minimal social stratification, A sense of kinship regulates society and Common Culture and Dialects” (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982)

Tribal areas:

Northeastern, Middle India, Northwestern-Himalayas, Andaman and Nicobar islands and South India

Middle eight states:

“Gujarat, MP, Orissa, Bihar, Andra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand Maharashtra, - 85 % tribal population, North-east – 11 % of the total tribal population and Northern and Southern states – 3 % of the total tribal population”⁴

Linguistic classification (Language groups):

Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Sino-Tibetan

Classification based on physical traits:

“Mongoloids, Negritos, Australoids, Dravidians, Aryans” (Xaxa 2003)

Changes in the structure of the TRIBES:

The government policies have enforced this, if they tribal do have to move, they have to move in the direction of the broader population. Hence they have different connotations.

- Tribal: a cultivator in a self-contained society
- Peasant: a producer as a part of a larger society
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It is how the shift is happening have they ceased to stay a tribe because they are migrating from their clans where there is larger extinct taking place in the culture, dialects, rituals etc.

Contemporarily there is a problem in using the term “tribe “because know they can address them as a people engaged in certain occupations.

This phenomenology discarding the term tribe and nowadays they treated as a community (Backward Hindus/Dalit Christians), hence their culture, languages and dialects are depleted.

“It is well known the fact that any language or dialect is to regarded as endangered if children do not learn it thoroughly any more or not at all this will inevitably lead to its death in due course unless the language gets revitalised as a result of new circumstances or successful application of some efforts maintaining it. As per UNESCO’s report, out of the total number of 5,000 languages that are spoken in the world today, half of them are endangered” (DLA 2019).

Many sociolinguists had claimed that compared to others, for South Asian immigrants, language retention was more natural than language loss. But in reality, it is seen that the 2nd/3rd generation migrants adopt other tongues/regional languages are assimilated.

The inception of the paper:

In India, there are five regions (Northeastern, Middle India, Northwestern-Himalayas, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and South India) which encompass the specified geographical areas where the speakers of endangered languages live scattered. It believed that an endangered language heralds the demise of a whole culture on which the life of a community stamps up in terms of its language. Hence, it is a demand to preserve the endangered language and save our unique heritage of culture (vis-à-vis Tribal Society-Tribal Community). Though the efforts/ initiatives by various academic institutions in these five regions after establishing a Centre for Endangered Languages under guidelines of UGC in the XII Plan period will need to contextualized.

Contextualising the Role of Academic Institutions:

In this context, UGC constituted an expert committee on Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous endangered languages which had recommended to provide financial assistance initially for five and continuity after it based on performance for permanency.

Afterwards, at various Universities, i.e. Tezpur University, Assam University, Sikkim University, Rajiv Gandhi University, Vishwa-Bharati Santinikaten, IGNTU Amarkantak etc. and already established centres like CIIL expanded in the direction of preservation & promotion of endangered languages.

All institutions are doing great work in the desired directions as per the Guidelines of UGC, which briefly described below;

- Carry-out a rigour field-based, content analysis of available data, started archiving and documentation of smaller indigenous/ endangered languages using state of the art, speech and communication technology, in formats that are universally acceptable viz. digitalised textual, audio & video format.
- Planning to Generate/publish monographs, grammars, grammatical sketches, dictionaries & lexicon, ethnolinguistic and theoretical descriptions, collection of oral & folk literature & scholarly books on endangered languages vis-a-vis creating a digital library (procuring it in digital, textual, audio, and video formats)
- Planning to produce language & dialects atlases with particular reference to minority & endangered languages, some of them prepared a blueprint.
- Organising series of workshops, symposium & seminars intended towards promoting advanced research related to endangered languages.
- Interfacing teachers from various departments/centres interdisciplinary in nature (viz. Anthropology, Social Work, English, Hindi, and Tribal Development & Computer Science) to develop field linguistics, lexicography and data management etc.

Analysis and Conclusion:

Establishment of centres and starting **Academic Programmes** like UG/PG/Diploma and PhDs in the relevant areas will not be able to contemplate the contemporary issues and concerns.

Hence the roundtable discussions/seminars/symposiums/workshops alone will only bring together of experts on linguistics, sociolinguistics, language renewal, and language teaching to lay-out or design a blueprint of policy changes, course designing and to undertake research. And it will help in following ways; offer life-long preservation, life-long educational opportunities

establish a folk museum and create a digital archive. Gradually tribal society will become history only.

As an expert/ outsiders, the existing power-relations are neglected in totality by the Academic Institutions. Hence **changes in the structure of the tribes have drifted them in a different direction; Tribal-Peasant.** Dimensions of social citizenship and its interface in societal structure for tribes in Rural and Urban Set-up concerning the modified idea of citizenship which is associated with the phenomenology of migration changed their livelihood profiles among tribes. And to stabilise and revitalise the endangered languages of tribes needs participatory community initiatives which can be a bridge through tribal educators.

They will be able to interface the gap between the Tribal Society-Academic institutions. It can perform language maintenance and transmission through dialogues on the roles of families, communities, and schools in promoting their languages. “Because any language or dialect is to be regarded as endangered if children do not learn it thoroughly any more or not at all this will inevitably lead to its death in due course, unless the language gets revitalised as a result of new circumstances or successful application of some efforts maintaining it” (DLA 2019).

Suggestions:

In addition, the barriers need to highlighted

- The lack of opportunity to practice native languages at home;
- The parents’ lack of proficiency in the native language
- The teachers’ criticism of those who speak the home language in school;
- The likelihood of put-downs by non-speakers of the home language;
- The perception that English is a better vehicle for economic success;(can be traced in the North-East Regions)

“Besides, some widespread misconceptions about language teaching and learning identified as severe barriers to the success of native language maintenance and transmission. These misconceptions included; any group have to give up your language to master another one” (Cantoni 2007).

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Endnotes

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³ <http://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/scheduled-tribes-welfare/ministry-of-tribal-welfare/> retrived on 10/01/2020 at 13:45 hrs.

⁴ http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/scheduled_castes_and_sceduled_tribes.aspx/ retrived on 10/01/2020 at 13:45 hrs.