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Loss of Cultural Identity: An overview of Collections of Endangered Tribal Languages in Odisha

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Abstract

The culture and tradition of India is very rich and often considered scientific. The multifarious culture bears a great bondage among the people of India. It happens to be possible and people get illuminated due to varieties of practices and knowledge imparted with each other since time immemorial. Odisha and Odia languages have got its place in constitution but it needs serious attention of the Govt. and people of Odisha. The life is changed and the world has been quite small. The modern gadgets and technologies have searched almost everything that human being needs today. It is ironical that the human being is searching for new living and non-living species exists on earth but it is not finding out the marginalised voice which is still roaming around the jungle for mere food for their survival. We have marched almost six decades of independence and the modernity in language has attained such height that we have started coding human language into machinery language. Odisha is located on the eastern coast of India, it was carved out of the province of Bihar in 1936, since then numerous things have got changed. People are promised, dreamt and made to sleep with peace and the next day they find the life unchanged. It seems as if they have inherited the issues by their birth and death is awaited which would of course, bring them the ultimate solution. There are huge numbers of tribal languages in Odisha. It is observed that they have long practised culture, tradition, therapy, beliefs, systems, values, morals, ethics, etc. which could add greater knowledge to rest of the world, moreover they are expected to be treated with utmost empathy. The language becomes the only barrier for them to reach us. The existing Govt. and system plays politics with the innocence as well religion conversion is also alarming nation-wide.

Keywords- Culture, Language, Odisha, Tradition, Tribal

Introduction

The state Odisha is comprised of thirty districts and a sizeable population resides here sharing different religion, culture, language etc. Tribal Languages in Odisha needs a handful help and encouragement, since time immemorial we have been living cordially with different tribes,

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even the tribal communities are described in mythologies and Hindu Puranas. The example of helpfulness and innocence is vividly sketched in books. However, the modern society is reluctant to extend a hand for help to revive the culture of the tribes. The term society derives from the communities and language is the soul of any community. The loss of any language can cause the loss of culture and rich practices. Hence the paper is an analytical study of different tribes and communities living in Odisha and their typical problems. The multi-cultural state Odisha is filled with tribes of different languages. There are almost 62 tribes including 13 primitive tribes among them. A survey report made by NGO's with state Govt. officials stated that they have around 72 varieties of mother tongue classified into 38 languages, out of which 19 languages are extinct and remaining are in dying situation. Tribal languages are supposed to be codified with scripts and preserved, but only four tribal languages have got their script and recognition till date. *Santhali*, *Ho*, *Sora*, *Kui lipi* have their script. *Santhali* language has got its place in the Eighth schedule and *Ho* is on its way to get included. The people of *Kuanrunda* and *Lathikata* blocks of the *Sundargarh* district, conducts a session every Thursday where , elders of the *Oraon* tribe make it a point to converse with younger members in Kurux, their mother language. The tribal communities like *Saura*, *Bhumia* and *Oraon* have taken necessary measure to draw the attention of the Govt. to protect their mother tongue. Mr. Sabar stated that "Handfuls of rice contributed by womenfolk is not enough when we confront the gigantic task of saving the Sora dialect. But with this, we ensure ownership of the community in preserving our language," Mr. Sabar has spent 15 years developing software for the Sora script and his contribution for bringing tribal languages to the main stream is worth appreciating. Recently they have drafted a memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime minister of India requesting to include their respective languages in the eighth schedule of the constitution. The state Govt. is also receiving petitions from different rural bodies to include their dialects in the eighth schedule of the constitution . There are tribes which holds a considerable numbers of speakers in Odisha and the linguists have been engaged to develop scripts for their spoken language. Tribes like *Munda*, *Koya*, *Khadia*, *Oraon*, *Bhumiya* are the most prominent tribes struggling for their language and recognition. ATLC researchers stated that "The languages like Odia, Hindi and English are promoted by the central and state Govt. and a student of the tribal community doesn't want to be left behind as these alienated languages could help him get mainstreamed into the development process". The technology proved bane for the tribal language prosperity as the popularity of Television and its use made the people feel inferior of their language, sense of living etc. to a greater extent. The youngsters of this generation feel ashamed of speaking their mother tongue publicly. A strong community-driven movement could save the dialects only as people are switching their dialects in a mass. The *Santhali* language has been brought into education stream and taught in more than 550 schools in the district of *Keonjhar* and *Mayurbhanj*. Koraput is one of the tribal district in Odisha province and the *Gadaba* tribe resides there with a sizeable population of 84689 (2011 census) in two blocks of the district.

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Gutab is the mother tongue of the tribe but it's hardly spoken and it has lost its importance among the new generation. Another living example is 1% of the 8,88,581 *Gonds*, who constitute the second largest tribal community in Odisha after the Santhals, can speak *Gondi* properly their language. The linguist believe that speakers of the tribe someday skip their mother tongue as they have started speaking in either Odia or *Desia*, another popular tribal dialect.

Govt. and Social Media

The Govt. and social media plays a vital role in everyone's life. It is quite obvious to note that after independence the govt has taken serious majors in the field of health, communication and education which are very primary. The life in Odisha is quite typical and even after the completion of six decades the people of Odisha are backward socially as well as economically. The only reason behind their poverty is poor literacy rate which squeezes the development. People can't think of a better life because they aren't aware of what is better life for them. They have not got exposed, even they are not recognised. The census has kept no record of their existence, it's shocking that few years back only some villages near *Niyamagiri* Hills of Odisha is recognised. Bijoy Mishra states, 'The language of the hills and tribal people are supposed to be researched thoroughly, the words of ancient origin have to be identified to give them recognition worldwide'. The tribal exploitation has crossed all limitation, the women of *Ghumsar Udayagiri* in Odisha are on the top in the list of living victims. The journey starts with the so called educated officials recruited in places like *Ganjam, Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj, Koraput, Sambalpur, Subarnapur, Sundargarh* and in many other tribal districts in different branches of the Govt. projects with a hope to uplift the standard of living of the tribal people. The innocent and poor tribal people were molested and their rising voice was shut up by power or money. The India Today has published a special report in its magazine with the title "How Tribal women of *Ghumsar, Udaygiri* village in Orissa are sexually exploited". The scenic beauty of that places attracts thousands of visitors to visit that place and it is regarded as Kashmir of Odisha, but for years the beautiful women of *Ghumsar, Udaygiri* have been duped by petty officials and contractors, who purchase a wife and spend time with them for few months and as their work gets over they leave the place as well the woman behind the jungle to suffer for the rest of her life. A survey report says that there had been more than 200 women living in that village with their kids with a hope that the man who loved her so much would return someday. The condition is harsh and pathetic to such an extent where values and ethics are questioned.

Activities and Actions

The endangered tribal languages in Odisha needs proper attention as it could add value to the linguistic studies and researches. The culture of Odisha is very rich and old. People have developed writing skill and maintained thousands of manuscripts. The researchers have discovered those manuscripts in a very poor condition, because they were

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not properly taken care of though they were very important from the linguistic and culture point of view. The traditional *Shriti Parampara* is jeopardized due to communication gap.

Satyasundara Barik in *The Hindu* entitled “Fearing that extinction of mother tongue would sound the death knell for their identities, people take ownership of their language”.

Parmananda Patel, a lead researcher with the Govt. run Academy of Tribal languages and Culture in Bhubaneswar remarked that “Communities are apprehensive that the extinction of their dialects would sound the death knell for their ethnic identities.”

The Odisha Govt. has extended its hand to lift the tribal languages. It has adopted Multi-Lingual Education programme in 2006, in which the mother tongue of tribal children is made medium of instruction for five years of primary education. There are around 24 languages included in MLE, however learning materials for 21 languages have been developed so far. The state Govt. is taking necessary majors and appointed 3385 tribal language teachers for teaching in various schools where the medium of instruction is a tribal language. Linguists have been engaged to prepare dictionaries for the students of different communities. However, 20 tribal dictionaries have been successfully compiled so far and some are on the track of publication. The community interest and Govt.’s effort would prevent the withering of tribal dialects.

Conclusion

The paper is based on analytical and descriptive study of languages in Odisha. The major dialects found in Odisha is facing a challenge for a long time. The condition is choking the cultural growth of the society. The state has been making policies to gain the confidence of the people as well commissions are framed to resolve the issues related with languages and tribes. The province is sharing a greater geographical part with the people of woods who can really be part of the development of the state as well as the country. The people are quite rich by heart and their honesty can be utilised as assets for the growth of the masses. The language is heart of any community and human being of such innocence could really be dumb in the society. The marginalised community don’t get acceptance with their language, and always expected to mingle with rest of the world with a new approach and alienated language, some of the rituals practised by them are supposed to be very primitive and scientific too. They are also inscribed by their ancestors but due to lack of knowledge and modern practices which is prevailing in every corner of the society, we are unable to recover them. There is major communication gap, the youngsters who are coming out of the society doesn’t know about their own culture as they are more fascinated and allured to learn either Odia or English and the outsider doesn’t know how to communicate with the elderly people of the village. The researchers and linguists are expected to go a step ahead to develop scripts for them to continue with their own language.

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