

# Importance of Mother Tongue as a Third Language in School Curriculum: Special Focus on the Galo Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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## Abstract

The identity of tribal people is deeply rooted in their native languages. Their mother tongue is the main source of their indigenous or traditional knowledge. At present, one of the prime challenges of tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh is to preserve the knowledge of their indigenous culture and tradition, which are mostly in the form of oral narratives. In this field, the Galo<sup>1</sup> tribe of Arunachal Pradesh has endeavored to document their oral narratives and promote and preserve their Indigenous knowledge through the mother tongue language textbook. The 'Gallo Ennam'<sup>2</sup> is the newly developed script of the mother tongue language of the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. It was recognized as a third language by the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh in 2008. Eventually, since 2010, their mother tongue language textbook has been introduced in the school curriculum of Galo inhabited areas. The main motto of the third language textbook is the preservation of indigenous knowledge in their native language among the younger generation of society. Hence, based on both primary and secondary sources from educational institutes and society, the paper discusses the importance of the mother tongue language as a medium of instruction and focuses on the implementation of the Galo language of Arunachal Pradesh as a third language in the school curriculum.

**Keywords:** Tribal, Preservation, Indigenous, Mother tongue, Textbooks, Galo.

## Introduction

The best way to communicate and to know the person is through the language he or she speaks. The home language or mother tongue works as magic to reach deep into a person's heart. One is readily accepted by the other when the communication takes place in the mother tongue. The connection of the mother tongue with a person is not just literal, but it has moral importance, leading to traditional and cultural importance. It is believed that the work done in the early stage is better than the work done later. The foundational stage of any person is the important phase when he or she can learn and speak any language in the best way. Mother tongue language is mostly the first language a child knows before he or she encounters any other language. Therefore, the knowledge about the child's surroundings impart in their local language is effortless and considered a cakewalk for a child in comparison to using a language different or new to them. Hence, it is believed to be the best medium in the field of teaching and learning to make learning feasible and enjoyable for children. "Evidence from all over the world, including from India, shows that children who study through their mother tongue or native language perform better in other subjects such

as mathematics and science compared with their peers who are taught through an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction."<sup>3</sup>

The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage 2022 states that; "The mother tongue or home language is more than just a mode of communication for the child, but also relates closely with the child's personal, social and cultural identity".<sup>4</sup>

In India, while acknowledging the role of the home language/mother language in the preservation of Indigenous traditional knowledge, many steps and contributions have taken place gradually in the history of education to encourage the importance of the mother tongue alongside the use of other languages.

The first comprehensive plan for education in India, 'Wood's Education Dispatch,' was released on 19th July 1854. It has been considered as the foundation stone of the education system of India. According to it, the medium of instruction was optional, with both vernacular and English being accepted. The vernacular was accepted at the School level and English at the university.<sup>5</sup> Following that, many other educational recommendations and constitutional provisions on the mother tongue as a medium of teaching and learning in primary alongside English in higher education are being advocated.

The principle of the three-language formula was first discussed in the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) meeting in 1957. Later, the first Education Policy, the Kothari Commission of 1964, headed by Dr. DS Kothari, encouraged multilingualism. Though the recommendation had no specific guideline on mother tongue, it underlined that the "medium of education in school and higher education should generally be the same...the regional languages are adopted as the medium of education in higher education.... three language formula should be implemented".<sup>6</sup>

The first National Curriculum Framework (NCF), published in 1975, stated that the child should learn the first language, which would generally be his mother tongue, to a level where he can communicate easily with others through properly articulate speech and in writing".<sup>7</sup> Further, it advocated, "By the end of the primary stage, the pupil should have acquired the competence to express orally, as in writing, through the standard form of the mother tongue".<sup>8</sup>

National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education- A Framework 1988 advocated the importance of mother tongue in school Education. It stated that in the case of whose mother tongue is different from the regional language, the mother tongue may be used as a medium during the first two years of primary education, and the regional language should be used for other classes at elementary and secondary stages.<sup>9</sup>

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2000 advocated that a child's first language as a medium of learning must be the mother tongue or the regional language.<sup>10</sup> Followed by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 said that when children enter school, they have full control and competency over their home language, so "the language must be accepted as they are, with no attempt to correct them."<sup>11</sup>

Most significantly, The New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 has mentioned, "Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but probably till grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language".<sup>12</sup> Henceforward, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2022 states, "There is indeed overwhelming evidence from across the world, including from India, that shows that children who studied through their mother tongue or a home or familiar language perform better in other subjects such as mathematics and science compared with other peers who are thought through an unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction".<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore, and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) are developing primers of a total of 121 languages in 2024.

This initiative includes several tribal languages spoken by people of the northeast, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and other regions. In August 2023, the primers of Kuwi and Desia, languages of Odisha, were released. These efforts aim to connect the children to their roots through teaching and learning.<sup>14</sup>

Under Article 350A. Facilities **for mother instruction –tongue at the primary stage** -It shall be the endeavor of every state and of every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother –tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any state as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities. Article 29 follows: Protection of rights of minorities.

- (1) Any section of the citizens having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own residing in any part of the territory of India shall have the right to conserve the same. Section 29(f) of Chapter V under the Right to Education Act 2009 states that the Medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in the child's mother tongue.

Further, while promoting equitable access to education, the theme of (IMLD) International Mother Language Day 2023 identified by UNESCO- "Multilingual education –a necessity to transform education" clearly recognized the value of mother tongue education in transforming the education process and bridging the inequalities of access to knowledge. The theme of 2024 advocates, "Multilingual education is the pillar of intergenerational learning". A UN statement said, "Multilingual education based on the mother tongue(s) in the early years of schooling plays a key role in the transition from home to school and fosters diversity".<sup>15</sup>

At present, the inclusion of the mother tongue in the school curriculum is encouraged in different parts of India. In the North-East, communities at large are heading towards the homogenous task of preserving their identity through their language and literature. Languages like Mising, Rabha, Karbi, Tiwa, Deori Dimasa, Sadri, etc., from Assam, have been introduced as a medium of instruction in the foundational stage, whereas earlier in 2023, Santhali has been already introduced as a medium of teaching and learning.<sup>16</sup> Languages like Anal, Gangte, Hmar, Linagmei, Moa, etc are recognized as a medium of teaching in Manipur. It has been mentioned that "way back in 1965 till date 18 tribal languages are recognized as a medium of teaching and learning in School of Manipur".<sup>17</sup> In Nagaland, though, there is a frequent urge from the Nagaland Government to allow them to continue with English as a medium of instruction while citing the problems of various linguistic categories within the state. At present, only four Naga dialects, namely, Lotha, Sumi, and Tenyidie are being taught beyond class VIII".<sup>18</sup> In the state of Mizoram, "there are five mediums of instruction available in the elementary level of schooling in Mizoram such as Bengali medium, Hindi medium, Nepali medium, Mizo medium and English medium of instruction. Among these, the two most prominent are Mizo and the English medium".<sup>19</sup> Though the mushrooming of English medium schools has overshadowed the mother tongue language, the number of Mizo medium schools is still higher in rural areas and is considered a prominent part of teaching and learning. In Sikkim, "the medium of instruction across Sikkim remains English. But Bhutia, Lepcha, Limbu, Newar, and Rai may be taken as an additional subject by students who hail from these communities.".<sup>20</sup>

Arunachal Pradesh is a land of as many as 111 scheduled tribes.<sup>21</sup> It is situated in the Northeastern corner of India. At present, in Arunachal, script development is loud and strong. The Arunachal Pradesh government is giving importance to the indigenous languages of the state, and they have been working to develop scripts for various indigenous languages of the state. It is mentioned that "Any discussion on the language of Arunachal Pradesh, to begin with, has to take into account the general perception of speakers

of those languages themselves. But, the member of each tribe or even sub-tribes strike an attitude of distinction in their respective speech forms as a mark of group identity and believe that their speech forms are distinct from other tribes and sub-tribe".<sup>22</sup> Thus, different speech of various ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh are being considered as languages in Arunachal Pradesh. Tribes like Wancho, Tangsa, Kaman, Taraon, Idu Adi, Nyisi, Tagin Kaman, Idu, and Tangsa, etc, are currently working on the revitalization of their language through documentation of their oral literature. They have introduced their mother tongue language textbooks in the school curriculum as a third language.

The objective of the present paper is to discuss the importance of the mother tongue or native language as a medium of instruction in schools. Meanwhile, it focuses on the implementation of mother tongue textbooks of the Galo tribe in the school curriculum of Galo-inhabited areas.

Galo tribe resides in West Siang, Lapa Rada, and Lower Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh. A considerable number of Galos also reside in East Siang, Upper Subansiri, and the heart of the capital, Itanagar. The Galos belong to the Tani branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is considered one of the largest and most diverse language families in the world. When it comes to communication and language, the Galos have their language, which is a sub-group of the 'Tibeto-Burman'<sup>23</sup> language. However, within Galo as a single language, there are numerous sub-dialects classified as Karko, Tai, Gensii, Taipodia, Zirido, Laree, Baam, and Puugoo etc. The script of the Mother tongue language of the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh is called Gallo Ennam. Here, 'Gallo' stands for Galo people, and 'Ennam' stands for a script. The Galo tribe has carved a niche with the implementation of their mother tongue in the teaching and learning process as a third language. Since 2008, their mother tongue language (MTL) has been adopted as a medium of teaching and learning in the various schools of Galo inhabited areas.

Further adding, the home is the first school of a child before he enters formal schooling. Mostly, when a child is introduced to formal education, he or she has competency in their mother tongue and is ready to learn the surroundings through the same. Hence, in that stage of early learning, every child should be encouraged to use their mother tongue language rather than lowering them by imposing a language completely new and indifferent to them "A child must never be discouraged from the speaking or made to feel ashamed by their home language."<sup>24</sup> It is believed that "Stories, poems, songs, and drama link children to their cultural heritage."<sup>25</sup>

Oral literature, no doubt, will remain the best source to know the culture and ethnicity of the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. But with time, due to limited sources, the oral tradition is hardly available to the present generation like earlier. The knowledge of the Indigenous forest, their flora, and fauna, the history of the tribe, the myths and stories, etc., of Indigenous tribes are available in oral narratives and need to be documented. So, the teaching and learning process is considered the best medium to pass down this knowledge of the past to the present generation the same will remain available for future generations, too, and in a process, the mother tongue itself will be saved from becoming extinct. Like other tribes of the Arunachal Pradesh, the Galo people believe in the documentation of their oral narratives in their mother tongue and preserving them for the younger generation. In a process, the textbook is one of the important mediums to showcase ethnic diversity as well as to give knowledge about one culture and tradition.

Endeavor for documentation of oral narrative in their mother tongue started with the development of the script of the Galo Tribe called Galoo Ennam. "North East Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) organized a seminar "**Script Development for the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with special reference to the Galos**" in November 2001, sponsored by the National Museum of Mankind, Bhopal."<sup>26</sup> It was organized to discuss different aspects and feasibilities of devising a script for the Galo

community of Arunachal Pradesh. To follow up with the recommendation of the seminar held in NERIST, Nirjuli, on 22-23 November 2001, the Central Institute of Indian Language, Mysore (CIIL), in collaboration with the Galo Welfare Society (GWS), conducted a workshop for the preparation of primer in Galo. The workshop was conducted at NERIST, Nirjuli, from 20th January to 18th February 2004 and was participated by scholars from different dialectal groups of Arunachal Pradesh under the guidance of Dr. Tado Karlo, Chairman, Galo Language Development Committee (GLDC)<sup>27</sup> of Galo welfare committee (GWS).<sup>28</sup> The month-long workshop ended with the finalization of the primers. Accordingly, the books from the workshop were released in the VI 'Galoo Baanv Kvba'<sup>29</sup> held at Basar<sup>30</sup> in 2006. Thus, the finalized form of the Galo mother tongue language script was accepted as named 'Galoo Ennam'.

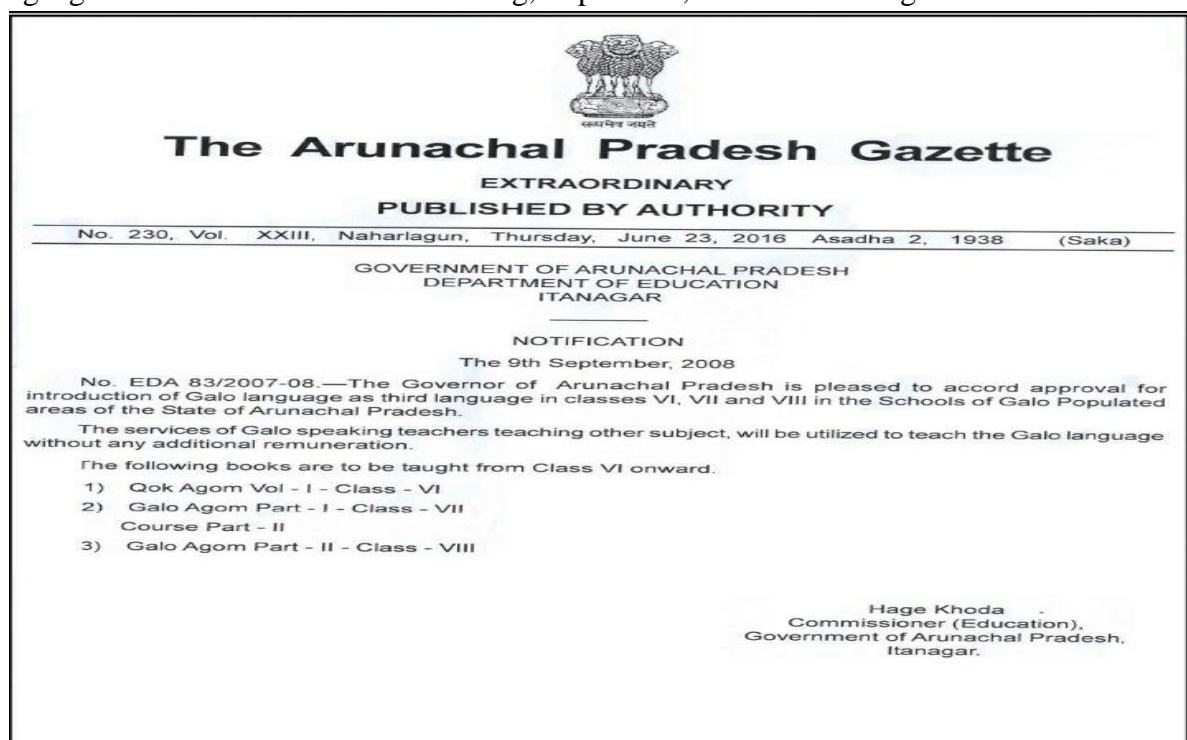
The State Govt. vide its official Gazette Notification No.EDA-83/2007-08 Dated 9th September 2008 accorded approval for the introduction of Galo Language as a third language in classes VI, VII, and VIII in the schools of Galo populated districts 28 of the state. Gradually, in early 2009, the International Standard Organization (ISO 639-3) also recognized the existence of the Galo language.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the textbook on the Mother tongue language of Galo was introduced in the schools of Galo areas from the session 2010.<sup>32</sup> Keeping in view the recommendation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) had been entrusted with the responsibility of publication of the mother tongue language textbooks in the state, and as a part of the process, the official publication of Galo Mother tongue textbook was carried out in 2021, under the chief mentorship of Mrs. Soumya Saurabh, IAS Special Secretary, Elementary Education, and Government of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>33</sup>

The following books were implemented to be taught from class VI onwards.<sup>34</sup>

1. Qok Agom vol-I - class VI
2. Galo Agom part-I - class VII, course part
3. Galo Agom part-II-class VIII

Eventually, the government of Arunachal Pradesh appointed Mother Tongue Language teachers of the Galo language in various schools of West Siang, Lepa Rada, and Lower Siang districts.





However, the influence of English and Hindi language is the major challenge the mother tongue language is facing in Arunachal Pradesh. English is the primary medium of instruction in schools. It is the official language of the state. Several English tuition and coaching centers scattered in different parts of the state also prove the importance of the English language among the common masses. In communication, in the absence of a unified language, Hindi has made inroads into every community. People are more at ease with Hindi as a medium of exchange among different tribes and sub-tribes. Gradually, over the years English and Hindi have overshadowed the importance of local dialects/languages among the tribal.

### Conclusion

Hence the implementation of the mother tongue language of the Galo tribe as a third language in educational institutes is an effort to preserve the linguistic and cultural identity of the tribe with a message to the young generation that learning any other language should not be carried out at the cost of the native language rather, it should be alongside it.

Most importantly, to encourage the use of their Mother tongue as the main means of communication (both written and verbal) among the community on a larger scale alongside other languages such as Hindi and English. Further, the comprehensive study on the proper application of the third language textbooks of Galo and the perspectives of the teachers and students of different schools can provide more information on mother tongue textbooks in Galo-inhabited areas.

### Notes & References:

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