

# A Study on Decline of Tribal Language in Arunachal Pradesh

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## **Abstract:**

Language is an important aspect of tribal life which reflects the world view of the tribe, tradition and culture. Loss of language leads to extinct of traditional knowledge. Indigenous languages all around the world are facing a threat of extinction due to several factors. Arunachal Pradesh being home to 26 major tribes and 110 sub tribes is a hotspot of endangered language in the world. With globalization, spread of modern education, migration, absence of written scriptures, influence of dominating language like Assamese, Hindi and English, the native language of the state are on the verge of extinction. This poses serious challenges to Arunachal languages on annihilation.

**Keywords:** Language, Language vitality, Endangered Language.

## **Introduction**

Language is a window of the society. It transmits one's traditions, culture, knowledge and beliefs from one generation to another generation. It helps in preserving and protecting ones traditional and cultural aspects of community, literature, songs, folktales, proverbs, prayers, stories etc are some of the medium through which language passes from information and culture of one generation to other. It is a phenomenon in the process of the evolution of Life. A language gives meaning to our lives, expresses diverse cultural traits and shapes our very perception of the world around us. It is one of the fundamental ways of establishing our identity and also shaping other people's views of who we are. It reflects ones identity through the words you speaks to others. Every nation around the world is known by their language identity or by their mother tongue. It is a means of understanding ourselves and society we belongs. Language plays a major role in defining ourselves in relation and in contrast with others. The loss of language also causes the loss of other culturally significant practices that are dependent on the language. Oral histories are lost if no one speak the language any more. Likewise, traditional songs, poetry and other verbal art forms are lost. Language loss has a significant impact on both the collective and the individual identities of a community.

Language shows the diverse cultural traits of human society through the medium of verbal and oral words. Each and every society around the globe is mirrored in their usages of various terms, words, phrases, proverbs, songs, prayers etc. The language shows the worldview of a particular group of people such as the indigenous tribes are most well understood in their usage of words and sentences in relation to their connection with the nature and surroundings. Diversity is the one of important element of beauty in nature. A loss of a single language is a great loss for the world. That ends the diverse colors of the language.

### **Language Vitality**

Language vitality is the degree to which a language is used, maintained, and transmitted from one generation to another within a community. It is important for preserving cultural identity, traditions, and knowledge. When a language loses vitality, it may become endangered or disappeared completely.

#### **According to UNESCO, language vitality depends on several factors.**

1. Intergenerational language transmission
2. Number of speakers
3. Domains of language use
4. Language attitudes
5. Government and institutional support
6. Documentation and literacy

### **Endangered Language**

An endangered language is a language that is at risk of no longer being used, as its speakers shift to another language or die out. Language endangerment is a serious concern. For a variety of reasons, speakers of many smaller, less dominant languages stop using their heritage language and begin using a more dominant language. Parents may begin to use only that more dominant language with their children and thus the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language is stopped. As a consequence there are fewer speakers who use the language as their first or primary language and eventually the language may no longer be used at all. A language may become dormant or extinct, existing perhaps only in recordings or written records and transcriptions. Languages which have not been adequately documented disappear altogether. The world's linguistic landscape is rapidly changing, with many languages facing the threat of extinction. Language endangerment is a complex issue that affects not only the speakers of endangered languages but also the cultural heritage and identity of communities worldwide. Language endangerment may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions.

### **Linguistic Landscape of Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the linguistically most diverse regions in Asia, being home to as many as 50 distinct languages in addition to innumerable speech varieties thereof. The vast majority of the languages identified belong to the Tibeto-Burman and Tai language families. Language in Arunachal Pradesh is divided into many groups: - Tani Groups- Nishi, Tagin, Galo, Adi, Apatani and Mishing group usually used in central part of the state. The vast majority of Arunachal Pradesh speaks Tani language from Tibeto-Burman language family. To the east of the state lies Mishmi group of Tibeto-Burman :Idu, Digaru and Miju. The further south, we find Singpho Language which belongs from Kachin family, usually used by major speakers in Kachin state in Myanmar and the presence of Nocte, Wangcho and Tangsha groups in the state shows affiliation of Naga Language, spoken in the state of Nagaland. To the west and north of the state, we find Bodic Language such as Monpa, Memba and Khamba. Most speakers of these languages are closely related to Tibetan and Bhutan Language. In eastern part, Tai Khamti language is a single representative of the Tai family, which is closely affiliated to the Shan language of

Myanmar’s Shan state. Besides these languages, the state has also many languages which are quite distinct and unique from other languages, Such as Bugun, Koro, Nah, Miji, Bangru, Puroik, Sherdukpen, Hruso and Lisu. Arunachal Pradesh is a state which is a store house of rich linguistic varieties and knowledge in the world. These languages are not merely tools for communication — they are living repositories of ancient myths, local knowledge systems, community memory, and spiritual wisdom. Each one holds the identity of a people, mapping their relationships with the forest, rivers, ancestors, and each other.

**Endangered Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh**

**Table.1**

Population and Degree of Endangerment of Languages of Arunachal Pradesh			
Sl. No.	Tribes (Language)	Population (2001 Census)	Degree of Endangerment
1.	Tani Languages		
	Adi	120118	Unsafe
	Tongam	227	Critically Endangered
	Milong	3150	Critically Endangered
	Apatani	27676	Unsafe
	Galo	75768	Unsafe
	Nyishi	163020	Unsafe
	Tagin	39129	Unsafe
	Nah	1000	Critically Endangered
	Puroik	3945	Definitely Endangered
2.	Tai Khampti	12925	Unsafe
3.	Mishmi	35085	
	Idu		Definitely Endangered
	Miya		Definitely Endangered
	Taruon/Digaru		Unsafe
4.	Nocte	36299	Unsafe
5.	Wancho	47788	Unsafe
6.	Khowa (Bugun)	1616	Critically Endangered
7.	Monpa	43344	Unsafe
8.	Mayor	391	Critically Endangered
9.	Miji	6721	Definitely Endangered
10.	Sherdukpen	3260	Unsafe
11.	Singpho	4539	Definitely Endangered
12.	Aka (Hruso)	5140	Definitely Endangered
13.	Tangsa	29538	Unsafe

Source: Arunachal institute of Tribal Studies and UNESCO

In its variety of linguistic diversity, Arunachal Pradesh doesn’t have any tribal language of the state as lingua franca. There are 26 major tribes and 10 sub tribes in the state with different languages and dialects. During the 1960s, the introduction of Assamese and Hindi as the language subject in school education and English as an official language in the state eventually created a lingua franca which later was used by the diverse speech communities of the state to effectively communicate with each other. Through years of usage of this highly functional language variety a major language shift has occurred amongst the native speakers of tribal languages of the state towards the lingua franca referred to as Arunachal Hindi. The tribal languages of the state are on the verge of extinction due to this language shift. The increasing numbers of incompetent speakers of mother tongue among the young population reflects the endangered scenario of the native languages. With the rise of migration of people from other states in Arunachal Pradesh. There is no increase of other languages in the state. The Indo-European languages Assamese, Bengali, English, Nepali and especially Hindi are making strong inroads into Arunachal Pradesh. Primarily as a result of the primary education system- in which classes are generally taught by Hindi-speaking immigrant teachers from Bihar and other Hindi-speaking parts of northern

India – a large and growing section of the population now speaks a semi-creolized variety of Hindi as its mother tongue. Because of the linguistic diversity of the region, English is the only official language recognized in the state.

### **Globalization**

With the rapid growth of globalization and industrialization in the world, Arunachal Pradesh along with the rest of India has emphasized on the modernization of the society and people. The dawn of modernization has led to the growth of urban places in the region in the state with different gathering together in these places. With the absence of one common language among the tribes of the state the situation led to the using of the Hindi as a lingua franca in the state. Hindi gradually began to replace the role of indigenous language of the tribe in social and other domains of their daily life.

### **Migration and urbanization**

The effects of migration and urbanization further exaggerate the language endangerment. As young people move to cities for education and work, they adapt to dominant languages for survival and integration, leaving behind their native languages as relics of the past. Most of the speakers from rural villages use link language like Hindi and Assamese in their daily life to communicate with others gradually diminishing the role of local language in their life. This led to a situation where the speakers began to use the dominant language more in compare to their own mother tongue. The uses of major language in family gatherings, friend's events and official gatherings sidelined the native language as a dormant language in the community. The students and youths migrating to cities in search of better prospects also find them in a situation where they do not have any other speakers apart from themselves to make conversation in their own language.

### **Transition of Demography**

With the influence of Globalization in the state, the rise of migrant population has also increased. As labour market in Arunachal Pradesh was absent among the local people development activities initiated by the government of India brought workers both skilled and unskilled from different parts of the country to this region. The rise of the migrant workers led to use of the Hindi and Assamese in the state and the medium of communication with the tribes of the state. With the absence of common language among the different tribes of the state the workers continued to use their own language in their day to day conversation. Unlike the other states of North East states in India like Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, where the immigrants workers learns the Native Mother Tongue to get employment there. Usually the migrant population tends to use the language of the particular state. But in the case of Arunachal a reverse trend occurred. This fact in a way reflects the negative attitude tribes have toward one's own tribal language.

### **Introduction of scheduled language in the state**

During 1950s, with absence of common language among the tribes of the state, the Assamese was used as medium of instruction in the academic institutions of the state by the teachers mostly from Assam,. This language was also used by the people in trade fairs and exchange of goods with the traders from the Assam. With the introduction of Assamese Language in the academic institution there grew a number of students well versed in the Assamese language. Assamese became link language amongst the diverse

linguistics groups of students. That is reflected in the first generation of the academicians, writers, administrators, politicians and elders. Every tribe employs Assamese language for their conversation and expression of views. The numbers of poetry and novels published in the language by the reputed writers such as Y.D Thongchi and Lummar Dai gives us a glimpse of Assamese literature in the state. Assamese was the first outsider language which was introduced in the state for educational as well as a common lingua-franca among the masses.

After independence, the government of India decided to introduce the Devanagari script for local language and Hindi in the whole of Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFA). With the introduction of the Hindi Language in the state, the teachers from central India were transferred in large numbers to teach the students of the state. This gradually increases the numbers of Hindi speaking students in the region. Another important factor for the growth of Hindi in the educational institutions is the 1962 Indo-China war. Having tasted defeat at the hands of Chinese in 1962 war and facing rebellion in other NE states like Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. The Central government under leadership of then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru started the process of integrating the state of Arunachal with migration of speakers from mainland India. Large numbers of Hindi speakers along with Hindi teachers was pushed into the state and with that process of slow death of tribal culture began. Later years in another major step which contributed to the worsening of situation, the government of Arunachal in the 80s introduced Hindi as main language right from the primary school level.

In 1971, the administration decided to affiliate all schools of Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA) to the central school system with English as the medium of instruction. Since then the numbers of the English speaking community members are gradually increasing. The introduction of these scheduled languages in the state has greatly influenced the indigenous language as the children of a community are restricted to use their own mother tongue in educational premises.

### **Absence of written scriptures**

Most tribes of the state do not have their language script which results into the loss of culture and traditions with the intrusion of other dominate language in their daily life. Only Monpa with their Bodhic script and Khampti with their Khampti script have a written form of language in the state. Thus, they are in a secure position in compare to the other vernacular languages of the state. While the other tribes of the state like Galo, Tagin, Nocte, Mishmi, Apatani etc use only spoken form of language. The absence of a written script makes the preservation of language difficult for the future generations. Without written records, traditional knowledge related to culture, folktales, folksongs, myths etc. gradually fade away. It also led to introduction of Hindi and English as Language for formal education as there is no written form of language to use. Under such circumstances the language gradually dies in natural ways.

### **Conclusion**

The influence of Globalization, change in demography and introduction of scheduled languages has diminished their role of the indigenous language in the state. This is noticed in the young speakers who are well versed in Hindi language other than their own mother tongue. The numbers of the students conversing in their native languages with their family and friends is decreasing. Loss of language is a great loss for the community members as the language is one of the significant aspects of their identity. Not only it determines the identity of the ethnic group but it also transfers the traditional knowledge and

culture from one generation to another. language is the window by which we see into the tribal mind. Language can be saved or destroyed by the community members themselves. The role of the community members plays a vital role in maintaining and preserving their language. Language use of the community members decides the fate of their language. It is their steps and initiative that will lead to protection of the purest forms of languages. The parents should impose the learning of mother tongue amongst children within the family first. Without the participation from the community members first and followed by the government many languages of the state will vanish in the near future.

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