

Language Crisis among Tribal Youths in Ranchi

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Abstract

Language is not just a way of communication, it is more than that. The rapid changes have weakened tribal languages among youths, and is impacting their identity, knowledge, traditions, culture etc.. which is resulting in the language crisis among tribal youths. This study examines the importance of tribal language mainly among youth and future generation and it also examines that if the tribal language is lost it means losing rich culture diversity. Globalisation, urbanisation, modernisation, marginalisation, migration, cultural assimilation etc are the main reason that the tribal language is at the risk of extinction among youth/younger generation. This study uses mixed method approach. The findings of this study show that how migration, urbanisation, modernisation, etc took upon younger generation that they abandoned their own tribal language and adopt to dominant languages. The findings also show the steps youth should take to preserve tribal language.

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Keywords: tribal language, language crisis, tribal youth, language shift, language extinction and decline, language loss, language preservation and revitalization, linguistic identity, cultural identity, tribal communities, youth language practice, cultural heritage, language and identity, urbanization, modernization, globalization, migration, dominant languages, hindi and English influence, language assimilation, social change, cultural transformation, government policies, youth participation, tribal education, Ranchi tribal languages.

INTRODUCTION

A tribal language is a language spoken by Tribal/Indigenous communities and they have their own, language, culture, traditions, identity, indigenous knowledge. The tribal language gives the identity from which tribe someone belongs to. The tribal language are passed down from one generation to another through songs, daily life, storytelling etc. But many tribal languages are endangered because the younger generation adopted the dominant language and abandoned their tribal language. The concept of tribal language resulted in identity crisis refers to the decline or the loss of tribal languages among tribal communities, mainly seen in the younger generations. When tribals migrate from their own ancestral land to urban or international places, the decline or the extension of tribal languages can be seen. Tribal communities mainly youngster's often experience cultural and linguistic shifts due to modernization, urbanization, migration, globalization, and also by formal education system. Migration and urbanization effects the tribal language and reshapes the identity and adapts to the host societies or surroundings. Language is not just a way of communication. Tribal language also holds cultural knowledge, oral traditions, folklore, collective identity and many more things. The tribal language also preserves, tradition's, rituals, and spiritual practices, oral histories and many more things. And hence all these things are at the high risk of being vanished or extinct. When tribals migrate to different place,

city or country the urbanisation takes place and hence dominant languages replace the tribal-indigenous languages, and the tribal languages are left behind for the survival. And this leads to assimilation and identity fragmentation. Language and cultural preservation is important among younger generation as they use dominant languages in their everyday life and have adopted to dominant language more.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There were very few studies of tribal language crisis/extinction in Ranchi. Dr Dipankar Biswas (2024) talks about the extinction and importance to maintain cultural identity, traditional knowledge system which language carries and tells about causes which is leading to tribal language extinction and preservation. Dr MK Devappa (2018) tells about distribution, classification and cultural importance of various tribes in India, like, Dravidian, Indo Aryan etc in diverse linguistic places.

Numbers of studies have been conducted on topics related to tribal language crisis/extinction in India. But few based on Ranchi which indirectly reflect the tribal language crisis among youths.

Language is not just a means of communication, (Satyabrata Acharya, Debarshi Kumar Sanail, Jayeeta Mazumdar, Partha Pahitim Das 2023) highlighted the features and cultural value of Munda Languages that the loss of language is not only a decline in communication but also a cultural and identity loss. They talks about the creation of digital library and digital archive that preserves the language data like audio recording, text records etc. (Priyanka Karunamay, Dr. Rasmirekha Shethy, Dr. Dipanshu Sharma 2024) tribal language carries many indigenous knowledge, like the Adivasi ayurvedic medicines. The indigenous knowledge system plays a fundamental role in environmental conservation and sustainable education and Oraon tribe indigenous knowledge system as a valuable knowledge system and to be applied into modern education and environmental policies for a good future. (Poonam Tripathi 2018) in today generation the tribal youths don't even know what is totem or the symbol behind their totem and hence impact of urbanization and modernization which is leading to cultural loss and identity crisis in younger generation. Totem and taboo are language, myths, oral traditions and when myths disappear the meaning of totem is also lost and this leads to the identity crisis. (Dr. Abhijit Ghosal & Suchismita Sen 2012) when tribals migrate they adopt the dominant languages and abandon their own language and culture, in their study they tell how the tribal people adapt to the urban lifestyle after the migration from Jharkhand to Kolkata, and this leads to the extinction of their culture, identity and they are struggling to preserve their cultural identity. (Madhu Ranjanin 2018) preservation and revitalization of tribal language is important for today's youth and future generations, in her study, it is important to maintain the richness of tribal languages, challenges, preservation, revitalization including declining number of speakers to preserve the tribal language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Urbanisation, globalisation, modernisation, migration etc, led to the loss of tribal languages among youths and they abandon their tribal language and adopt dominant languages. The older generation, parents and grandparents are fluent and speak their own tribal language but the tribal language is now being passed to younger generation and the youths adapted to dominant language and feel shame/shy to speak their own tribal language. As said earlier language is not just a means of communication. Urbanisation, globalisation, migration, cultural assimilation, modernisation, influence of western culture etc, have cast their shadow on the tribal youths. The less use of tribal language can weaken the ties among their tribal community. Rapid language shift from tribal language to dominant language can be seen that the tribals abandon their

tribal language sometimes to get the recognition, or not to feel left out in the dominant societies and hence the cultural assimilation occurs. This shift can be seen because of urbanisation, migration, education, employment, modernisation, globalisation, media etc, to maintain social mobility in the host society. And these all can be the problem of the tribal language crisis because to maintain the new status the tribal youths abandon their own language, culture, identity. When we go to village we can see the youths living in village can speak, understand their on tribal language but on the other hand when we see the youths living in city, urban areas they don't even know their own tribal language can the reason be that the tribal language is not being passed down to younger generation. We can say that but only for the youths who live in city and urban areas because they don't feel the need to speak their tribal language as they have adopted to the dominant language of the host societies they live in. language is interconnected with a persons identity and from which tribe they belong to. The less use of tribal language among youth can lead to the extinction of tribal language not now but maybe in future as the tribal language is not being passed down to younger generations and lead to identity loss. (Satyabrata Acharya, Debarshi Kumar Sanail, Jayeeta Mazumdar, Partha Pahitim Das 2023) highlighted the features and cultural value of Munda Languages that the loss of language is not only a decline in communication but also a cultural and identity loss. And migration is of the huge cause of tribal language crisis among youths as (Abhijit Ghosal & Suchismita Sen 2012) said in their study that, when tribals migrate they adopt the dominant languages and abandon their own language and culture, in their study they tell how the tribal people adapt to the urban lifestyle after the migration from Jharkhand to Kolkata, and this leads to the extinction of their culture, identity.

The social identity theory explains that language is important part of group identity, loss of the tribal language weakens the cultural identity and the community ties (Henri Tajfel). Language shift theory explains that how communities abandon their own native/ tribal language for dominant languages, and this helps in understanding the causes of the tribal language crisis (Joshua Fishman). Language is not just tool for communication it carries identity cultural and traditional knowledge heritage. The decline in tribal languages is loss in terms of, it leads to identity crisis, and weakens the connection with the traditions, customs etc. when said tribal language carries traditional heritage or knowledge it means the knowledge about medicine, agriculture etc. and the tribal language crisis may result in disappearance and these traditional knowledge which can benefit not only in today modern society but for in future too. The rapid growth of modernisation, globalisation, migration, influence of dominant languages, effect of media and TV are the reasons for the decline and extinction of tribal languages among youth.

Social identity theory says that language is important in forming who we are as an individuals or as groups, its related to the identity. Language shift theory explains that how the tribes slowly started using a widely spoken language, dominant languages instead of their own language. These two theories help us understand how tribal language is dying out can cause problems with identity and they also help us see how language and identity are connected.

(Dr. Ram Dayal Munda) Losing a language means losing an entire way of life. For Dr. Ram Dayal Munda their was one motto "Nachi se Baanchi" (dance to survive) where the cultural erosion can be seen because of modernisation and assimilation which threatened tribal existence. In his book "Adi-Dharma" Dr. Ram Dayal Munda said "if you take the tribals away from his land it is like stopping him from breathing and if you want to see tribal disappear take him away from his lang" what happens to tribals when big projects are built on his land? He has to leave his home and move to cities. And in the city they work as labourer or servant and he loses his independence and self respect and hence the tribal loses his language and culture

when they are forced to leave the land. In his another book “Adivasi Astitva aur Jharkhand Asmitake” he talks about the identity, culture and language of tribal people. he believed that to save languages people need to build schools and be proud of their cultural heritage.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies mixed method (i) Qualitative data was taken from interviews, and (ii) Quantitative data were taken from structured interview. The findings of the study were analysed using narrative and descriptive analysis to gain greater understanding. The mixed method is used to know the reason behind the tribal language crisis among tribal youths. This study is designed to, study in Ranchi, India. The objective of the study is to identify the tribal language crisis among youths in Ranchi, and the causes and how tribal language gets affected by various factors that shape their identity. The study was conducted in 2026 on a sample of 70 tribal youths living in Ranchi. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. In terms of gender 39 females and 31 males were interviewed. The sample included tribal students, employed, unemployed youths from different tribes in Ranchi. In terms of tribes 32 Oraon, 21 Munda, 1 Odiya, 13 Santhal, 3 Kharia youths were interviewed. The age of the youths varied from 18-25 years. Data was collected only after the stated objectives of the study were told to respondents and received their consent to carry out the interview. The interview was carried out in privacy.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study used mixed methods approach. The conclusions was made on the basis of results of quantitative analysis led to formulation of questions for collecting data for qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis was conducted to confirm or disconfirm or to provide the further explanation of the findings from quantitative analysis. The first part of analysis was to quantify extinction of tribal language that can be associated with urbanisation, migration, globalisation, etc. through descriptive analysis. Both quantitative data and qualitative data are combined to create data sets and integrate into a whole in the mixed method approach.

DISCUSSION

The data revealed that 54.29% of the respondents cannot speak and understand their tribal language. 31.43% of the respondents can speak and understand tribal language moderately and 14.29% of the respondents can fluently speak the tribal language.

The data revealed that 88.57% respondents speak Hindi and English in their daily life and 11.43% speak youths speak in tribal language with Hindi in their daily life at home and community gatherings.

82.86% respondent believed that the use of tribal language is decreasing among youth and language is important for preserving tribal culture, knowledge and identity while 17.14% not believe so.

The data revealed that 15.71% respondents feel shy/ ashamed in speaking their tribal language and are not proud in speaking their tribal language while 14.29% do not feel shy or ashamed and are proud of speaking their tribal language. And the rest 70.00% did not respond.

The data revealed that 94.29% of the respondents agree that tribal language is decreasing among youths because of migration, urbanisation, westernisation, globalisation, use of dominant languages, modernisation, marginalisation, while 5.71% disagree.

58.57% youth respondents believe that tribal languages are at risk of disappearing and observe a decline in their use, while 27.14% do not agree and 14.29% are not sure.

88.57% of tribal youths respondents said that they lived in a city since their childhood and this can also be the reason that they don't know, understand, speak their tribal language. While the 11.43% respondents said they did not live in city since childhood or always.

The data also revealed that 51.43% of respondents agree that tribal language gives social respect within their tribal community while the 48.57% respondents disagree.

Data revealed that 41.43% respondents know their tribal language because their parents taught them their tribal language. While the rest 58.57% respondents don't know tribal language because their parents never taught them and hence it can be seen that the tribal language is not being passed down from generations to generations. And hence the data revealed that 12.86% respondents think that tribal language is being passed on the next generation. But 87.14% respondents don't think that the tribal language is not being passed down to younger generations.

Ability to Speak and Understand Tribal Language	Number of Respondents (F)	Percentage (P)
Cannot speak and understand tribal language	38	54.29%
Can speak and understand tribal language moderately	22	31.43%
Can fluently speak the tribal language	10	14.29%
Total	70	100.00%
MODE (Highest Frequency)	Cannot speak and understand tribal language	38 (54.29%)

CASELETS

Regarding the question related to, why do you think young people are using tribal language less. Many tribal youth replied that:

The first youth responded that,

“Because of urbanisation, westernisation, modernisation, migration and I always lived in a city. And because of the dominant language we use in our daily life. Migration, urbanisation, western influence, have you ever noticed how today's youth talk putting some gen-z words while they speak and these all are effect of social media and western culture that that have abandoned their tribal language and give less importance for tribal language and this will make them loose the identity. Hence the use of dominant language like hindi English youths are disconnecting from their roots. Sometimes i also feel shy to speak my tribal language but that's our identity and I should not be shy. Economic necessity and globalized education, urbanisation and migration and tribal languages are also neglected by education system, and changing parenting things too that parents never taught.”

Another tribal youth responded saying,

“I cant speak because my parents never taught me and my father always got transferred from here to another place as he works in a bank so we migrated from one place to other so I think it can be main factor that is migration.”

Another tribal youth replied,

“As tribals are often marginalized so the social pressure is formed and hence I adapted to dominant languages.”

Another youth responded that,

“As a child like me whose parents belong from different tribe I think in my case that’s the reason I cant speak or know and many people like me cant speak or know their tribal language.”

Another youth responded,

“Because I think what will be the use of speaking tribal language when we only speak Hindi and everyone speaks and understand Hindi I think it was never important for me to learn tribal language. And I was born in a city and always lived in a city and I rarely go to my village and my parents never taught me and I think there is no use to learn tribal language because in the city we speak Hindi and English. And after coming in a city people usually talk and adapt the language spoken in that city. I speak in Hindi and English and I don’t give much importance to tribal language as it is not necessary.”

Another youth responded that,

“Do you really think any of the youth today is interested in speaking or knowing their tribal language. This can be my prediction that in future there will be no trace of tribal language and why because now the youth is more westernized and modernized and they don’t feel the need to learn their languages and tis will lead to extinction. Because today only few youth can speak but those few youth in future cant teach their kids the tribal language and this this is how the identity and the language will be lost and we all will have only our caste certificate as a proof.”

Further the youths respondents have shared their views on, what steps can help preserve tribal languages. And what role can youth play in saving their language:

“visiting villages, talking to elder person who knows the tribal language. And try to learn and speak tribal language at home with family. And government should also take steps by adding some policies. And parents should teach their children their tribal language from childhood. Tribal forums and weekly gatherings should be done for promoting and developing the tribal language and culture. Government should take steps by adding extra language in schools in primary. Government policies like adding language as a side subject in school. Emotion connection, prevention of culture and heritage and sense of belonging and identity. And the main thing not to ashamed of my own tribal language. And by helping our tribe to promote our language. And its okay to be westernized and modernized but don’t forget your roots from where you came that’s the main thing youth can do to save their tribal language. Not to forget our roots and stay connected to our roots. As youth we can keep our language alive by speaking it proudly in our daily lives sand sharing it through music, stories and social media. When we use our tribal language with confidence we help preserve our culture for the next generation.”

A tribal youth narrated his/her experience regarding, the problems they face when using their tribal language:

“I cant understand and speak the tribal language and this makes me feel out of the group. When someone speaks with me in my tribal language I couldn’t understand and when there is any kind of get together in my family I always feel left out because everyone knows tribals language in my family except me. And I I know I don’t know the tribal language and in future I wont be able to teach my kids our tribal language and this can lead to the tribal language extension.”

Furthermore a the youth responded was asked, what will happen if tribal language disappears, and the respondent replied:

“Our identity will vanish our knowledge will vanish in short tribal ever existed will vanish. Our tribe will vanish so does our identity will too. Our traditional folk culture identity will disappear. Loss of cultural identity. Like if someone will come to me and say or ask which tribe I belong to and I say Oraon tribe, but when they will say prove it, how will i? through my tribal language right by speaking Kurukh, because I think language is the only identity from which our tribal identity can be proven. The moment we speak in our tribal language a person knows they belong from this tribe and losing our tribal language would create a gap between our culture and identity. Loosing a language is not only loosing words its more of that how people interact and have understanding and knowledge. The most important thing the tribal knowledge carries lots of knowledge and all those knowledge will be lost. The knowledge here I am talking about is that the medicine knowledge the a tribal ayurvedic medicines are famous that will also be lost with the language.”

The above five caselets make it abundantly clear that if the tribal language will be lost the identity of tribal people will be lost. The tribal youths stated here that the main reason can be seen because of the migration, urbanisation, less use of tribal language and more use of dominant languages, modernisation, globalisation, and youths not feel the need of tribal language. And hence it is important to preserve our tribal language

CONCLUSION

Young people are leaving their languages behind for dominant languages due to urbanisation, modernisation and the social stigma. Migration is the main factor for the extinction of tribal languages. And as many parents never teach their children their tribal language they don't feel the need to know or speak their tribal language. In schools, workplace and daily lives tribal language are seen as less important. And this makes young people distance themselves from their languages. But tribal youths also have the power to change this. The youths can speak their languages at home and create online contents. To save language we can also write them down digitally and teachy them in schools and create programs for youths. Governments, communities, and institutions need to make saving tribal language as the top priority. Youths can be the bridge between traditions and new ways. Youths can help keep their tribal language alive. Tribal languages are the part of who we tribals are. The tribal youths should be proud of their language and culture as that gives the tribals their identity.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to constraints of time and money only certain wards of Ranchi were selected for the study. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from the tribal youths who were willing to be interviewed and were capable of sitting for one to two hours. Since the total number of youth respondents were small and the sample size was 70.

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