



The Endangered Languages of Telugu Speaking States: Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

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Languages are repositories of local knowledge and traditional wisdom. The worth of a language is neither measured by the number of letters in its alphabet or words it has, nor by its grammatical niceties. It is valued for its ability to convey a distinct way of thinking- that's tethered to culture. Culture and history are reflected in many ways: Clothing, food and architecture are just three common ways to differentiate one culture from another. One of the most potent ways of understanding the culture and history of a country or region is through its language. Unfortunately, many cultures are now under threat and the list of endangered languages is growing day by day.

India has reportedly lost one-fifth of its languages in the past five decades. As globalization held sway over the world, communities, which used to live in relative isolation, sought access to wider world. In the process, it parted with its own language and adopted a new lingua franca. While a certain school of thought rues the demise of local languages, there are revival movements that have emerged across the world, especially in India.

Survey on Languages in India

According to one estimate, 6 per cent of the world's languages today are spoken by 95 per cent of the world's population. The two year-long survey by the Vadodara-based Bhasha Research and Publication Centre revealed “ that the country had 1,100 languages in 1961, but nearly 220 of them have disappeared.” Ganesh Devy, the Socio-Linguist, writer and lead co-ordinator of the survey, believes most of the lost languages belonged to nomadic communities, scattered across the country. “Were they alive, they would have been spoken by three to four per cent - around 50 million people,” Devy told the media. In 1971, the Govt. of India decided not to list those languages with less than 10000 speakers. In India 96.56 percent of people speak the 22 languages scheduled in Indian constitution; just 3.4 per cent of our country men speak all the remaining 1613 mother tongues. It implies that any language that does not find a mention in the census list should be considered as endangered. It is indeed a sad situation, if these languages are not conserved.

In this context, we would like to focus on the native tribal languages of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana that are now on endangered list. The native tribal languages of Kolami, Koya, Gondi, Kuvi, Kul, Yerukala, Savara and Kupla tribes which contributed to enrich the language and culture of Telugu people, are on the verge of extinction, for several reasons like lack of practice, absence of education, poverty stricken state of the speakers.

The UNESCO lists 191 languages of India as endangered. While Eduardo Hughes Galeano, the literary giant of Latin America, puts it 'Every two weeks, a language dies. The world is diminished when it loses its human sayings, just as when it loses its diversity of plants and beasts'. It's not alone in Telugu speaking states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, depletion of linguistic diversity is seen throughout the country.

List of Some Endangered Languages in AP and Telangana

Koya Tribe – Language - Koya

Koya tribe is a tribal community habituated to the southern part of India. Koyas are commonly referred to as Koi, Koyalu, Koyollu, Koyadoralu. In Andhra Pradesh, they live especially in West Godavari, East Godavari, Khammam and Warangal districts and are sparsely found in Adilabad and Karimnagar districts. Koya are second and the largest populated tribe of Andhra Pradesh with the population of 568,019 (11.3%) in total ST population according to the census of 2001. Koyas speak Koya language, also known as Koya basha which does not have any script and has very limited number of words. To cater to their communication requirements of the modern age, they borrowed many Telugu words and even use Telugu script to write in their language.

Gadaba Tribe –Language – Gutob

The Gadaba community's (with 8000 population) historical roots suggest that Gadaba Adivasi lived near a place called 'Gada' near the Godavari river. The indigenous culture of Gadaba is closely connected with prakruti- the natural environment. Since generations, our ancestors were always self-dependent from cultivating their own food to preparing their own fabrics. According to our legends, the first paddy was discovered and cultivated by Gadaba adivasi, not just in India but also in the entire world, which we are

proud about. Their language Gutob is under threat. The younger generation has stopped speaking Gutob due to large scale migration to cities. The tribe is switching to Telugu, which made the language endangered.

Konda-Dora or Porja - Language -Kubi

The Konda Dora are Tribal people, distributed in the Agency Area of the Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and East Godavari districts. According to the 1981 Census, their population is 1, 41,374. They call themselves Pandava Doras or Pandava Rajas. They believe that they are the descendants of the Pandavas of the Mahabharata. The Konda-Dora language, which is also known as Kubi, is closely related to the Kui language of the Khond, and has borrowed vocabulary from Odia and Telugu. Many Konda-Doras speak Telugu instead of their native language. The language is endangered, but fortunately not declining. Some text books have been developed for schools, up to 5th standard.

Valmiki Tribe - Language -Kupia

The Valmiki are a tribal group, concentrated in the agency area of Hyderabad, Mahaboobnagar. Vijayanagaram, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts of AP. The Valmiki of India, numbering 86,500 are part of the Telugu people. Their primary language is Kupia. Though Kupia is the medium of conversation, while conversing amongst each other, the Valmiki tribe tends to switch to Telugu. Mostly landless laborers, they are economically handicapped. Due to frequent migration, in search of a living, their access to education is limited. Thus preservation of language through writing does not take place.

YerukulaTribe - Language - Kurru

This tribe is concentrated in Nizamabad and Karimagar in Telangana, Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Periyar, Salemin Tamil Nadu, parts of Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra. Yerukula is a Dravidian language mainly spoken by the Yerukala tribe. This language is also called Kurrubasha or Kulavatha. Yerukala is linguistically close to South Dravidian languages such as Ravula and Irula.

Lambadi or Banjara–Language - GorBol

Banjara Tribe is also known by numerous other names such as Laman, Lambadi, and Vanjari , a nomadic tribe, who may have origins in Afghanistan or in the Marwar region of what is now Rajasthan, northern India. They are now found mostly in the south Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana - in Warangal, Rayalaseema, Guntur, Adilabad, Bidar, Mahabubnagar, but also elsewhere in the country. Banjaras speak Gor Bol, also called Lambadi, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages. As Lambadi has no script, it is either written in Devnagri script or in the script of the local language such as Telugu or Kannada. Most Banjaras today are bilingual or multilingual, adopting the predominant language of their surroundings.⁴In contrast to other languages, Lambadi is making a comeback with widespread of education. Now they are working to conserve their language. There are journals and books in this language.

Unquantifiable Loss

The loss of language, however, does not merely mean the loss of a mode of communication. It's not just about the loss of a few thousand words. Languages are not simply a collection of words put into order by grammar and syntax. In many ways, languages are like living organisms that express the associations we forge. Languages exist not only for the purposes of practical communication; they convey a linguistic community's entire mode of thinking and its culture. So when a language dies a way of thinking dies with it.

Each language is like a code that describes knowledge about medicinal secrets, ecological wisdom, weather and climate patterns, spiritual attitudes, and artistic and mythological histories. The Tulu language, for example, spoken by a little more than a million people preserves epic poems of the 13th century. The loss of its script then is akin to the loss of a key that could have been used to unlock a treasure trove of knowledge. Harrison puts it aptly, “To allow languages to become extinct—along with the culture and ecologies that they encode—is to risk an erosion of knowledge whose value, once lost, we can never quantify.

The government of India seems to have finally woken up to the crisis. “Under a scheme initiated by the Govt. of India , Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India , the Central Institute of Indian Languages is working to protect ,preserve and document all the endangered mother tongues of India. And UGC has directed the central and state universities to set up a center for endangered languages and work to preserve them. Though this project has been given to many universities where there is no linguistic department ,we can only hope for the best.

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