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Linguistic Diversity Among Tribes in Odisha

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Odisha, located in eastern India, holds a distinctive position among Indian States and Union Territories due to its vibrant and diverse tribal landscape. The majority of Scheduled Tribes inhabit hilly and forested regions, leading a subsistence-based, non-stratified, and non-specialized economy. Their social structure is uncomplicated, and their aspirations and needs are modest. Despite facing socio-economic and educational challenges rooted in geo-historical factors, the Scheduled Tribes in Odisha retain their unique identity and rich cultural heritage. Since independence, the process of socio-economic development has been underway and gaining momentum.

Odisha is home to 62 Scheduled Tribes, who collectively speak as many as 74 dialects.



Gadaba Tribe

Their ethos, ideology, worldview, value orientations, and cultural legacy exhibit richness and diversity. On one end of the spectrum, some tribes lead nomadic lifestyles, relying on food gathering and hunting, while on the other end, there are skilled settled agriculturists and horticulturists. Consequently, the tribal areas of Odisha present an incredibly varied and dynamic socio-economic panorama.

Let's explore the tribal linguistic scenario of Odisha:

The tribal languages in Odisha have been divided into three main groups: Austro-Asiatic (Munda), Dravidian, and Indo-Aryan. The Austro-Asiatic group includes languages such as Gata (Didayi), Gutob (Gadaba), Junag Birhor (Mankidia), Mundari (Mundari/Munda), Santali, Sora (Saora, Lanjia, Juray, Arsi), Gorum (Perenga), Remo (Bonda), Khaira (Kharia/Mirdha), Korwa, Bhumij, Ho (Ho/Kolha), and Mahili (Mahali). The Dravidian group comprises Parji (Dharua), Koya, Kui (Kondh-Kutia/Dungaria), Konda/Kubi (Konda Dora), Ollari (Gadaba), Kurukh/Oraon (Oraon), Gondi (Gond), Madia, Kuvi (Kondh, Jatapu), Pengu (Pengo-Kondh), and Kisan. The Indo-Aryan group includes Desia, Bhuyan, Bhatra, Jharia, Matia, Kondhan, Laria, Bhulia, Aghria, Kurmi,



Dangaria Tribe

Sounti, Bathudi, Sadri, Binjhia, Banjara, Baiga, Bhunjia, and Halbi. Among the tribal communities in Odisha, four communities (Santal, Saora, Ho, and Kondh) have developed their own scripts and have achieved written language status. The Santali language, which is included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, uses the Ol Chiki script. The Saora language script is known as Soran Sompen, and the Ho language uses the Warrang Chiki script. These scripts also include numerical symbols from 1 to 9 and zero.

The multilingual tribal situation in the state poses communication challenges at various levels, including inter-tribal and tribal-non-tribal interactions. While bilingualism is widespread, the extent of linguistic adaptation to the dominant Odia language, which serves as the regional state language, is not consistent among the different tribes. The peculiarities associated with this multilingual situation act as barriers for planned development interventions due to the evident gap between stakeholders and development practitioners. Therefore, further research is necessary in the field of ethno-linguistic and sociolinguistic contexts, aiming to foster unity amidst the diverse array of languages and facilitate

sustainable socio-economic development of the tribal communities. There is a myth that the former zamindar (landlord) of Biramitrapur, who strongly supported the Sadri language, intentionally limited access to facilities for Oraon speakers of the Kudux language, resulting in a gradual shift of Kudux speakers to Sadri language.

Linguistic Classification:

It refers to the categorization of languages based on their shared linguistic features, historical relationships, and cultural affiliations. In the context of Odisha and its scheduled tribes and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs), the languages used by these communities can be classified into three main ethnolinguistic groups.

Austro-Asiatic (Munda):

This group includes languages that belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family. Examples of Austro-Asiatic languages spoken by the tribes in Odisha are Gata (Didayi), Gutob (Gadaba), Junag, Birhor (Mankida), Mundari (Mundari/Munda), Santali, Saora (Saora, Lanjia, Juray, Arsi), Gorum (Perenga), Remo (Bonda), Khairia (Kharia/Mirdha), Korwa, Bhumij, Ho (Ho/Kolha), and Mahili (Mahali).

Interestingly, among these tribes, Ollari, which is assumed to be a section of the Gadaba tribe, speaks a language that belongs to the Dravidian language family. This indicates a linguistic connection between the Munda group and the Dravidian group in this particular case.

The tentative list of Austro-Asiatic language speakers among the tribes in Odisha includes:

Tribe	Language(s) Spoken
Bhumij	Bhumij
Birhor	Mankirdia



Bonda	Remo	Kisan/ Mirdha	Kisan
Didayi	Gta	A section of Gadaba	Ollari
Gadaba	Gutob	Oraon	Kurux
Ho, Kolha, Kol, Koda	Ho	Gond	Gondi
Juang	Juang		
Kharia	Kharia		
Munda/Mundari	Mundari		
Parenga	Gorum		
Mahali, Santal	Santali		
Saora/Savar	Saora/Savar/ Sahar/Saura		

Please note that this table is not exhaustive and includes only a selection of tribes and their respective languages from the Austro-Asiatic/Munda group in Odisha.

Dravidian:

The Dravidian group includes languages that belong to the Dravidian language family. Examples of Dravidian languages spoken by the tribes in Odisha are Parji (Dharua), Koya, Kui (Kondh-Kutia/Dungaria), Konda/Kubi (Konda Dora), Ollari (Gadaba), Kurukh/Oraon (Oraon), Gondi (Gond), Madia, Kuvi (Kondh, Jatapu), Pengu (Pengo-Kondh), and Kisan.

The tentative list of the Dravidian dialects spoken by the tribes of Odisha are:

Tribe	Language(s) Spoken
Dharua	Parji
Gondia, Koya	Koya
Dongaria Kondh	Kuvi
Kutia Kondh	Kui
Kandha Dora/ Jatapu	Telgu



Bonda Tribe

Indo-Aryan:

The Indo-Aryan group includes languages that belong to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Examples of Indo-Aryan languages spoken by the tribes in Odisha are Desia,

Bhuyan, Bhatri, Jharia, Matia, Kondhan, Laria, Bhulia, Aghria, Kurmi, Sounti, Bathudi, Sadri, Binjhia, Banjara, Baiga, Bhunjia, and Halbi.

The list provided includes various tribes in Odisha that primarily speak Odia as their mother tongue. However, it's important to note that the specific variant of Odia spoken by these tribes may differ based on their geographical location. Here are some key points regarding the languages spoken by different tribes in different zones of Odisha:

- Southern Odia: Tribes such as Desia, Bhumia, Bhatri, Jharia, and Matia primarily use Southern Odia as their first language.
- Western Odia: Kandhan, Laria, Bhulia, and Aghria tribes predominantly speak Western Odia.



- Northern Odia: Tribes like Kurmi, Sounti, and Bathudi use a variation of Odia influenced by South-Western Bengali.
- Hindi Odia: The Sadri language is spoken by certain tribes, and it is influenced by the accent, intonation, and speaking style of Hindi.
- Chhattisgadi Hindi: The Binjhia tribe uses a dialect influenced by Chhattisgadi Hindi.
- Hindi Dialect: The Banjara tribe speaks a Hindi dialect.
- Chhattishgadi: The Baiga tribe uses the Chhattishgadi language.
- Marathi: The Bhunjia/Halvi tribe speaks Marathi.

It's important to understand that these languages are predominantly used as the first language within these tribes. Over time, as a result of contact, diffusion of linguistic traits, mutual borrowing, and convergence, they have adopted Odia as their family language.

Some of these languages have distinct ethnic identities, while others do not have specific ethnic affiliations. Larger tribes such as the Kondh and Saora have sub-tribes like Dongria, Kutia, Penga, Jatapu of Kondh, and Lanjia, Juari, Arsi, Sudha of Saora. Each sub-tribe has its own language with dialectical variations.

Traditionally, these languages have been primarily oral and non-literary. However, in recent decades, scripts have been developed for certain languages to aid in written communication. For example, the Ho language uses the Warang-Chiti script, Kui has the Kui Lipi script, Santali uses the Ol-Chiki script, and Saora has the Saoran Sompén script. These scripts have enabled the publication of texts in these languages. It is noteworthy that only Santali language has been included in the 8th schedule of languages in India.

Conclusion:

With the advent of industrialization, increased access to education, acculturation, and improvement in living standards, there is a growing scope for language assimilation among these tribes. This process may involve a shift towards more dominant languages and a decrease in the usage of indigenous/tribal languages.

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