

Ollari Gadaba: An Endangered Dravidian Language

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Abstract

The vast population of India is composed of different ethnic groups with diverse cultures and languages. In spite of this diversity, languages along with their cultures existed side by side for centuries. Modernization and Globalization have become great threat to these minor and ignored languages of the country. The study on various languages spoken by the different ethnic groups, especially the tribal languages contributed a lot to the linguistic canvas in India and abroad. Ollari Gadaba is a tribal Dravidian language spoken in the border areas of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. There are two sections of the Gadaba community namely, Gutob-Gadaba and Dravidian Gadaba. The former group speaks a Munda language and the latter group speaks Dravidian languages such as Koṇḍēkōr and Ollari. Burrow and Emeneau (1961) treat Ollari Gadaba and Koṇḍēkōr Gadaba as dialects of the same language, but Krishnamurti (2003) kept them apart as languages under the Proto Central Dravidian languages. These Dravidian Gadabas are found in the Vijaynagaram district of Andhra Pradesh and in the Koraput district of Odisha. The language spoken in Koraput is known as Ollari Gadaba and the one spoken in Andhra Pradesh is called as Koṇḍēkōr Gadaba. In this present paper, I would like to discuss the endangerment scenario of Ollari Gadaba and various steps to be taken for the preservation of it.

Keywords: Gadaba, Ethnic groups, Linguistic diversity, Language endangerment, Documentation and Preservation.

Introduction

Ollari Gadabais a tribal Dravidian language spoken by 4000 speakers (2001 Census) in the border areas of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. The word *Dravida* was first used as a language by *Kuma:ri-la-bhaṭṭa* in his book *Tantrava:rttika* in seventh century AD by referring to some Tamil words which were wrongly given Sanskrit origin by some contemporary scholars. Then Robert Caldwell (1875: 3-6) was the first to use 'Dravidian' as a generic name for the language family (along with Indo-Aryan) spoken in the Indian subcontinent. The new name was an adaptation of a Sanskrit term *Dravida* which was traditionally used to designate the Tamil language and people in some contexts, and for other South Indian people. Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1994) and Krishnamurti (2003) suggests that Dravidian is not a racial term and suggests that the Dravidians have entered India through northwest two millennia before the Rigveda people entered India by the 15th BCE.

The Concept of Language Family

Francis Whyte Ellis, an English civil servant, was the first scholar to recognize the Dravidian languages as separate language family in 1816 and asserted that Tamil, Telugu and

Kannada ‘form a distinct family of languages’ and that Sanskrit had intermixed with them in later times but had no connection. Then he recognized the Dravidian languages as a family, when Sir William Jones had floated the concept of the Indo-European language family in his famous lecture to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta on 2nd February 1786. Robert Caldwell in 1875 brought out the first edition of his *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages* where he enumerated twelve Dravidian languages exclusive of Brahui. They are divided into cultivated dialects viz. Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Canarese, Tuḷu and Koḍagu and uncultivated dialects viz. Tuda, Kota, Goṇḍ, Khond, Oraon and Rajmahal. He succeeded in showing a family relationship among these Dravidian Languages in phonology and morphology and in disproving their Sanskrit origin. He also tried to show a possible similarity between the Dravidian and the Scythian languages. Later several minor Dravidian languages were discussed based on grammatical sketches and vocabularies in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Geographical and Demographical Distribution of Dravidian Languages

According to Krishnamurti (2003:19-21), there are twenty-six Dravidian languages known at present. They are classified into four subgroups as follows.

Names of the Languages and their Geographical Distribution

Sothern (SD I)	Southern-Central (SD II)	Central (CD)	North (ND)
1. Tamil	12. Telugu	19. Kolami	24. Kurux
2. Malayālam	13. Gondi	20a. Naikri	25. Malto
3. Iruḷa	14. Koṇḍa	20b. Naiki(Chanda)	26. Brauhi
4. Kuṛumba	15. Kui	21. Parji	
5. Koḍagu	16. Kuvi	22. Ollari	
6. Toda	17. Pengo	23. (Koṇḍēkōr) Gadaba	
7. Kota	18. Maṇḍa		
8. Baḍaga			
9. Kannaḍa			
10. Koraga			
11. Tuḷu			

Ollari Gadaba

Ollari Gadaba is a central Dravidian language. There are two sections of the Gadaba community namely, Gutob-Gadaba and Dravidian Gadaba. The former group speaks a Munda language and the latter speaks Dravidian languages, such as Koṇḍēkōr and Ollari. Burrow and Emeneau (1961) treat Ollari Gadaba and Koṇḍēkōr Gadaba as dialects of the same language, but Krishnamurti (2003) treats them as separate languages under the Proto-Central Dravidian languages. These Dravidian Gadabas are found in the Vijaynagaram district of Andhra Pradesh and in the Koraput district of Odisha. The dialect spoken in Koraput is known as Ollari Gadaba and the one spoken in Andhra Pradesh is called as Koṇḍēkōr Gadaba. The total population of the Gadaba community is estimated around 46,000 according to 2001 Census. The Gadabas in Odisha are conversant with Oriya and in Andhra Pradesh are fluent in Telugu. Bilingualism among

Gadabas is very common and in some places, they are trilingual too (Ramaiah & Ramakrishna Reddy 2005, vol. VI, pp-424)

Other Names of Ollari Gadaba

The Ollari Gadaba is also known as Ollar, Ollaro, Hallari, Allar, and Hollar Gadbas. Ollari speakers live in the Lamtaput, Nandapur and Pottangi blocks under the Jeypur sub-division of Koraput District. They are distributed in 16 villages; viz. Chuppa, Chondua, Nokkulapadar, Mundagada, Muria, Tokkal, Leuja, Kappuguda, Charaguda, Litiput, Maddi, Kaligada, Kapparuguda, Pami, Kadalipadar and Tentulipada. Ollari has not attracted the attention of scholars till 1956. A few scholars have attempted to describe the different aspects of the language. Bhattacharya's (1956) *Ollari A Dravidian Speech* is the only full-length study available giving out a comprehensive account of language. It may now be stated with some amount of certainty that Ollari is an important Dravidian language which is perhaps spoken by a distinct ethnic group. Ollari-Gadabas use their mother tongue exclusively at home and in private domains. It is more prevalent among the aged males and middle-aged females while the middle-aged males and the youngsters resort to Desia in the locality and in the communication network of the tribal's and the non-tribal. A few of them who have received education are exposed to Standard Odia, the official language of the state. The language has no script.

Origin and Census of Ollari Gadaba

It is found in 1956 that the Kolarian speech known as the Gadaba language spoken by M̄r or B̄r̄ Gadaba who are known among themselves as Gutob. These Gutob people together with the Ollar of Koraput and the Poya of Salur and Koṇḍēkōr Gadaba of Srikakulam and Visakapattanam constitute bigger ethnic group, called by the name of Gadaba. According to Bhattacharya 1956, the origin of Ollari Gadaba is unknown, but gives the explanation that the word 'Ollari' is derived from the Gadaba (i.e. Gutob) word **ola** which means leaf. It was a belief that Ollar women previously used to wear leaves instead of clothes. Also, there is a mention of an old tribe called Oliyār Na:ga in ancient Tamil texts (cf. V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils in Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, 1904, ch. III). The present day Ollar Gadabs of Koraput may be related to the Na:ga tribe referred in those texts. But the Original language spoken by Na:ga tribe is unknown.

About the population of Ollari people has not been mentioned in the census until 1951. It is found only in 1931 Census of Madras that 797 Gadabas were recorded speaking a dialect called Hallari (Vol.XIV, p.306) and the language of the Ollari Gadabas remains a mystery until 1956. Except this figure about the Ollari Gadabs no separate figures are available in the respective census but together (Gutob Gadaba, Ollari Gadaba, Otaro, Kaththiri and Dedeng Gadaba under generic name of Gadaba) are shown as:

43,939 in 1961,
46,594 in 1971,
56,913 in 1981,
67,139 in 1991,
72,982 in 2001 census.

The reason is that communities which have less than 10,000 people are not considered to be as a separate language.

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Language vitality and Language Endangerment

UNESCO has developed a framework for determining the vitality of a language in order to assist in policy development, identification of needs and appropriate safeguarding measures. They have made surveys in 2001, 2003 and 2005 to determine the Language Vitality and Endangerment. Based on the surveys done, the Ad-Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages elaborated a landmark concept paper entitled “Language Vitality and Endangerment”, which established the following nine factors.

S.NO	Factors of Language Vitality and Endangerment	Application to Ollari
1	Inter-generational language transmission	Absolutely No
2	Community members attitude towards their own language	Negative attitude
3	Shifts in domains of language use	Except home there is shift in many domains
4	Government and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use	No
5	Type and quality of documentation	Very less
6	Response to new domains and media	Absolutely no response
7	Availability of materials for language education and literacy	No
8	Proportion of speakers within the total population	Less
9	Absolute number of speakers	Less than ten Thousand

Types of Language Endangerment

Languages have been classified into different types based on the condition and situation of the languages. It is very difficult to perceive language weather it is safe, vulnerable or extinct. Thus, for the purpose of the study, it is very important to classify the languages. Since language endangerment is not uniform, classification of endangered languages has been done by many scholars and some of the classifications are given below.

UNESCO’s classification of endangered languages (UNESCO’s Language Vitality and Endangerment Frame Work):

1. Safe – Language is spoken by all generation; inter-generational transmission is uninterrupted.
2. Vulnerable – Most children speak the language; but it may be restricted to certain domains.
3. Definitely endangered – Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.
4. Severely endangered – language is spoken by grand-parents older generation; while the parent generation may understand it, but they do not speak it to the children or among themselves.
5. Critically endangered – The youngest speakers are grandparents and they speak the language partially and infrequently.
6. Extinct – There are no speakers left.

Classification of Endangered Languages According to Sasse (1992)

1. A – Abandoned language (language which is dying out).
2. T – Target language (dominant language which is continued).
3. Primary language (language with higher degree of lexical grammatical and pragmatic competence)
4. Secondary language – (language with lower degree of lexical, grammatical and pragmatic competence).

Christopher Mosely’s Classification of Endangered Languages. According to Mosely (2007: xii) Endangered Languages are Classified into Five Types.

1. Potentially endangered – Language which usually implies lack of prestige in the home country, economic deprivation, pressure from the larger languages in the public sphere and social fragmentation In the private, to the extent that language is not being systematically passed on in the educational system.
2. Endangered – Where the youngest fluent speakers tend to be young adults, and there is a disjunction in passing on the languages to the children, especially in the school but even in the home environment.
3. Seriously/Severely endangered – The youngest fluent speakers being among the older generation aged fifty and over, implying a loss of prestige and social value over a generation age.
4. Moribund – Only a tiny proportion of the ethnic group speaking the language, mostly the very aged.
5. Extinct – Where no speakers remain. This last category means that a language whose existence is remembered by 7 living people in the community merits inclusion, because there is at least the faint or theoretical possibility of revival.

From the above-mentioned classifications, Mosely (2007: xii) appears to be more convincing for the reason that Ollari is Seriously/Severely endangered language which lacks prestige in social domain, not transmitted the language through formal education and the youngest fluent speakers being among the older generation aged fifty and over. In the present study I adopt Mosely’s Classification to assert that Ollari is a severely endangered language.

Speakers of Language (both by younger and older generation) and their level of fluency

To know about the language use of Ollari Gadaba people, a pilot study was conducted in the month of December. The study was conducted in the major villages of Ollari people viz. Gugaguda, Tokkal, pommi, Pottangi and Lamtaput. The study shows the following picture of the language use.

Statistics of Language Use:

Language	Age	Understand	Speak	Understand and Speak
OLLARI	3-5	-	-	-
	6-15	-	-	-
	16-25	-	-	-
	26-35	-	-	-

	36-45	-	-	-
	46-55	Yes	-	-
	56-Above	Yes	Yes	Yes

The above table shows that people up to 45 years in community cannot speak the language and the people who are between the age group of 46 and 55 years can understand the language and people who are above 56 years can speak and understand the language. This shows that the language is not properly transmitted to the younger generation and is severely endangered.

Step to be Taken for the Preservation of Ollari Gadaba

1. Language Documentation
2. Language Revitalization

Language Documentation is an effort to prevent languages from becoming unknown. There are several ways to document the endangered languages. Among the major steps can be seen below.

Record the Data

The first and easy step to preserve a language is recording the data. If the data is recorded it can be used for various language revitalization purposes to preserve the dying language.

Developing Primers

Once the data is recorded, it can be used for various purposes like developing primers. According to the constitution every child should get primary education in his/her mother tongue which is not happening at all. With the recorded data, if primers are developed and teachers' are appointed by giving training, it will be great step from the government side in preserving the endangered languages.

Developing Dictionaries

Developing dictionaries need some amount of funding from various institutions which has become very hard to get funding in the present days. With recent technology and tools like FLEx developed by Summer Institute of linguistics can be used in making the phonemic, bilingual dictionaries etc. with less effort and minimum of training.

Developing the Scripts

Many people in India think that new scripts should be developed for the tribal endangered languages. It is not correct because tribal people are bilinguals in most of the cases. Bilingualism among tribals is very common and in some places, they are multi-lingual's too (Ramaiah & Reddy 2005, vol. VI, p-424). So, we can develop the script in one of the dominant languages of that area. For example, Devanagari and Roman scripts are used for many languages. If a script is developed, it will be a significant step in preserving the language. These scripts should be developed in consultation with the respective communities. So that the communities can proudly say that they too have the scripts. Once the script is developed, the community can be encouraged to document the vast knowledge which will bring the recognition to the society (Mohanty, 2013:63).

Language Revitalization includes:

Community Radios

Community stations serve geographic communities and communities of interest. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local, specific audience. Community radio stations are operated, owned, and influenced by the communities they serve. They are generally nonprofit and provide a mechanism for enabling individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own stories, to share experiences. This kind of effort (setting of community radios) will help the communities to preserve their own language because often they hear their own language rather than the dominant language.

Encourage Younger Generations

One way is to encourage younger generations to speak the language as they grow, so that they will teach their children the language as well. In many cases, this option is nearly impossible. As a linguist if we sensitize the communities to know the value of mother tongue as well as the value of primary education in mother tongue will be helpful in encouraging the younger generations and the community to ensure the survival of the language.

Conclusion

Based on the above points I can conclude that, Ollari is a severely endangered language which has less than ten thousand speakers. Though Ollari belongs to Dravidian group of languages, it is clubbed with Gutob Gadaba and other tribal languages for the census purpose. Due to this reason the language has never attracted linguists to work on its structure as many attempts were made to describe the structure of dominant languages. If we take some of the steps mentioned above, it will be of great help to community, linguists, anthropologists and the language itself.

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