

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

Dr. Bablu Ray

Assistant Professor

Department of Linguistics

Dr. Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya (A Central University), Sagar (M.P.)

babluray@gmail.com

Abstract

The case of language endangerment world-wide is a very serious issue these days and the languages must be saved from dying. As per UNESCO's (2010) report, India is having 197 endangered languages which is the highest number of endangered languages in the world. The situation is such a grave that even official languages like Manipuri and Bodo and many tribal languages are in the list of the endangered languages of India. Further, indigenous languages like Mahali, Sidi, Karo, and Dimasa are also at the verge of extinction (Devy 2013). In this pretext, the present research paper by analyzing data from UNESCO (2010), Census (2011) and Ministry of Tribal affairs of Government of India (2019) and some other sources, tries to identify and analyze the endangerment of the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh and argues for the revitalization and preservation of the same. The study finds that tribal languages like Gondi and Korku of Madhya Pradesh are in UNESCO's (2010) list of endangered languages. Further, the decadal growth rate (pan-Indian) of the tribal languages shows lesser growth rate of the speakers of Gondi and Bhili (Census 2011). Similarly, Khandeshi, Kamar, Korwa, and Nihali have too shown decrease in their speakers and potentially they are endangered. Furthermore, the report of the Ministry of Tribal affairs of Government of India (2019), too, enlists the languages like Bhili, Gondi, and Korku of Madhya Pradesh as the endangered languages. Thus, there is a strong need for the revitalization and preservation of the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh as well as of other states so that linguistic and cultural ecology of the country could be saved.

Keywords: Language Endangerment, Language Revitalization, Language Loss, Language Death, Tribal Languages, Madhya Pradesh

Introduction

The phenomena of language decline, language decay, language loss, language extinction, and language death are collectively referred as the case of language endangerment (Tsunoda 2005).

As per UNESCO's (2010) report, the reality of language endangerment is that half of the 6000 languages spoken today are on the verge of extinction. So, the situation of language endangerment is very grave and proper attention is needed all around the world to save our languages from being endangered or from being dead. In the words of Krauss (1992, p. 5), "*out of world's 6000 languages, Americans speak only 15% (900 languages), and the European and the Middle Eastern people speak only 4% (275 languages) of the languages of the world whereas 81% (1900 languages) of the world's languages are being spoken in the sub-continent of Africa, Asia and in the Pacific region of the world* (Tsunoda, 2005)." Similarly, in its preamble of the document "Language Vitality and Endangerment" prepared by UNESCO's Ad-Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Language also highlights the act of language heterogeneity by citing Bernard (1996) that approximately 97% of the global population speaks 4% of the world's languages whereas only 3% of the global population speaks 96% of the world's languages. The above-mentioned fact reveals how the languages of the world are unevenly distributed, which also is somehow responsible for the endangerment of the languages of the world. The phenomenon of language endangerment is not the new one. In fact, it dates back to the period of pre-colonial as well as to the post-colonial. The trace of it can be very much seen in the pre-historic as well as historic periods or times (Tsunoda, 2005) and European colonization is primarily responsible for the endangerment of the world's languages (Hale, 1992) and the phenomenon of language loss can be seen at an alarming rate in many parts of the world around the sixteenth century (Dixon, 1991).

However, it can't be claimed that all the languages of the world are either endangered or almost at the stage of extinction. There are various degrees of endangerment of the languages and on the basis of those degrees; the endangerment of a particular language can be decided. Based on the criteria of 'intergenerational transmission', UNESCO's (2003) document on "Language Vitality and Endangerment" enlists the following degrees of language endangerment: (i) safe, (ii) unsafe, (iii) definitely endangered, (iv) severely endangered, (v) critically endangered, and (vi) extinct. Based on these degrees of language endangerment, UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Language in Danger (2010), reports that out of 6000 languages, 2473 languages spoken around the world are recognized as endangered languages. This indicates that only 57% of the languages spoken worldwide are safe while 43% are in danger. Of these endangered languages, 4% have been extinct since 1950, 10% are unsafe, 11% are certainly endangered, 9% are highly endangered, and 10% are critically endangered.

Further, UNESCO's (2010) report on the countries having the most endangered languages, enlists India at the top with 197 endangered languages followed by other countries namely the United States of America (192), Brazil (190), Indonesia (147), China (144), Mexico (144), Australia (108), Papua New Guinea (98) and Canada (88). Thus, the condition of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

language endangerment in India is really pathetic and alarming for the people of the country. The degrees of the endangerment of 197 languages are illustrated below with the help of the pie chart:

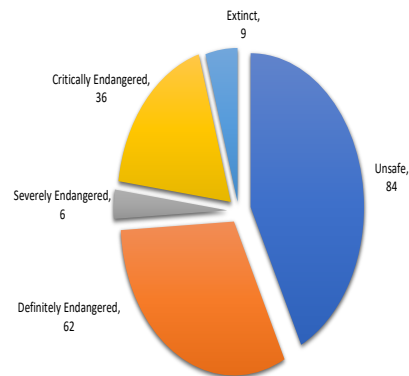


Figure 1: Degrees of Endangerment of 197 Endangered Languages of India

The most serious issue of concern is that two official languages like Manipuri and Bodo are also among 197 endangered languages of India. It's quite surprising that these two official languages are also enlisted in the 22 scheduled languages of India which get special attention from the Indian government and are also considered to be healthier than other non-scheduled or tribal languages. Even some official languages like Angami, Khasi, Ao, Chang, Khiemnungan, and Manipuri of the states have also been listed as the endangered languages of India (Sengupta, 2009). Indian government's policy is such that except 22 languages, majority of the Indian languages are without any official recognition of the states or the nation. Thus, in this pretext, the condition of the regional languages or indigenous/tribal languages can be easily presumed. The tribal or indigenous languages seriously require special attention for their revitalization. UNESCO's (2010) report also enlists tribal languages like Birhor, Asur, and Korwa to be endangered. In fact, Birhor is listed as the critically endangered language of India as it is left with only 2000 speakers. Further, the report (2013) of Peoples Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) provides an interesting data that out of 780 languages, India has lost around 250 languages (Devy, 2013). It further reports that several other indigenous languages like Mahali, Karo, Sidi and Dimasa of Eastern India, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujrat and Assam respectively are also at the verge of extinction (Devy, 2013). Thus, the issue of language endangerment is a very serious

issue, and it has caused a serious threat to the human kind. In fact, with the loss of every language, we definitely lose history, culture, tradition and the past knowledge which are transferred to the future generation through using language. Thus, serious efforts must be taken to revitalize and protect endangered languages.

The topic of endangerment and revitalization of languages has been an interesting field of research for many scholars. The scholars who have significantly contributed to this field are Fishman (1991), Campbell (1994), Kapono (1995), Dixon (1997), Dorian (1981), Crystal (2000), Tsunoda (2001), Nettle and Romaine (2000), Dorian (1989b), Ladefoged (1992), Brenzinger (1992b), Krauss (1992), Whaley (1998b), Hale et al. (1992), Robins and Uhlenbeck (1991), Matsumura (1998), Shoji and Janhunen (1997) and Sakiyama (2001). Recent works on the topic of endangered languages and revitalization of languages include the works of Sengupta (2009), Moseley (2010), Sallabank (2010), Gupta (2017), Singh (2018), Bhattacharjee (2019), Boruah (2020), Dash (2020), Immidiseti (2021), Gautam (2022), and Saxena & Kaur (2025).

Though significant amount of research on the topic of language endangerment and revitalization has been done yet the research on the endangerment and revitalization of the tribal languages of the central part of the country lacks and needs to be analyzed in detail. Therefore, the present research paper aims to investigate and discuss the linguistic situation and the status of tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh in terms of language endangerment and revitalization. It, further, tries to explore and analyze the possible causes of the language endangerment and also advocates the possible ways to revitalize the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh which may be critically endangered and at the verge of their extinction.

Linguistic Situation in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh, the state of India, is situated in the central part of India. The state can be divided in Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern parts. The northern region of Madya Pradesh is known as “Bundelkhand” which include the places like Gwalior, Shivpuri, Orchha Khajuraho and Panna. The western part of Madhya Pradesh includes the cities of Ujjain and Indore. The eastern part of Madhya Pradesh includes several cities like Jabalpur, Amarkantak, Balaghat, Baihar and the southern region of Madhya Pradesh covers the places like Rewa, Satna, Sidhi, Saldol and Singrauli.

If we look at linguistic situation of Madhya Pradesh, it can be easily observed that Hindi is the official language of the state and it is widely spoken by the people of the state. Madhya Pradesh is also known as the central belt of Hindi language. Besides Hindi, Marathi is also spoken by the people of Madhya Pradesh particularly in the city of Indore. The language is spoken in this city because of the impact of the Maratha rulers who ruled this region for quite a

long period. Although Hindi is widely spoken in the state but if we move from urban to rural areas of Madhya Pradesh we find many regional languages such as Bundeli, Bagheli, Malwi, and Nimari widely spoken by the people of the state. The specific regions where these regional languages are spoken are discussed below in detail:

(a) **Bundeli:** It's spoken prominently in the area of Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh which include places like Sagar, Damoh, Gwalior, Datia, Chhatarpur, Panna and Tikamgarh.

(b) **Bagheli:** Bagheli language is spoken mainly in the area of Baghelkhand area of Madhya Pradesh. The regional language is spoken in Rewa, Sidhi, Satna, Umaria and Anuppur areas of the state.

(c) **Malwi:** It's spoken in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. The Malwa region of the state includes the districts like Ratlam, Ujjain, Nimach, Mandasour, Dewas, Indore, Sehore, Jhabua, Rajgarh, Bhopal, Neemach and and Guna and also in some areas of Hosangabad.

(d) **Nimadi:** It's the language generally spoken in the western regions of Madhya Pradesh which include the area of Khandwa, Khandwa, Badwani, Nimad, Burhanpur, Harda, and southern part of Dewas.

Apart from all these regional languages, some tribal languages are also spoken by various tribes of living in different areas of Madhya Pradesh. A brief discussion on the tribes and the languages of Madhya Pradesh is provided in the next section.

Tribes and Tribal Languages of Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is also inhabited by many tribal people, and they can be found in various parts of the state. The major tribes of Madhya Pradesh can be identified as Gond, Baiga, Bhil, Korku, Kol, and Bharia. The Gond tribe of the state is mostly inhabited in the districts of Balaghat, Chhindwara, Khandwa, Mandla, Shahdol, and Burhanpur whereas Bhil tribes are found in some areas of Jabalpur and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh. Baigra tribes live in the forest areas which include Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh. So far as Korku tribe is concerned, they can be easily found in Betul, Hosangabad, Chindwara and Eastern areas of Nimad districts of Madhya Pradesh. The people of Kol tribe are inhabited in the districts of Rewa, Sidhi, Satna, Mandla, Rajgarh, and Sahdol, and Bharia tribe is mostly found in the districts of Jabalpur and Chhindwara. Most of these tribes prefer to live in remote areas which include either hilly or forest areas and they keep themselves engaged in cultivation, hunting, fishing or some small activities which are important for their livelihood. The languages spoken by the tribes are usually considered to be tribal languages. Some of the tribal languages are scheduled languages whereas

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

some of them are non-scheduled languages, too. The languages of India which are enlisted in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution are called as scheduled languages while those which are not enlisted are known as non-scheduled languages. As per the census of India (2011), the total numbers of scheduled languages are 22 and the non-scheduled are 99. Further, it is surprising to note that out of the 99 non-scheduled languages, majority of them belong to tribal languages except Bodo and Santhali which have been enlisted as the scheduled languages.

However, the tribal languages which are spoken by the tribes of Madhya Pradesh include the following:

(a) **Gondi:** Gondi being one of the members of Dravidian family of language is primarily spoken by the Gond tribes of Madhya Pradesh. It can be also observed being spoken in several other parts of India such as Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. This tribal language can be easily found in the Gond tribe living in the hilly areas of Satpura and Vindhyaachal regions. The total number of people speaking this language include 11,64,290 (Census of India, 2011). The district wise percentage of the people speaking the language can be seen below:

S. No.	Districts of M.P.	Percentage of the total speakers speaking the language
1	Betul	27.69 %,
2	Dindori	14.09 %
3	Balaghat	10.55 %
4.	Mandala	10.22 %
5	Seoni	6.91 %
6	Chhindwara	5.52 %
7	Anuppur	2.23 %
8	Harda	1.76 %
9	Singrauli	1.64 %
10	Dewas	1.31 %
11	Khandwa (East Nimar)	1.24 %

Figure 2: District wise percentage of the people speaking Gondi

(Source: Census of India, 2011)

(b) **Bhili:** It belongs to Indo-Aryan Family of language and is spoken by Bhil tribe living in the regions of Jhabua, Dhar and Nimar, Jabalpur and Chhindwara districts of Madhya

Pradesh. The Bhili tribe also has sub-tribes which include Bhila, Barela and Pataliya and the languages spoken by them are Bhilali, Barel and Patelia. As per the census of India (2011), Madhya Pradesh has the second highest Bhili speaking people (35,87,810) after the state of Rajasthan ((35,92,208). The district wise distribution of the percentage of the people speaking the languages is as per the details given below:

S. No.	Districts of M.P.	Percentage of the total speakers speaking the language
1	Alirajpur	89.96 %
2	Jhabua	85.26 %
3	Barwani	58.54 %
4	Khargone	24.31%
5	Dhar	15.55 %
6	Burhanpur	14.97 %
7	Ratlam	13.62 %
8	Khandwa (East Nimar)	06.08 %
9	Dewas	2.13 %

*Figure 3: District wise percentage of the people speaking Bhili/Bhillodi
(Source: Census of India, 2011)*

(c) **Korku:** This tribal language is the language of Korku tribe which are mostly found in the several areas of Madhya Pradesh such as Betul, Khandwa, Harda, Hosangabad and eastern areas of Nimar Districts. The language belongs to Astro-Asiatic family of Language and the total number of people speaking this language is 4,70,386 (Census of India, 2011). The district wise distribution of the percentage of the people speaking Korku as per the data given below in the table:

S. No.	Districts of M.P.	Number of the people speaking the language
1	Betul	1,75,346
2	Khandwa	1,27,198
3	Burhanpur	87, 935
4	Harda	37,202
5	Chhindwara	36,538
6	Hosangabad	11,983
7	Barwani	1,568

8	Dewas	1054
9	Khrgone	346

Figure 4: District wise percentage of the people speaking Korku
(Source: Census of India, 2011)

(d) **Khandeshi:** This is found mainly found in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat but and it belongs to Indo-Aryan language family. It has been also observed in the state of Madhya Pradesh with the limited number i.e. the 2.04 % of the total population of Khandeshi speakers (Census of India, 2011). The district-wise percentage of distribution of the Khandeshi speakers can be seen in the chart given below:

S. No.	Districts of M.P.	Percentage of the total speakers speaking the language
1	Barwani	2.10 %
2	Burhanpur	0.62 %
3	Balaghat	0.22 %
4	Neemuch & Sehore	0.01 %

Figure 5: District wise percentage of the people speaking Khandeshi
(Source: Census of India, 2011)

(e) **Halabi:** This language comes in the category of non-scheduled language of India and it belongs to Indo-Aryan group of language family. As per census of India (2011), the majority of the people speaking this language are found in the region of Chhattisgarh (7,06,304) but it can be also found in the other states of India such as Odisha (31,767), Maharashtra (24,950), Gujarat (1053) and Madhya Pradesh (1985). The district-wise distribution of the people speaking the language in Madhya Pradesh are as per the details given below:

S. No.	Districts of M.P.	Total number of speakers speaking the language
1	Balaghat	795
2	Betul	740
3	Seoni	347

Figure 6: District-wise total numbers of the people speaking Halabi
(Source: Census of India, 2011)

(f) **Korwa:** It, being the member of the Astro-Asiatic language family, is prominently found being spoken in the state of Chhatisgarh. As per the Census of India (2011), 19,212 speakers of Korwa reside in Chhatisgarh whereas in Madhya Pradesh the speakers of this language are very limited in number i.e. 2,147 persons only. The speakers of this language in Madhya Pradesh are mainly found in Harda and Chhindwara districts.

(g) **Kamar:** This tribal language comes from Dravidian language family and is used particularly by the tribal communities living in the area of Rewa Districts of Madhya Pradesh. Besides, Madhya Pradesh this language is also spoken in Chhatisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala.

(h) **Nihali:** This language is critically endangered language primarily spoken in Buldana district of Maharashtra and in Esat Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh, too. This language doesn't belong to any group of language family, therefore, this is known as the language isolate. Census of India (1961) reported total 3600 Nihali speakers but a study on the language by Nagaraj (2014) claims that Nihali language is only spoken by the people Buldana district and the Nihali tribes living in East Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh no longer use Nihali language rather they use Nimadi language. Thus, the speakers of Nihali in Madhya Pradesh are very rare.

Endangerment of the Tribal Languages of Madhya Pradesh

As per UNESCO (2010) there are 197 Indian languages are endangered and out of them 81 are vulnerable, 62 are certainly endangered, 7 are severely endangered, 42 are critically endangered. Besides, there are 5 languages on the list that are already extinct. Moreover, India tops in the list of the endangered languages of the world. It is also notable that among the endangered languages of India, most of the languages are the non-scheduled languages (Immidiseti, 2011).

The tribal languages such as Gondi and Korku of Madhya Pradesh are, too, in list of endangered languages (UNESCO 2010). The Ministry of Tribal affairs of Government of India (2019), too, has declared many tribal languages to be the endangered languages of India in which the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh such as Bhili, Gondi, and Korku are in the list. Like the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh, the tribal languages of the other states are also in the category of endangered languages. Majhi, the tribal language of Sikkim; Karo, the language of Arunachal Pradesh; Dimasa, the language of Assam; and Sidi, the language of Gujarat are also facing the problem of extinction (Devy, 2013).

Moreover, the pan-Indian decline (in percentage) in the growth of the tribal language speakers can be seen from the table given below:

S. No.	Non-scheduled Languages/Tribal Languages	1971-1981	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2011
1.	Gondi	13.33	11.06	27.72	9.97
2.	Bhili/Bhilodi	26.30	29.79	71.97	8.67
3.	Korku	13.08	34.06	23.26	26.57
4.	Khandeshi	383.05	-19.98	113.13	-10.36
5.	Korwa	218.47	-42.83	25.84	-17.73
6.	Halabi	54.46	-0.10	11.07	29.13
7.	Kamar	----	----	----	----
8.	Nihali	----	----	----	----

Figure – 7: Decadal growth rate in percentage (pan-Indian) in the speakers of non-scheduled/tribal languages of India

(Source: Census of India, 2011)

The percentage of the decadal growth rate (pan-Indian) in terms of the speakers of the above-mentioned non-scheduled/tribal languages as provided by the Census of India (2011) reveal the that Gondi and Bhili/Bhillodi languages have lesser growth between the period of 2001-2011. The decadal growth rate of these two languages is below 10 percent and lesser than the previous decades. Next, the decadal growth rates of Korku and Halabi in between 2001-2011 are comparatively better than previous decade (1991-2001) and also better than other languages. Further, there is a grave situation for Khandeshi and Korwa languages. Their growth rates have gone in minus between the period of 2001-2011. Moreover, there is no data given on the decadal growth rate of the languages of Kamar and Nihali by the Census (2011) as the speakers of these two languages are below 10,000 because the Census of India (2011) has enlisted only those non-scheduled languages which have above 10,000 mother tongue speakers.

Thus, the data released by Census of India (2011) reveal the fact that out of these 8 tribal languages which are spoken in Madhya Pradesh as well as in other states of the country, the

potential growth in their speakers can only be seen in Korku and Halabi languages. The growth in the speakers of Gondi and Bhili languages is not satisfactory as these two languages are widely spoken across the country. On the other hand, Khandeshi, Korwa, Kamar and Nihali are already showing signs of decrease in their speakers and potentially they are endangered. Based on the above fact, it can be said that the tribal languages must need attention for their revitalization and preservation before they die soon.

Thus, some of the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh are already endangered and some of them are on this way to this phenomenon. There are many factors that cause language endangerment and loss of the languages. Some possible causes that can attribute to this phenomenon have been discussed in the next section.

Possible Causes for the Endangerment of the Tribal Languages in Madhya Pradesh

A number of reasons could be assigned for the endangerment of the scheduled, non-scheduled and of the tribal languages and these may extend from internal, external, economic, political to cultural reasons. Various causes of language endangerment of the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh have been identified which include *Influence of Dominant Languages, Language Shifting, Marginalization of Minority or Indigenous Languages, Speakers' Negative Attitudes towards their Own Language, and Impact of Globalization* etc. The prominent causes have been discussed below in detail:

(i) **Influence of Dominant Language:** One of the major reasons of language endangerment of tribal languages is the dominance or influence of the powerful language like English and Hindi which are the official languages of India. Moreover, Hindi is the language that is used almost in every domain of life of the people of Madhya Pradesh and the other states. Moreover, in Madhya Pradesh, besides these two languages, several regional languages like Bundeli, Bagheli, Malvi and Nimadi are spoken. These regional languages are considered to be prestigious languages and that pose a serious threat to the tribal languages as tribal languages lacks prestige due to spoken only in the group of people who are less in numbers. The low prestige of the tribal languages tends to discourage tribal people from using their own languages.

(ii) **Language Shift:** It is the second most causes of the loss or endangerment of the tribal languages in Madhya Pradesh. Language shift occurs in multilingual situation where the community moves from minority language to the majority language. Language shift occurs due to better livelihood and better job opportunities. The tribal people of the state have also shifted to the use of dominant and prevalent language like Hindi for getting their better livelihood. Sometimes for the official purposes, they are bound to learn the dominant languages. Thus, such language shift causes a great loss to the younger generations of the tribal people. They gradually

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

adopt the dominant languages and in due course of time they forget their own native languages which are indeed the seed of their age-old culture. One of the reasons for shifting towards dominant languages is that dominant languages are associated with power, prestige and social status. The research by Khubchandani (1992) also reveals the decline in language retention by the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh. The striking feature is that though the number of tribal speakers between the period of ten years (as in the data of census 1971 & 1981) has increased from 8387 million to 11,987 million yet there is a decline of 10 % in the language retention of tribal languages (from 41 % in 1971 to 34% in 1981) because the number of speakers speaking tribal languages remains the same i.e. 3420 million in 1971 as well as in 1981.

(iii) Language Contact Situation: In fact, the language contact situation in the different areas of the state of M.P. has led to the situation of bilingualism and multilingualism among the members of the tribal language communities and they now don't speak the pure variety of their tribal languages. Moreover, situation has given rise to the mixed or hybrid varieties of languages in the tribal areas.

(iv) Marginalization of Indigenous Languages: Marginalization of languages can be also assigned as one of the prominent causes of the endangerment of tribal or some other indigenous languages. In India, it can be easily seen that out of many languages being spoken, only 22 languages have been enlisted as the scheduled languages and rest of the languages are recognized as non-scheduled languages of India. It's a fact that those languages which have been recognized as the scheduled languages get special attention of the government for language planning and any developmental activity related to languages. For example, Hindi is not only the official language of India but it also serves as the link language for regional language speakers. It is also the language of instruction and mass media in India. In Madhya Pradesh, Hindi is prominently used in schools, colleges, universities, administration and in print media. Besides Hindi, English in India, too, has got the status of the second official language and it also serves as a common link language for all non-Hindi speakers. Thus, due to such language policy of India, both Hindi and English languages being the powerful and prominent languages in the country have indirectly led to the marginalization of the tribal languages in Madhya Pradesh and in other states of India. In addition to these, the tribal languages lack their scripts, their literature, and they also lack the huge numbers of speakers which have directly forced them towards their endangerment. Thus, many tribal languages do face extinction due to lack of proper support system from our government.

(v) Speakers' Negative Attitudes towards their Own Language: Negative attitudes of the tribal people towards their own native languages have also served as one of the deciding factors for the cause of language endangerment of tribal and many other minority languages. Due to socio-political, economic or some other reasons, tribal people shift to dominant languages and

they use their own language only in some restricted domains like home or in local areas. Due to socio-economic pressure, they also tend to force their children or upcoming generations to learn and educate in the dominant languages so that they could secure their future and get better livelihood. Thus, such types of negative attitudes of the tribal people or minority class towards their own native languages cause language endangerment and loss of their own tribal languages and culture.

(vi) **Modernization and Urbanization:** Tribal people live in mostly the hilly or isolated areas, away from the hustle and bustle of the cities but due to modernization and urbanization such as the infrastructural developments or establishments of the industrial areas, the tribal people have been pushed away and displaced from their own homelands. Sometimes, deforestation for industrial or mining purposes also leads them to leave their places and to move to the other regional areas where they can get some livelihood. As a result, they are compelled to learn the local or regional languages and restrict their own tribal language only to their home domains.

However, the above-mentioned factors lead to the attrition or endangerment of tribal, minority or any other language but the most important factors that lead to the endangerment of tribal languages is that tribal languages are spoken mostly in home domains by the tribal people. The tribal languages in the state of Madhya Pradesh have neither been the language of education, media, and power. If we assess the status of tribal languages in terms of UNESCO's language endangerment scale, tribal languages fall in the category of '*vulnerability*'. This situation of '*vulnerability*' refers to the fact that tribal languages are gradually leading towards the phases of language endangerment. Hence, the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh do need to be revitalized and preserved otherwise the tribal languages of the state will definitely disappear in near future.

The Need for Revitalization and Preservation of the Tribal Languages of Madhya Pradesh

As the tribal people are decreasing day by day and the loss of the people is the loss of the society and their culture. We must need to protect tribal languages from being endangered and loss. The preservation of the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh as well of the other states must be achieved through the processes of language revitalization.

Language revitalization is the processes of protecting and bringing the endangered languages again to their use (Singh 2018). Many scholars have given various names to this process which include language revival, renewal, regeneration, and reversing shifting of languages. As per Fishman (1991), the process of 'reversing language shift' is the process of revitalization of language shift. Further, Grenoble and Whaley (2006) view this process as to

raise the numbers of the speakers and to extend the use of the language in various domains. Hinton (2011) also having the similar viewpoint regarding this phenomenon and he states that it is the process of teaching language to the speakers who don't know or speak and also to make use of the language in various domains.

Language revitalization has been very impactful in bringing the dead languages back into lives. The examples of revitalization of Hebrew and Maori languages are well known to us. The Hebrew and Maori languages were considered as dead language but could again come into existence through the processes of revitalization. There are several ways of revitalizing the dead or endangered languages. By attempting the following processes of revitalization, we can save our minority or tribal languages which are at the verge of endangerment or extinction. Some of the processes of revitalization include (a) proper language planning, (b) education in minority or tribal languages, (c) constitutional provisions and its proper implementation for minority or tribal languages, (d) tribal peoples' positive attitude towards their own native languages and their active involvement in preserving their languages, (e) creation of grammar, lexicon and placing the languages in the educational system and media, (g) language documentation/ archiving, and finally (h) creating awareness towards language revival through government initiatives.

Indian government, too, has several constitutional provisions for safeguarding and promoting the linguistic minority of the country. Article 29 and 244 of the Indian Constitution provides policy to safeguard ethnic and linguistic diversity. Moreover, article 347 and article 350 also provide provisions for preservations of the minority languages. In the recent past, Indian government launched a scheme called - "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India" which is being monitored by CIIL, Mysore. Under this scheme, the institute protects, preserves and documents those languages which are either endangered or have less than 10,000 speakers. Further, the University Grants Commission of Government of India has also taken the steps of establishing various centers for protecting and promoting endangered languages in several central universities of the country. Besides, the implementation of NEP: 2020 by the Government of India also contributes largely to the promotion, preservation and education in mother tongue or regional languages of the country.

Despite the above-mentioned constitutional provisions and Indian governments' initiatives to safeguard Indian languages, the tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh and of the other states are in the list of endangered languages and their speakers, too, are decreasing day by day. Thus, there is an urgent need to revitalize and preserve the tribal languages of the state. Efforts must be made to retain purity of the tribal people, their languages and their culture because death of one's language is the death of one's culture. Tribal people and tribal languages are true example of linguistic diversity that exists in India. India, being a multilingual country, presents the best examples of the linguistic diversity. As per UNESCO, linguistic diversity is a 'pillar of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

cultural diversity' (as in Singh 2018). Therefore, we must save and revitalize each and every language from being endangered so that linguistic diversity of the country should remain alive. Furthermore, when a language dies, it not only causes loss to its lexicon, grammar but loss also happens to an indigenous knowledge system, ethnic identity, cultural heritage and of course of a distinct world view. Thus, it is very important to maintain linguistic ecology and the linguistic diversity of the country by saving other minority and tribal languages of the country. Lakoff (1987: 337), rightly affirms that "*diversity of languages and cultures provides diverse ways of comprehending experience and this is necessary to their survival as species and that vanishing languages and cultures need to be protected just as vanishing species do*" (as cited in Singh, 2018: 4). Thus, to retain the linguistic and cultural diversity of India for which India is widely and very known, the government of Madhya Pradesh must pay attention to revitalization and preservation of all of the tribal languages which are heading towards their endangerment and extinction. The state government as well as the central government must rethink, review and reframe their language policies so that the tribal and minority languages which are marginalized could be saved from dying. Further, it must be also done for betterment of the linguistic ecology of the country, too.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of language endangerment has caused a serious threat to the entire world. It has seriously affected the minority or tribal languages of India which have fewer speakers in numbers. As per the report of UNESCO (2010) India tops the world in having the highest number of the endangered languages. The total numbers of the endangered languages have risen to 197 and most strikingly the languages which are non-scheduled and tribal languages are mainly the endangered languages of the country. Like many other tribal languages of other states of India, the Tribal languages of Madhya Pradesh are also in the list of endangered languages. Besides, the vitality and the growth of the tribal languages spoken in Madhya Pradesh is non-significant (Census of India, 2011). The dominance of powerful languages, languages contact situation, bilingualism, marginalization of minority languages, tribal speakers' attitude towards their own languages may serve the cause of the endangerment of the tribal or minority languages. Despite Indian Government's policies for protecting linguistic rights and linguistic ethnicity, and efforts in preserving the endangered languages through implementations of various programmes, many tribal languages have disappeared and are still in the queue of being endangered. Thus, the present situation is alarming for all of us including those who are the policy makers in the Indian government. Efforts must be made to revitalize, preserve and document the tribal languages which are critically endangered. Preservation and documentation of the tribal languages are not only necessary for saving the lexicon and its structure but for saving the entire linguistic and cultural identity of the tribal people. Moreover, tribal languages must be saved from dying so that the linguistic diversity as well as cultural ecology of India could be maintained. The amendment

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

in the government policies from time to time and strict enforcement of them would definitely save many tribal or minority languages from getting endangered and dying. The revitalization and preservation of the endangered languages can be achieved through individual's effort, language planners and policy makers' support. Each one of us must come forward and save these unnoticed, unprivileged and dying languages of our country in order to serve in the rights of saving our nations linguistic and cultural identity.

References

- Bhattacharjee, B. (2019). Language Revitalization and Community Initiatives: An Indian Perspective. *Language Ecology*, 3 (2), 233-254.
- Boruah, D. M. (2020). Language Loss and Revitalization of Gondi Language: An Endangered Language of Central India. *Language in India*, 20 (9), 144-156.
- Brenzinger, M. (1992b). *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Special Reference to East Africa*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Campbell, L. (1994). Language Death. In R. E. Asher & J.M.Y. Simpson (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Vol.-4, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1960-1968.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dash, R. K. (2020). Revitalizing Endangered Languages in India: Can Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Work? Paper Presented in 2nd International Conference on Social Sciences in the 21st Century. 27-29 March.
- Devy, G. N. (2013). Stated in an interview published in a daily newspaper *Hindustan Times* www.hindustantimes.com, Accessed in December 2024.
- Dixon, R. M. W. (1991). A Changing Language Situation: The decline of Dyirbal, 1963-1989. *Language in Society*, 20 (2), 183-200.
- Dixon, R. M. W. (1997). *The Rise and Fall of Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dorian, N. C. (1981). *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Dorian, N. C. (1989b). *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

- Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Gautam, A. K. (2022). Language Endangerment in India: An Overview. *Language in India*, 22 (1), 85-95.
- Grenoble, L. A. & Whaley, L. J. (1998b). *Endangered Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grenoble, L. A. & Whaley, L. J. (2006). *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gupta, N. (2017). Endangered Languages: Some Concerns. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 7 (7), 494-506.
- Hale, K. (1992). On Endangered Languages and the Safeguarding of Diversity. *Language*, 68 (1), 1-3.
- Hale, K. & Krauss, M. et al. (1992). Endangered Languages. *Language*, 68 (1), 1-42.
- Hinton, L. (2011). Revitalization of Endangered Languages. In Peter K. Austin & Julia Sallabank (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Immidiseti, S. (2021). The State of Language, Endangerment, and Policy in India: A Forking Path. Honors College Theses. 325. https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses/325
- Itagi, N. H. & Singh, S. K. (eds.) (2002). *Linguistic Landscaping in India*. Mysore: CIIL and M. Gandhi International Hindi University.
- Kapono, E. (1995). Hawaiian Language Revitalization and Immersion Education. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 112, 121-135.
- Khubchandani, L. (1992). *Tribal Identity: A Language and Communication Perspective*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies,
- Krauss, M. (1992). The World's Languages in Crisis. *Language*, 68 (1), 4-10.
- Ladefoged, P. (1992). Another View of Endangered Languages. *Language*, 68, 809-811.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Matsumura, K. (1998). *Studies in Endangered Languages*. (ICHEL Linguistic Studies Vol.1.) Tokyo: Hituji Syobo.

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:6 June 2026

Dr. Bablu Ray

Language Endangerment and Revitalization of the Tribal Languages: A Study of Madhya Pradesh

- Moseley, C. (ed.). (2010). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (3rd edition). Paris: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Nagaraja, K. S. (2014). *The Nihali Language*. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.
- Nettle, D. and Romaine, S. (2000). *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robins, R. H. and Uhlenbeck, E. M. (1991). *Endangered Languages*. Oxford/New York: Berg.
- Sakiyama, O. (2001). *Lectures on Endangered languages: 2 -from Kyoto Conference 2000-* (Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim C002). Osaka: Osaka Gakuin University.
- Sallabank, J. (2010). Language Endangerment: Problems and Solutions. *eSharp, Special Issue: Communicating Change: Representing Self and Community in a Technological World*, 50-87. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/esharp>
- Sallabank, Julia (2011). Language Policy for Endangered Languages. In Peter K. Austin & Julia Sallabank (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 277–290.
- Saxena, S. & Kaur, G. (2025). Preservation and Revitalisation of Indian Languages through Digital Archiving: A Systematic Review of Bharatvani. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 45(1), 57-64.
- Sengupta, P. (2009). Endangered Languages: Some Concerns. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 44 (32), 17-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663414>
- Shoji, H. and Janhunen, J. (1997). *Northern Minority Languages: Problems of Survival*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.
- Singh, P. (2018). Revitalization of Minority Languages: Implications for language Policy and Planning. In Kailash Pattanaik and Arimardhan Kumar Tripathi (eds.), *Indian Languages & Cultures: A debate*. West Bengal: CFEL, Vishwa Bhartri Shanti Niketan. Pp. 1-26.
- Tsunoda, T. (2001). Role and ethics of researchers and method of documentation. In Osamu Sakiyama (ed.), *Lectures on endangered languages:2 - from Kyoto Conference -* (Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim, 2001, C002), 261-67.
- Tsunoda, T. (2005). *Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

UNESCO (2003). Language Vitality and Endangerment. UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf>, Retrieved in September 2024.

UNESCO (2010). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. Paris: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187026/PDF/187026eng.pdf.multi>, Retrieved in September 2024.

Government of India (2011), Census of India, New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General, India <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-16.html>, Accessed in March, 2025.

Government of India (2011), Language Atlas of India 2011, New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, India, <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/42561> , Accessed in March, 2025.