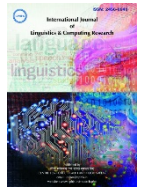




International Journal of Linguistics & Computing Research

Journal Homepage: <http://cphfs.in/research.php>



The Sense of Danger: An Overview of Endangered Languages in India

Professor Udaya Narayana Singh
Chair-Professor & Head, ACLiS
Amity Centre for Linguistic Studies (ACLiS)
Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon
Pachgaon, Manesar PIN 122431
E-mail: unscil51@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper aims at demonstrating that in the context of languages of India facing a threat of extinction, there are two kinds of barriers that are at work, bringing in a division among those that are 'achiever languages' and those that are 'endangered languages'. One of them is 'Socio-cultural' barrier (resulting mainly from the ethnic affiliation and inter-ethnic relationship as well as from societal and cultural practices) and another – 'Physical barrier' (especially the hills and the mountains as well as wide rivers and desert) – both of which have been important in creating a kind of seclusion for certain languages that are moving towards endangerment over a period of time. While seclusion poses one kind of danger, living together could result in a silent killing of less functional languages because of our 'assimilationist' tendencies. Even though there are constitutional provisions for all language communities, the real-life situation is far from satisfactory. It is, therefore, not surprising to find India topping the list of endangered languages in the world in the latest UNESCO count.

I. INTRODUCTION

India accounts for 2.4% of the world's land surface with a densely populated space where 16% of the world's population live (*India: A Country Study* by James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden eds. Federal Research Division; 1995; Also, *The Library of Congress: Country Studies*; Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress) [1]. Consequently, it has always been a home for a large number of languages. For instance, the 1961 census reports mentioned a total of 1,652 "mother tongues," out of which 184 had more than 10,000 speakers [2]. The encyclopaedic *People of India* series of the Anthropological Survey of India [3], identified 75 "major languages" out of a total of 325 languages used in Indian households. Some other account shows India [4] as a home for 398 languages - 387 of which are living languages. India thus writes in many languages and speaks in many more voices.

As a nation-state 'India' (or, *Bhārat* as it has been known in our Cultural History) has emerged as a unique cultural space that has 'absorbed' numerous religious and philosophic thoughts, different practices of life as well as countless number of speech varieties. And yet, communication has never broken down in

this sub-continent. India has been an example of picture perfect – a mix of comprehension, compassion and conviction - a singular country with plural expressions. All this was possible because language always mattered to us. For instance, the clinical name of *Phonetics*, the science of speech sounds was *ShikSaa* (literally, 'education') in ancient India, without which no education could be complete. Besides, in all ages, we had authors who wrote in many languages.

It is estimated that there are about 700-1,000 languages spoken in the South Asian region, belonging to at least four major language families - Indo-Aryan (most of which belonged to one sub-branch of Indo-European), Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic. Multilingualism is not a new phenomenon in the Indian context. Even Sir George Grierson's twelve-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1923) – had identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. One of the early Census reports also showed 188 languages and 49 dialects (1921 census). Each speech community in India has a number of languages in its repertoire – used for different functions. The base language(s) would be in the inner fringe – and so are the basic elements of grammar. What is acquired through acculturation & socialization

are in the relatively outer fringes. Thus, while planning for either state intervention in policy planning vis-à-vis our languages and cultures, or in drafting our Constitution, the founding fathers had emphasized on both mother tongues as base languages and the regional/link languages. Language has been like a ‘peelable’ entity for India, with multiple layers.

II. THE DISTRIBUTION

At this point, it may be ideal to introduce the linguistic complexity with respect to language diversity in India. The following facts about India may be worth-noting:

- 1,576 *rationalized* mother-tongues (2001 Census);
- 1,796 other mother-tongues;
- 122 languages (with 10,000 plus speakers)
- 22 languages in the Indian Constitution, cover 96% of our population.
- 20 *Austric* & 98 Sino-Tibetan languages make up another 2%.
- Highest literary award in 24 languages
- Magazines & Newspapers in 101 languages
- Radio programmes in 146 speech varieties
- 50 languages with literary vitality (1989 estimate)
- Earlier about 69, but now 33 languages used in schools; '04
- 14 major writing systems, but about 25 in all – many yet to be connected to the UNICODE consortium activities. Here is a sample of India’s major scripts:

Gut.	DEV	GUJ	PUN	BEN	ORI	TEL	KAN	TAM	MAL	SINH	URD	SIND
k	क	ક	ਕ	କ	କ	క	ಕ	க	ക	ක	ک	ڪ
kh	ख	ખ	ਖ	ਖ	ଖ	ఖ	ಖ	-	ഖ	ක	کھ	ڪھ
g	ग	ગ	ਗ	ଗ	ଗ	గ	ಗ	-	ഗ	ග	گ	گ
gh	घ	ઘ	ਘ	ଘ	ଘ	ఘ	ಘ	-	ഘ	ඝ	گھ	گھ
ñ	ड	ડ	ਡ	ଡ	ଡ	డ	ಡ	ന	ന	ඬ	ن	ڱ

Fig 1: Major writing Systems of India

The extent of linguistic variation is so complex that a single language like Hindi has over 49 speech varieties.

Genealogically, it is the Tibeto-Burman and the Austric groups that seem to be in danger zone more than the smaller languages within the Indo-Aryan and the Dravidian fold. This, however, cannot be a sweeping statement, because more than the ‘language family’, it is the distance and seclusion that have played an important role here. As historical facts show, there had been a great deal of admixture of ethnic and linguistic groups in the eastern part of India, and it is these small groups of mother tongues that are more severely threatened. But let’s look into the details of language families in this region first.

Languages spoken in the South Asian region belong to at least four major language families: Indo-European (most of which, i.e. 74.24% belong to its sub-branch Indo-Aryan, IA), Dravidian (with 23.86% speakers), Austro-Asiatic (1.16%), and

Sino-Tibetan (0.62%) [5]. The Wikipedia figures (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia [6]) are slightly different though: 72 % Indo-Aryan, 25% Dravidian, and only 3% people speaking Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and other languages. But since the former figures are generally endorsed by both Census reports and Ethnologue, we could stand by the same. The biggest chunk of languages and mother tongues belong to the Indo-Aryan sub-family of Indo-European languages. The immediate predecessor of Indo-Aryan happens to be Indo-Iranian, the oldest specimens of which are available in the Zend-Avesta. Among the modern Indo-Aryan languages, Hindi (especially, the western variety) is a Midland Indo-Aryan language, spoken in the Gangetic plain and around it, on three sides, are Panjabi, Gujarati, Rajasthani. The Eastern Hindi varieties are spoken in Oudh and to its south. In the outer layer of the midlands, we get languages such as Kashmiri, Lahnda, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, in the northern and the western region, and Oriya, Maithili, Bengali and Assamese in the east.

Among Dravidian languages, besides the four internationally known languages spread in many parts of the world, namely, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telugu. There are 26 Dravidian languages by the current count, of which 25 are spoken in India and one (Brahui) is spoken in Baluchistan on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Spoken by more than 300 million people in south Asia, the antiquity of Dravidian languages is largely due to the rich grammatical and linguistico-literary tradition of Classical Tamil [7] and other classical stages of Kannada and Telugu.

The Austric family of languages is divided into two branches, Austroasiatic and Austronesian, the latter formerly called Malayo-Polynesian. They are spoken in India, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. The Austroasiatic branch has the Munda languages in India, spoken in the eastern and southern parts of India. The well-known Munda languages include the following: Santali, Mundri, Bhumij, Birhar, Ho, Tri, Korcu, Khari, Juang, and Savara, etc. The Munda speakers are found mostly in the hills and jungles, while the plains and valleys have some pockets inhabited by people speaking these languages.

The Tibeto-Burman family is a part of Sino-Tibetan languages, spread over a large area - from Tibet in the north to Burma in the south, and from the Ladkh wathrat of Kashmir in the west to the Chinese provinces of Sze-chuen and Yunnan in the east. Lepcha, Sikkimese, Garo, Bodo, Manipuri, and Naga are some of the better-known Tibeto-Burman languages. Besides a few that are close to Tibetan, Bodo and Tipra sub-groups are now well-known, and so are the Naga languages. The Kuki-Chin languages as well as Lushai and Manipuri fall somewhere in between these extreme sub-families. Several smaller languages that cannot easily be fit into any of the above large families such as Burushaski in the North-West are language isolates. Then there are separate families [8] like Andamanese which would include quite a few diverse languages in the Andamans, and one could possibly also add six odd languages spoken in 22 odd Nicobar islands.

Thus, as can be evident from this discussion, language families in India roughly coincide with broad geographic division of the sub-continent. Indo-Aryan speakers are spread over northern and central regions, whereas the twenty-odd Dravidian groups are mostly located in the Southern peninsula. The Austro-Asiatic languages are spoken mainly in the East and Central India, whereas the Tibeto-Burman communities live in the northern Himalayan region (like Himachal Pradesh) as well as in the seven North-Eastern States.

In the socio-cultural space called 'Bharat' or 'India', what happened in all ages was the following: Every time a new element was introduced (from the Aryan influx to the hostile Turks and the Moghuls, leave alone the British merchants) in this cultural space, all concerned speech communities – the hosts as well as the external groups “finally settle down for a peaceful comingling and cultural as well as racial fusion with their predecessors in the land”...“after an initial period of hostile contact in some cases”. In the political entity called India, there is no doubt “there have been occasional clashes of interests and ideals or of attitudes which are ultimately based on or linked up with the desire to wield power and control pelf – on the political and economic factors.” All the late-comers (such as the Indo-Mongoloids, or the Turks or the Perso-Arabic stocks) fell into this pattern established through a 3,000 years of contact and convergence. This kind of convergence has given rise to what has been called the 'Sprachbund' or 'Linguistic Area' as in M.B.Emeneau's 1958 work – 'India as a linguistic area'. This means that 'assimilation' – rather than 'aggressive conflict' has been a natural trend in the South Asian region.

III. WHERE IS THE DANGER?

Genealogically, it is the Tibeto-Burman and the Austric groups that seem to be in danger zone more than the smaller languages within the Indo-Aryan and the Dravidian fold. This, however, cannot be a sweeping statement, because more than the 'language family', it is the distance and seclusion that have played an important role here. As historical facts show, there had been a great deal of admixture of ethnic and linguistic groups in the eastern part of India, and it is these small groups of mother tongues that are more severely threatened. But let's look into the details of language families in this region first.

We will assume here that the latest UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2009), released on Feb 19th 2009 (on the eve of the International Mother Tongue Day – 21st February) presents a tentatively more-or-less accurate and expanded data-set of 2,500 endangered languages – ranked on the basis of five different levels of vitality: unsafe, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct. The report is extremely worrisome because it finds that “more than 200 have become extinct during the last three generations, 538 are critically endangered, 502 severely endangered, 632 definitely endangered and 607 unsafe” (http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=44605&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). Although – with the exception of the Andaman &

Nicobar Islands - greater number of nearly extinct languages are located in other countries, it is still painful to note that “199 languages have fewer than ten speakers and 178 others have 10 to 50.”

To give an over-all picture of the endangered languages in India, one finds that some of these 196 languages listed in the Atlas are spread across different states, and hence the total of all zones as given below would add up to 239. As is predictable, 67.36% of these are locatable in the eastern region, with another 18.41% in the Himalayan region in the north. If we take up their location with respect to the Himalayan belt, we find 70.29% of them tucked in this region. This only proves the thesis proposed here that the mountains offer seclusions and barriers where the outer world with more widespread and commercially viable languages is able to reach last. Consider the following distribution of 239 threatened linguistic zones where these 196 languages are possible to place:

North [48] *The Himalayas – 44 ; The Rest – 4* (CHATTISGARH – 3; HIMACHAL - 19; JAMMU & KASHMIR – 12; MADHYA PRADESH – 11; UTTARAKHAND – 13; and UTTAR PRADESH - 1)

West [04] (MAHARASHTRA - 4)

South[26] (AP – 11; KARNATAKA – 6; KERALA – 2; TAMIL NADU - 7)

East [161] *The Himalayas –124; The Rest –41* (ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS – 9; ARUNACHAL – 36; ASSAM – 24; BIHAR – 5; JHARKHAND – 10; MANIPUR – 28; MEGHALAYA – 5; MIZORAM – 6; NAGALAND – 21, and ORISSA - 17)

Even if one looks into the southern region, in both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu-Karnataka zone, these languages are located on the hills and in the areas surrounded by dense forests.

Consider the following map of language endangerment in India:

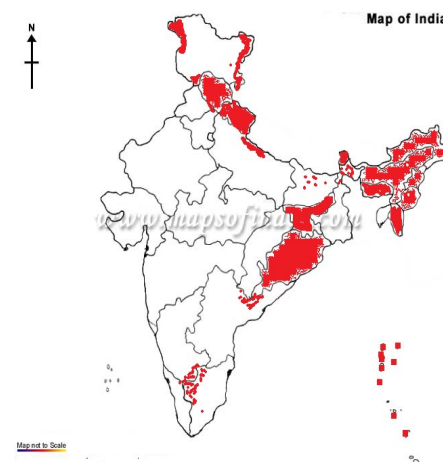


Fig 2: Plotting the Endangered languages in India

IV. POSSIBILITIES

Language Planners and Sociolinguists would of course take objection to this apparently primitive explanation such as the one proposed here based on ‘barriers’ and ‘distances’, but to my mind, the greatest impact of modern technology and the opening up of the universe of media and communication has been felt here. Since physical mobility had been minimal in these regions, the ideal situation would have been towards retention of these mothertongues (MTs). But the glitz and glamour of the other India or the outer world have reached or begun reaching these corners only in the last decade with explosion of both communication and media (television and radio) technology and their outreach. Hence, the impact – such as unconscious or planned decisions in favour of dropping one’s mothertongue and adopting a more functional language instead - has also been greater.

My conjecture is that this ‘shift away’ or ‘moving out’ of MT has been further helped by yet another factor, namely, lack of use these languages as media of primary education. As the 7th Education Survey Report (NCERT) shows, of the ‘language codes’ used for different MTs already in use, we get the following picture of 47 odd languages used in our school system today, out of which only 18, i.e. Angami, Ao, Bhoti, Bhutia, Bodhi, Garo, Kakbarak, Khasi, Konyak, Ladakhi, Lepcha, Limbu, Lotha, Mizo, Nicobaree, Sema, Tibetan and Zeliang are outside the 8th Schedule, and are smaller MTs, and Arabic, French, German and Portuguese are in the “foreign” languages category:

LANGUAG E	CODE	LANGUAG E	CODE	LANGUAG E	COD E
Angami	01	Kakbarak	17	Nicobaree	33
Ao	02	Kannada	18	Oriya	34
Arabic	03	Kashmiri	19	Oriya(lower)	35
Assamese	04	Khasi	20	Persian	36
Bengali	05	Konkani	21	Portuguese	37
Bhoti	06	Konyak	22	Punjabi	38
Bhutia	07	Laddakhi	23	Rajasthani	39
Bodhi	08	Lepcha	24	Sanskrit	40
Bodo	09	Limbo	25	Sema	41
Dogri	10	Lotha	26	Sindhi	42
English	11	Malayalam	27	Tamil	43
French	12	Manipuri	28	Telugu	44
Garo	13	Marathi	29	Tibetan	45
Gujarati	14	Maithili	30	Urdu	46
German	15	Mizo	31	Zeliang	47
Hindi	16	Nepali	32	Other language	48

Table 1: Languages in our Schools

The claim is not that their introduction in the school system would automatically make them functionally vibrant. For instance, among these, once again, ten of them, i.e. Angami, Ao, Kakbarak, Konyak, Khasi, Ladakhi, Lepcha, Limbu, Mizo, and Sema also figure in the endangered languages list. However, it is true that the new generation speakers of these languages, would usually go by the utility value, or as McConnel and Mahapatra said, by ‘language vitality score’ (including their availability in the newspaper/magazine domain and radio domain etc. With 37.75 million land-line telephones and 362.3 million cell-phones (2009 figures), 2.207 million net providers (2008) with 80 million internet users (2007 figures) and 562 television stations beaming 24 hours, Indian languages (Cf. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>)

V. HOW TO OVERCOME THEM POSSIBLE BARRIERS?

With a population size of 1,166,079,217 (July 2009 est.) where 31% were in the 0-14 age-group, and only 5.3% above 65, and only 2.5% annual rate of urbanization (by 2005-10 estimate) to add to 29% urbans, there is a terrible speed at which changes happen in India (http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurren/india/india_people.html). There is no doubt that the demographic profile of India has changed and is changing very fast. Over one-third of Indians are younger than 15 years of age, by 2000 estimates [9]. Further, more than 70% of the population lives in more than 550,000 odd villages [10]. Notice that 37.7% Indians are now in 0-14 age-group (by 1996 figure), but this will drop down to 27.7% by 2016. In comparison, most Indians (55.6%) today belong to the 15-59 age-group [11] – the population of which will dramatically go up by 1916 - pushing the people in older age groups [12]. Add the fact that the figure of ‘Internally displaced people’ (due to construction of large dams, political turmoil, insurgencies etc) in India is significantly large.

All these indicate that if an inclusive language policy based on multilingualism and pluri-culturalism is not in place, a young and changing/moving country such as India will have adverse repercussions later when we become a country with many more old people. The matter will get further complicated with many other questions, beginning from the issue of dominance of larger languages and LWCs (or, ‘Languages for Wider Communication’) to empowerment of smaller languages as well as to the interplay of market forces and language loyalty.

A few more points about India: It is administratively organized into 35 States and Union Territories (unless we further divide ourselves into yet newer states for which negotiations are on at the moment). Each of these units has under it, divisions or units at several sub-levels. At the first level, there are Districts (612 in number) – further sub-divided into sub-districts (5,564) [13]. Nearly 26.1% of the total population live in the urban areas which have shown a phenomenal population explosion - form 28.85 million in 1901 to 159.46 million in 1981 and 217 million in 1991 [14]. Currently, there are 51 Cities, 384 Urban Agglomerates and 5,161 Towns (2,843 in 1951) in India. A total of 138 million people, or 16 percent, lived in only 299 urban

agglomerations (Census 1991). Only 24 metropolitan cities accounted for 51 percent of India's total population, with Bombay and Calcutta leading at 12.6 million and 10.9 million, respectively. With greater urbanites, one might think the chances of homogenization would be better but that has not happened in India.

Although states in India are organized according to languages (where each state has its own state official language), each state has also numerous other language communities who may be speakers of one major language or the other migrating from other states. Further, at any given time, about 15% of Indians are on the move to other places. Therefore, this was attempted to have been tackled by creating facilities for out of state groups to open, maintain and nurture their own educational institutions with other than state languages. In addition, a large number of *Kendriya Vidyalayas* or Central Schools (that would use both English and Hindi as media of instructions) and *Navodaya Vidyalayas* funded and managed by the federal government have been of great help. Similarly, each state would have a Central University that would cater to the linguistic needs of the out of state and migrant population as well as aspirants from other states. It goes without saying that the states in India have excellent universities and colleges that give preference to state languages as well as state-level secondary examination boards that manage and affiliate all state-run and many private schools following state's linguistic policies and syllabi. At the same time, the states also allow private schools to set up schools in states but seek affiliation from the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) and/or ICSE (Indian Council of Secondary Education) that offer an all-India pattern.

After India gained independence in 1947, it was suggested that the newly independent nation should have a federal system, composed of a limited number of states. The basis of their formation was to be linguistic - a region with one major language make up one state. In order to overcome the political barriers, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, had appointed the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) in August 1953 with Justice Fazl Ali, K.M. Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru as members. After the Commission submitted its report, the States Reorganization Act was passed by parliament in November 1956, and it provided for reducing 27 states to 14 states and 6 centrally administered territories. Although there was no one-to-one match, the Indian Constitution (in its 8th Schedule) recognized 14 languages to start with. Later, one out-of-state language – Sindhi was added to the list of 8th Schedule languages, because unlike the Bengali speakers and the Punjabi speakers, the Sindhi speakers migrating from Pakistan had no particular state to claim as their own.

In 1956, some states were created from parts of others to unite members of a language group, as the whole approach was to be based on the linguistic principle. But even before the act was passed, there was already strong agitation for bifurcation of the Bombay state into two large states – one each for Gujarati and Marathi speech communities. Since the SRC did not agree to that, language riots followed in both Bombay and Ahmedabad. Finally in 1960, Bombay was divided into two new

states, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Once again, in November 1966, two states were formed of one earlier state, Punjab. One remained the state of Punjab, where the majority spoke Punjabi with Sikhs as dominating religious group, and the other entity with predominantly Hindu population was known as Haryana, where the majority spoke a variety of Hindi (often known as 'Haryanavi'). Similarly, the Karnataka state (focusing on Kannada) as well as the state of Andhra Pradesh (with Telugu as its principal language) also came up. Now we have 35 states and union territories with 22 Constitutional languages, which are all "National languages". The list does not include English though, even though Hindi and English are the official languages of the union of India. Each state has its own official and associate official language. And yet, the demand and passion for creating still newer states have not died down, with Telangana and Andhra issue coming up so prominently, besides the demand for a Gorkhaland.

On a different note, although earlier we only had Assam and the NEFA (or, the North-Eastern Frontier Areas), the North-eastern India now has seven different states, nick-named as the 'seven sisters'. These states are spread over an area of over 255,088 sq. km., which is 7.7% of India's territory [15], but house the largest number of linguistic groups, although most of them speak Tibeto-Burman languages. In fact, ever since the British gained the charge of governance of Assam in 1838, the plan was to isolate the tribal linguistic groups here, and accordingly, in 1873, through the promulgation of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, the NEFA was created. Except Assam, which itself had had a chequered history, all other north-eastern states of today were created at different period of time. In 1972, Meghalaya (with mostly Khasi and Garo speakers) was carved out of Assam through a peaceful process. Tripura, too, with Tipra or Kokborok languages (spoken by 19 Scheduled Tribes besides Bangla and Manipuri, out of which Bangla speakers account for 40% of its population) [16] had become a state in 1972. But much before that, Nagaland became a self-governing state within India (in 1960), although the state was officially inaugurated in 1963 [17]. This 16,579 sq. km area has between 12 to 14 Naga languages. One of the latest to be created was Sikkim (inhabited by speakers of Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali, Limbu), which was an independent kingdom till 1975 before it merged with India. After the memorandum of settlement between Government of India and the Mizo National Front was signed in 1986, Mizoram became an official state with Mizo and English as official languages in February 1987. At the same time, Arunachal Pradesh [18] was set up– on 20th February 1987. The major lingua-ethnic groups include: Adi, Nyishi (including Bangru and Puroik), Apatani, Bugun, Galo, Hrusso, Koro, Meyor, Monpa, Tagin, Mishmi (including Idu-Mishmi, Taroan and Kamman), Sajolang, Sartang, Tai Khamti, Yobin, Singpho and Tangshang (including a number of smaller groups from the Changlang district as well as Nocte, wanchoo and Tutsa from the Tirap district).

Now, to give one instance of attempts to disturb the linguistic-ethnic composition of the region, take the case of migration because of which as against the 355,320 Muslim population of the Assam Valley (as per 1911 census), the

number had grown almost three-times to 1,305,902 by 1941. It is not surprising, therefore, that violence against the speakers of 'Other tongues' erupted here repeatedly in 1979, 1987, 1989, 1990 and 1992 [19], and the region is disturbed linguistically even now. The violence had its roots in the large-scale immigration from Bangla-speaking Muslims during the last century. Among the north-eastern states, Manipur is one of the oldest as it had got the full statehood status in 1972. Although Manipuri speakers have the majority, about 30% are speakers of Naga and Kuki, with a number of other very small speech groups. Since 1972, the North Eastern Council Act, 1971, a North Eastern Council (NEC) has been established (with representation from all seven north-eastern states at the highest level) to act as advisory body in respect of balanced socio-economic development of the region [20].

As one could see, the Indian state had to make many changes in its political and constitutional structures to solve the political issues connected with languages. As mentioned already, when the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India on November 26, 1949, there were 14 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. They were (in the order of number of speakers): *Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Assamese* and *Sanskrit*. There have been three amendments to the Eighth Schedule during the last 55 years, results of which have been as follows. *Sindhi* was included through the Constitution Amendment Bill No 21 in 1967, *Konkani, Manipuri* and *Nepali* (or, *Gorkhali*) through Amendment Bill No. 71 in 1992, and *Maithili, Santali, Bodo*, and *Dogri* through Amendment Bill No. 100 in 2003. Thus, currently, there are 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule. Table 4 as given here lists these languages together with the number of speakers of each of these languages (as in Census 1991):

Sr. No.	Languages	Speakers	Percentage
1.	Assamese	1,31,68,484	1.33%
2.	Bengali	8,33,69,769	8.39%
3.	Bodo	13,50,478	0.14%
4.	Dogri	22,82,589	0.23%
5.	Gujarati	4,60,91,617	4.64%
6.	Hindi	42,20,48,642	42.49%
7.	Kannada	3,79,24,011	3.82%
8.	Kashmiri	55,27,698	0.56%
9.	Konkani	24,89,015	0.25%
10.	Malayalam	3,30,66,392	3.33%
11.	Manipuri	14,66,705	0.15%
12.	Marathi	7,19,36,894	7.24%
13.	Maithili	1,21,79,122	1.26%
14.	Nepali	28,71,749	0.25%
15.	Oriya	3,30,17,446	3.32%
16.	Punjabi	2,91,02,477	2.93%
17.	Sanskrit	14,135	0.01%
18.	Santali	64,69,600	0.65%
19.	Sindhi	25,35,485	0.26%
20.	Tamil	6,07,93,814	6.12%

21.	Telugu	7,40,02,856	7.45%
22.	Urdu	5,15,36,111	5.19%

Table 2. Scheduled languages in Indian Constitution and their speakers

Multilingualism being the rule, rather than being an exception in India, it is not surprising that cultural habits, rituals, and belief-systems show an equal extent of plurality. Religion, caste, and various social issues usually dominate the politics here.

In terms of **religion**, even though the Hindus account for 83% population, the country has 14% or 120 million Muslims, 2.4% Christians, and Sikhs - 2%, Buddhists - 0.7%, Jains - 0.5%, and others - 0.4% (<http://www.goski.com/india.htm>). The Census 2001 has given details of the decadal growth rate of different religious groups in India which is worth reproducing here, and one could see that the rate of decline is alarming among the Sikhs, whereas Christianity seems to be on the rise.

As for the **caste** system in India, it reflects occupational and religiously defined hierarchies in this region. Traditionally, there are four broad categories of castes (*varnas*), including a category of outcastes, earlier called "untouchables" but now commonly referred to as "dalits", and special constitutional provisions have been made for these castes, generally known as the 'Scheduled Castes'. Similarly, there is also a separate list of 'Scheduled Tribes'. The Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in India according to 1991 census are 13,82,23,277 and 6,77,58,380 respectively, constituting 16.33% and 8.01% of India's total population respectively [21]. It may be noted that the proportion of SC and ST population has increased considerably from 15.8% and 7.8% respectively in 1981. It is these tribes that are likely to speak the smaller languages of India.

During the debate in India's Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh had proposed that out of the 176 *Adivasi* (or Tribal) languages (as in 1949), Mundari (with its 400 000 speakers), Gondi (with 320 000 speakers) and Oraon (with 110 000 speakers) should be included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, because they were important and were spoken by more number of people than some of the languages already included. He selected only three out of many Tribal languages so as not to overburden the Schedule, and he felt that they would "enrich the *Rashtrabhasha* [national language] of the country" (CAD [22], p. 1439). Some others like Naziruddin Ahmad argued for Rajasthani and Hindustani and to be included in the list (CAD, p. 1482), and Syama Prasad Mookerjee for Sanskrit (CAD, p. 1391) but finally, only 14 languages were included. Notice that in 1951, besides these 14 languages, there were 23 major tribal languages and 24 other minority languages in several other official documents, including the Census, each of which was spoken by over 100,000 speakers. Therefore, these were pushed to "minor" languages category, although demographically, they should have been counted as stable. Even if these efforts were to succeed, this constitutional provision could only be one solution to the issue at hand.

As for the Government of India, many constitutional provisions were made to arrest the decay of stable languages and for the protection the rights of linguistic minorities. The Schedules (8th, 5th and 6th Schedules) and Articles 224 (provision for linguistic and other minorities), 350B (Special Officers for linguistic minorities), Articles, 330, 332 through 334 (Special representation was made for the STs in the Parliament & State legislative assemblies), and Articles 16 and 338 (for separate State-level and National Commissions under the Ministry of Tribal Welfare) were some examples. In addition, Article 350 allows the minority communities to express their grievances in their own languages and a special provision under Article 350A to allows them the smaller communities to demand for educational opportunities in their mother tongue.

There are and can be other administrative action that could help ease out the tension of many languages losing ground under their feet, as it were. For instance, the Government of India had taken some positive steps such as the following, although one could always argue that these would not be enough:

- Grant-in-Aid scheme under Article 275(1);
- Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955
- The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989;
- 43 Special Multi-purpose Tribal Blocks (SMPTBs; 2nd 5-Yr Plan);
- Under 4th Plan, projects set up in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.
- Later, a separate Tribal Development Agency was established
- Under 5th Plan, a Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) for direct benefit of the STs was launched;
- In 1987, the TRIFED or Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation was set up;
- National Forest Policy and Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 are being given fresh look to prevent land alienation from tribal to non-tribals

Surely many of these policy initiatives did not get translated into equally forceful action for various reasons, resulting in linguistic debasement in some parts of the country. Since nations are “imagined communities”, to quote Benedict Anderson, this imagination is expected to tie us up together territorially (in terms of shared space), economically (common goals and failures), politically (sense of participation in decision-making and with common rights and duties), culturally (through practices that are profane – beyond religious beliefs and biases) and historically (sharing the same myths, memories and texts). And, they are bound together by speech and communication, because languages should act as bridges and not as barriers. They are a privileged means to access ‘the other’.

VI. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Those engaged in containing or reversing the trend of growing number of endangered languages need to understand that – as I mentioned in the conclusive remarks of the talk (‘India Speaks, India Writes:

To Plan Languages is to Plan Societies’) given at the Global Seminar on the International Year of Languages organized by the UNESCO and UNDP at the United Nations on Dec 17-18, 2008 – language planning must be extended to help building civil societies based on acceptance of diversity of cultures and languages. This is because no matter what provisions are made on paper, the danger to such ideal systems come from three kinds of tensions:

- (i) The first is a constant tension between ‘*being*’ and ‘*becoming*.’ It is not only one’s numerical strength (or weakness), nor a biological danger in terms of reproductivity that could threaten languages. Even larger languages can disappear, if they decide to change their natural ‘*being*’ of bilinguality to ‘*becoming*’ members of a larger linguistic entity. This could happen for various reasons, ranging from higher education, better job prospects, or more social prestige. In a multi-cultural milieu, it is natural *being* bilingual. But in the process of *becoming* a bilingual, a large scale conversion may take place. This may result in language shift leading to language loss.
- (ii) The second danger comes also because of the ‘perception’ of one’s language universe. The members of a smaller linguistic group will often have to negotiate with some of these questions: How do you see yourself, and how do others look at you? Which of these two evaluations do you accept and why? How deep is your commitment to your ‘own’ tags of identity? This type of tension in smaller linguistic groups was pointed out long ago by Dell Hymes in his paper ‘Two Types of Linguistic Relativity’. Many small speech groups survive the onslaught of the forces of globalization, whereas many larger groups accepts a negative evaluation and give up their own tags.
- (iii) The third type of tension comes from how a speech group tries to ‘*include*’ or ‘*exclude*’ other speech groups that may be genetically, genealogically, and culturally related to their own group. Whether the group in question tries to divorce from the larger identity to create a space for its own language or tries to forge an identity with the other to create a new and larger identity. ‘*Split*’ and ‘*Merger*’ are the political game language continents often play, and this dynamics is often difficult for an observer from outside to understand. However, this urge to be like the rest of ‘others’, or the itch to forge one’s own destiny quite often grows out of particular historical moments, or as counter-moves against a perceived move by others.

That multilingualism and pluri-culturalism have been highly respected in India in all ages is clear from many documents and evidences. In fact, even while talking about ancient Indian literature – which many of us confuse with only history of Sanskrit literature, we find scholars like Winternitz commenting that “*The history of Indian literature...not only stretches across great periods of time and an enormous area, but is also one which is composed in many languages*”. But there is no denying the fact that the country has also been a field of linguistic tension. Such tensions involving smaller languages can be seen

even now. For example, even when though 80 percent of all Indians - nearly 750 million (1995 estimates) – speak one or other among the few Indian languages, and even when Hindi is understood by close to 60%, there are still many other languages with a long literary history, grammatical and lexicographical tradition and rich literary heritage, and they are still in use in all modern means of communication. Smaller languages often do not enter into this game bigger linguistic groups play, because they are engaged in a battle of survival in the first place. The civil societies must take some concrete action to protect and promote these intangible heritages.

REFERENCES

- [1]. <http://lweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/intoc.html>
- [2]. The 1981 census reported 112 mother tongues with more than 10,000 plus speakers
- [3]. People of India Project/edited by K.S. Singh. 1992, 72 volumes; New Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India.
- [4]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=India
- [5]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=India
- [6]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_India
- [7]. Annamalai, E. Review of Bh.Krishnamurti's 'The Dravidian Languages'; In Frontline, Volume 20 - Issue 22, October 25 - November, 07, 2003
- [8]. Mallikarjun, B. 2002. Mother tongues of India according to the 1961 census. Languages of India, Vol 5. August no.
- [9]. the details of which are: 0-14 years: 34% (male 175,228,164; female 165,190,951); 15-64 years: 62% (male 324,699,562; female 301,821,383); and 65 years plus: 4% (male 23,925,371; female 23,138,386)
- [10]. See:
<http://www.indianngos.com/issue/population/statistics>; Courtesy: www.unicef.org
- [11]. <http://www.indianngos.com/issue/population/statistics/statistics5.html>
- [12]. Calculated from the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections
- [13]. <http://www.censusindia.net/results/admin.html>
- [14]. http://www.cpcb-ecocities.com/e1622/e1628/e2110/index_eng.html
- [15]. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume12/Article3.htm>; esp. Sahni, Ajai. 'Survey of Conflicts and Resolutions in India's North-East'. [Institute for Conflict Management (ICM)].
- [16]. <http://www.economywatch.com/stateprofiles/tripura/profile.htm>
- [17]. www.economywatch.com/stateprofiles/nagaland/profile.htm
- [18]. <http://arunachalpradesh.nic.in/>
- [19]. <http://www.hvk.org/articles/1002/113.html>
- [20]. http://necouncil.nic.in/about_m.htm
- [21]. <http://gbpihed.nic.in/envis/HTML/monograph2/SC-STPopulation.html>
- [22]. CAD: Constituent Assembly Debates; see: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/debates.htm>