

Empowerment versus Disempowerment – A place of mother tongue

Corresponding Author: Dipjyoti Sundaray

The paper seeks to analyze the impact of non-recognition of tribal languages and exclusion of tribal children's mother tongues in the formal education system. It discusses how this exclusion severely restricts their freedom of choice and access to resources, leading to illiteracy, educational failure, and impact lifelong learning. It also highlights the benefit of mother-tongue based multilingual education on tribal children whose language is considered as dialect and not a full-fledged language by the authorities.

Keywords: Mother tongue, Tribal language, Formal education, Empowerment, Illiteracy, Quality Education, Multilingual Education, Medium of Instruction.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The dictionary meaning of mother tongue is “the language first learned by a child.” The mother's tongue has often been interpreted as one's native language. The Mother tongue is also related to the language of one's ethnic group. “In the linguistic and educational context, the terms mother tongue and native speech are often used indistinguishably. The term native speech can be distinguished as “the first speech acquired in infancy, through which the child gets socialized. It claims some bearing on intuitive competence, and potentially it can become individually identifiable” According to Khubchandani (1983), the term mother tongue can be defined as one's allegiance to a particular tradition, and it is societally identifiable. According to linguists, the mother tongue refers to L1, i.e., the language first acquired by the child and the first one to find expressions developed from the Language Acquisition Device placed by Chomsky in 1965. A general interpretation of the term is the language in which one thinks, dream, or show anger is his/her mother tongue. According to Pattnayak (1981), “Mother's tongue is both a sociolinguistic reality and a product of the mythic consciousness of a person. It gives social and emotional identity to an individual with a speech community”. According to Skutnabb (1981), a mother tongue may change, even several times in a lifetime. The mother tongue may vary even at a single point in time, depending on the criteria given below. So, Skutnabb Kangas gave four criteria for defining the mother tongue, namely origin, competence, function, and attitude.

Table :1: Four criteria can be used for defining Mother tongue

Criterion	Definition of ‘Mother Tongue’
Origin	The language one learned first (the language in which one established one's first lasting communication relationship)
Competence	The language one knows best
Function	The language one uses most
Attitudes	The language one identifies with (internal identification). The language one is recognized as a native speaker of by other people (external identification)
World View	The language one count in, thinks in, dreams in, writes poetry in, etc.)

Source Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981.

In India, before the 1961 census, the definition of mother tongue in different censuses varied in terms of narrow and broad interpretation. The 1881 census had a narrow interpretation of the term, which defined mother tongue as “the language spoken by the individual from the cradle. It continued till 1891, but the term was changed into a “parent tongue.” Then again, in the 1901 census, the term gained a new name, i.e.,

“language ordinarily used.” In 1961 census, the term had a broad interpretation, “mother tongue is the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother. Suppose the mother died in infancy, the language mostly spoken in the person’s home in childhood. In the case of infants and hearing impaired, the language is usually spoken by the mother (Hasnain, 2001). The ambiguity regarding the concept of mother tongue has not only been seen in Indian censuses but also in the censuses of European countries too.

In 2000, in a petition, the Madras High Court adjudicated that “mother tongue of a child should only be understood as the language which the child is most familiar with” mother tongue need not be the mother’s tongue or father’s tongue. Generally, the parents are the proper persons who can assess and say as to which is the language that the child is most familiar with”. (Mallikarjun, Language in India).

The UNESCO monograph of 1953 supported teaching in one’s mother tongue. When a child gets an education in his/her mother tongue, she develops higher abstract thinking in any language, according to the Hague recommendations on the Educational Rights of National Minorities and UNESCO Education position paper. Education in a multilingual world (2003) those are having their language as the primary medium of teaching; the better they become in the dominant language, provided, of course, that they have good teaching in it, preferably given by bilingual teacher”.

According to Benson (2004), while there are many factors involved in delivering quality education, language is the key to communication and understanding in the classroom. He stressed that many developing countries are characterized by an individual as well as societal multilingualism, yet continue to allow a single foreign language to determine the school education system. Instruction through a language that learners do not speak has been called “submersion” because it is analogy to holding learners underwater without teaching them how to swim. Compounded by chronic difficulties such as low level of teacher education on mother tongue-based multilingual education, poorly designed and inappropriate curriculum, and lack of adequate teaching-learning materials in school. Submersion makes both learning and teaching extremely difficult, particularly when the language of instruction is also foreign to the teacher.

Hence, the mother tongue-based multilingual education process uses the learner’s first language to teach children reading and writing skills along with academic content. The second language is taught systematically so that learners can gradually transfer skills from the familiar language to the unfamiliar one. The use of mother tongue in the early years of schooling can facilitate learners to acquire and develop skills in addition to understanding and participating in classroom learning processes effectively.

Meanwhile, the UNESCO 2008 Report pointed out that globally, there are about 50-75 million marginalized children who are not enrolled in school. Moreover, children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in the early years of education. The report also quoted that children’s first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school. Despite growing evidence and demand from the communities, many educational systems around the world insist on the exclusive use of one or sometimes several privileged languages as a medium of instruction. This means excluding languages spoken by children belonging to minorities and tribal communities.

Furthermore, according to the same report of the UNESCO, there are several risks of a foreign language of instruction. Such as parents not enrolling their children in school at all, children not able to engage successfully in the transfer of learning, teachers feeling devastated by children’s inability to perform academically in the classroom, and so on. There is a risk of adverse effects whereby children fail to become linguistically competent members of their families and communities and lose the ability to connect with their cultural heritage.

Many children speak a home language that differs from the language of instruction in school. Ball (2008) confirmed that children learn best in their mother tongue and complement their smooth transition to bilingual and multilingual education. Children successfully retain their mother tongue while acquiring additional languages depends on several interacting factors.

Studies show that six to eight years of education in a language are necessary to develop the level of literacy and verbal proficiency required for academic achievement in secondary school.

The multilingual situation in India

The Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) in its people of India project listed 623 tribal communities, out of which about 573 are notified or scheduled. The tribal groups speak 218 languages out of which 159 are exclusive to them; 54 languages are used by the tribal for inter-group communication. Singh (2002) stated that most of the tribal languages do not have a script and are written in the script of either the dominant regional language or another major language. Still, some tribal languages, such as Bodo’s have developed their writing system¹ even Khasi language use Roman script to write their language. Most of the tribal groups are bilingual or

¹ Bodo is a Sino- Tibetan language spoken by the Bodo tribal group in Assam, IT is one of the 22 languages that is given the special constitutional status in India. Since 1963, the language has been written using the davanagari script. It was formerly written using Latin and Assamese script.

multilingual at the community levels. Out of 623 tribal communities in India, there are about 500 bilingual communities. It must be noted that community-level bilingualism/multilingualism reflects the communicative skills of the adults. In contrast, for tribal children they grow up learning their native tribal language, which is usually spoken at home language, i.e., the mother tongue as the language of early communication.

The Sixth All India Educational Survey of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) shows that out of 42 languages used in schools as medium of instruction and as a language subjects, only 13 are tribal languages.

The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution consists of the following 22 languages – Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili, and Dogri. Of these languages, 14 were initially included in the Constitution. The Sindhi language was added in 1967. After that, three more languages, Kankani, Manipuri, and Nepali, were included in 1992.

Subsequently, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santhali were added in 2004. In December 2003, the Parliament of India passed the 100th Constitutional Amendment Bill to include four languages (Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santali) in the VIIth Schedule of official languages. This recognition came to these languages after prolonged movements and political lobbying. When the Constitutional amendment of 2003 conferred official language status to two tribal languages Bodo and Santali. It was for the first time since the adaptation of the Constitution that such recognition was accorded to any tribal language, which was possible due to the assertive language maintenance movements by the two tribal language communities. Other less powerful languages and mother tongues are often dubbed as ‘dialects,’ and weak voices for recognition are suppressed in the dynamics of power and politics. Pervasive discrimination and neglect in all spheres of governance limit the scope of democratic participation and effectively deny equality of opportunity to the tribal and other linguistic minorities. The conventional system of formal education is yet another principal basis of institutionalized inequality. Only a few of the languages are used for school instruction, and most of the tribal and minority languages are left out of the schools and literacy programs.

Based on the All India Survey (1974), NCERT reported as many as 80 languages used as a medium of instruction, but today the number has almost dropped fifty percent. Now the Sixth All India Survey has recorded 41 languages being used as a medium of instruction. This decrease in the figure is due to many constraints and hurdles. Which are listed below:

- a) Three language formula has not been implemented adequately.
- b) Many languages, mostly tribal languages have no script
- c) Lack of textbooks in all the mother-tongue.
- d) The controversy between language and dialect.
- e) Lack of financial and administrative commitment to maintaining a language.
- f) Privatization of Education
- g) The dominance of English over other languages.
- h) Lack of interest of parents in sending their children to schools other than English medium School, etc.

The education system of India up to class XII has been divided into four stages:

- (a) Primary/Elementary, (B) Upper Primary/Middle, (C) Secondary/High School and (D) Higher Secondary/Intermediate/Pre-University.

Table: 3 Number of Languages Taught in the Schools in India

Stage	Third Survey	Fifth survey	Sixth survey
Total number of languages	67	44	41
Primary School	47	43	33
Upper Primary School	28	31	25
Secondary School	24	22	21
Higher Secondary School	17	20	18

Source: Mallikarun (2004)

At the primary level, the number of languages used as a medium of instruction is more than the secondary and higher secondary. As we move towards higher education, the number of languages used as a medium of instruction goes on decreasing. However, now many institutions on an experimental basis, have taken up the work of introducing education in those languages whose speakers were not getting an education in their mother tongue.

In the education system, the most privileged one are those whose mother tongue is the medium of education in the schools. Mostly the medium of instruction is either English or the dominant language of that region. So, it becomes difficult for linguistic minorities to have education in the other mother tongue. It is a known fact that children learn better if they understand and speak the language of the classroom. Nevertheless,

only education in their mother tongue will not be fruitful to the children, as they will find difficulty in relating themselves with the outer world. So the dominant language of the region or the national language of the country and language of wider communication is also a critical need. So there is a need to have an education system where, along with mother tongue education, other languages should be introduced gradually over time. Many of the multilingual countries have recognized the importance of multilingualism in their education system. Many scholars, like Claire, Skutnabb, have talked about the relevance of multilingual mother tongue education. According to Thomas Claire (2009:83-91), the world's education ministers recommended that states should view linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom as a valuable resource and promote the use of mother tongue in the early years of instruction. The UN forum also made strong recommendations on MTME.

Language composition in Assam

In 1951, 120 languages were recorded as mother tongue in Assam, and the number rose to 200 in 1971. Some of them are new languages, as some almost dead and extinct dialects even came up as languages during the period. This was due to the ethnic consciousness gradually developed amongst different groups, which were in the process of assimilation into the more significant and larger indigenous society of Assam called the Assamese. The table below shows the principal languages of undivided Assam spoken with the given the number of speakers and the percentage of speakers to the total population.

Table 4: No. of persons speaking a different language in un-divided Assam (1971)

Languages	Total	Percentage
Assamese	8,904,917	60.89
Bengali	2,882,039	19.71
Hindi	792,481	5.42
Khasi	20,082	0.14
Garro	76,004	0.52
Bodo	533,713	3.65
Lushai/Muzo	4001	0.03
Nepali	349,116	2.39
Karbi	191,354	1.31
Oriya	150,196	1.03
Manipuri	97,167	0.60
Santhali	86,086	0.59
Miri	177,226	1.21
Rabha	138,630	1.01

Source: Census of India 1971

Let us look at the mother tongue-based multilingual situation in Assam as per the third and fifth survey conducted by the Government of India in the below table:

Table 5: Total number of Languages used as the medium of instruction in Assam

State	Third Survey				Fifth Survey			
	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher	Primary	Upper	Secondary	Higher
Assam	9	8	7	5	7+1	6+1	6+1	3+1

Source: Koul (2005)

Unfortunately, contrary to the government record on the language used as a medium of instruction, the ground reality is entirely different. The tribal language of Assam is alive as colloquial form, and all of them belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Hence has faced challenges to be used as a medium of instruction in school. They are unwritten language, lack of written literature, and use of the second language as a medium of instruction in education, linguistic minority, lack of lexicon grammar, mutually recondite language, isolation, etc. These factors make the languages as endangered, and the languages face severe challenges in the path of development.

Based on the language use and users, UNESCO has included these tribal languages of Assam as an endangered language. Besides the Bodo language, each language (including Rabha) has not got the recognition as the instruction in formal education because the Assamese language is used as the medium of instruction in government-run schools. Therefore, the tribal languages of Assam have not expanded and grown likes other dominant languages like the Assamese.

According to DISE (District Information System for Education)² data, there are 103,609 Primary schools in the country (grades 1 to V), which has more than 50 percent tribal children, 76458 schools with more than 75 percent tribal children, and 58,343 schools with more than 90 percent tribal children. These tribal children are taught in a submersion program of majority language education. Unfortunately, even the DISE database does not have any information on the first language of the tribal children or children whose home language is different from the school language.

Table: 6: Language as a declared mother tongue (percent to total population) Assam

Mother Tongue	1951	1961	1971	1991	2001
Assamese	61.9	62.6	60.9	57.8	48.8
Bengali	24.4	19.00	19.7	21.7	27.5
Bodo	2.1	2.6	3.7	5.3	4.9
Hindi	4.2	5.1	5.4	4.6	5.9
Other languages	10.5	10.7	10.3	10.6	12.9

Since 2001, there have not been any changes in the medium of instruction in school. The non-governmental organization has attempted to introduce mother tongue-based multilingual education in school using link language like Sadri. However, require greater afford to promote tribal language as a medium of instruction.

Table: 7: Endangered Languages of Assam as per degrees of Endangeredness defined by UNESCO

Name of the language	Number of Speaker	Degree of endangerment
Bodo	900000	Vulnerable
Mising	550000	Definitely endangered
Karbi	420000	Vulnerable
Rabha	150000	Vulnerable
Dimasa	112000	Vulnerable
Kachari	59000	Definitely Vulnerable
Deori	28000	Definitely Vulnerable
Tiwa	28000	Definitely Vulnerable

From the above table, it is evident that in Assam as well as most of the country, tribal languages are kept out of significant domains of power and development. Such as officials, legal and other formal use, education trade, and commerce, they become vulnerable to shift pressures from the dominant contact languages threatening their survival. To cope with such threats, the speakers of these languages seem to adopt ‘anti-predatory strategies’ (Mohanty 2004) to ensure survival by a passive withdrawal into domains of lesser power and visibility. The ‘natural’ bilingualism among the tribal and other linguistic minority speakers can be viewed as a form of maintenance strategy which also ensures smooth social functioning and inter-group relations. Still, the cost of such survival and maintenance is an identity crisis, deprivation of freedom and capability, educational failure (due to inadequate home language development and forced submersion in majority language schools), marginalization, and poverty” (Mohanty 2006). Unfortunately, most of the marginalized linguistic groups seem to be accepting the low status and exclusion of their languages as their fate. Their language is perceived as necessary for identity and integrative functions but, instrumental functions are dissociated from the native languages in favor of the dominant ones (Mohanty 2004) low vitality of their languages is perceived as legitimate by the victims of the processes of exclusion. The tribal and minority language speakers are disadvantaged. To begin with, they are usually weaker, mostly belonging to rural, backward, and economically underdeveloped areas. Prolonged deprivations, exclusion from education, and domains of official and economic power further weaken these languages, which are not allowed to develop.

Thus, the poverty of languages, disabilities, and disadvantages often associated with minor languages are not inherent; they are socially constructed by the institutionalized discriminations in educational, political, economic, and other social spheres conspiring to strengthen the association between tribal languages and insufficiency. Sadly, the weaknesses and inadequacy of tribal languages are often cited as grounds for their exclusion from education.

² District Informationssystem for Education-2005

Language Disadvantage at school

Despite an explicit constitutional provision that the state and the local authorities shall endeavor to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to minority groups (Article 350 A, Constitution of India), a large number of minority languages are weakened and endangered by their exclusion and non-accommodation in school education and literacy programs.

Broadly two types of perspectives are evolving to advocate the use of mother tongues or home languages as medium of instruction in early education as well as to encourage linguistic diversity in schools. The first perspective has been the recognition that mother tongues are not merely speech varieties but are languages that provide social and emotional identity to individuals to express the essence of their cultures and give them a sense of rootedness (Pattnayak 1990: ix). Schooling in the language of the child reflects respect for her and an appreciation of her culture. The exclusion of mother tongues from school hence is seen as harmful to the child's self-esteem (Edwards 1984: 81). According to Pattnayak, children are thereby reduced to "minorities in their own homes."

The acceptance of the language and culture of the child has a strong link with the positive identity of self and thereby to effective educational achievement. As stated by Edwards (1984), "the rejection of a child's language is unlikely to enhance feelings of self-worth which are important for educational success." Pattnayak (1987) observes that to control and dictate the languages of access to knowledge is a positive suppression of human talent. It deprives individuals and society of free choices, curbs creativity, and innovativeness and restricts participation or potential participation in multiple spheres of human interaction, thus, imposing limits on freedom."

The second perspective is primarily pedagogic, the principle of moving from the known to the unknown. It stresses the importance of spoken languages in bridging the often yawning gap between home and school, especially tribal children. More important is the emphasis on mother tongues or home languages as assets that smoothen the process of learning in children. For instance, it is now acknowledged that children who are fluent in spoken languages bring to school highly developed linguistic and social skills as well as learning strategies that need to be capitalized upon for further learning (Jeffcoate 1984-57). It is observed that verbal dexterity and linguistic expression observed among children from communities with oral traditions can contribute to successful learning. While research conducted among tribal children whose cultures place a high value on verbal ability, the richness of tribal cultures and particularly their oral tradition, offers unexplored pedagogic possibilities.

Tomasevski (2004) highlighted that the use of a dominant official language as the language of instruction in primary schools is the main feature of "collapsed models of schooling," which reinforce inequality. In India, exclusion of mother tongues from formal education is closely linked to the perception of powerlessness attribute to tribal languages as compared to the dominant majority languages such as Hindi or English or any other dominant regional language. English has established itself as the most preferred medium of instruction and has a significant presence in school curricula across the country.

In Assam, Asomiya is the language spoken by most of the population, resulting in the marginalization of other languages within the school system. It is extremely difficult for the children from non-Assamese speaking to access elementary schools where the medium of instruction is not their mother tongue. It is essential to mention that the schedule tribe population in Assam is predominantly rural (95.3 percent), with only 4.7 percent urban population.

Further, a study conducted by the Pratiche Institute shows that children from minority language groups become underachievers if forced to attend elementary schools, which are held in a language, not their own. The best solution is to teach these children in their mother tongue to ensure quality teaching and learning in school. In Assam, none of the tribal communities have been able to use their mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the classroom except the Bodo tribe.

UNPFH (2005) stated, "In subtractive language learning a new (dominant /majority) language is learned at the cost of the mother tongue which is displaced, leading to the diglossic situation and later often replacement by the dominant language. Subtractive teaching subtracts from the child's linguistic repertoire, instead of adding to it. In this enforced language regime, the children undergo subtractive education." In reality, most Government and policymakers perceive diversity as troublesome and multilingualism a socio-economic burden. Therefore, preference homogenization and standardization of the language situation in school.

Further to add, minority languages are considered inadequate, impoverished and underdeveloped and, therefore, unfit for educational and scientific use. Which has led to stigmatization and invisibilization of less powerful and marginalized languages. Moreover, pushing minority language into the inferior status of dialects. Languages without a script are often stigmatized as dialects, ignoring the fact that writing systems developed much after the languages and are not essential properties of language. Agnihotri (2009) has observed that one script can be used to write all languages, and any language can be written in many scripts. The hegemonic position of dominant languages, the imposition of their norms on the languages of minority and disadvantaged

groups, and common biases in the assessment of verbal skills of bilingual/multilingual children have led to the propagation of the myth of linguistic deficit. Mohanty (2000) describes the languages of the tribal mother-tongue speakers, of the poor and the disadvantaged as not deficient; they are only different. No language is inherently insufficient or illogical; the association between some languages and their so-called deficiency is social in origin resulting from unequal treatment of languages. The socio-cultural conditions of language use and the inequalities between languages propagate a misconception of some languages as 'substandard' languages, which entail inherent disadvantages for their users. The real problem of the languages of the disadvantaged is related to social attitudes and the conditions under which these languages get located in the hierarchy of social power.

Unfortunately, in most societies, schools represent such social attitudes and become instruments for the perpetuation of inequalities among languages. Disadvantages accumulate to speakers of some languages not because their languages are substandard or deficient, but because social biases against these languages and their exclusion from significant social domains, from schools, for example, form an essential part of the very definition of disadvantage. Languages are deprived of their legitimate place, marginalized, opt out of the domains of power privileges, and resources, and, in the process, impoverished. The consequences of prolonged deprivation lead to a further disadvantage to the languages and their speakers in a problematic situation. When a community continues to experience language disadvantage, and their languages are kept out of the significant domains of power and resource such as official, legal and formal use, education, trade, and commerce. That language becomes vulnerable and shifts pressure from the dominant languages, and hence their survival has been threatened.

Exclusion of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the formal education process has direct negative consequences for educational performance, socio-economic wellbeing, and some of the identity and empowerment of the speaker of tribal languages. This elimination severely hampers the chances of development and survival of tribal children in lifelong learning. Social and educational neglect strip languages of their vitality and contribute to weakness, which is used to justify further neglect in a difficult circle of language disadvantage (Mohanty, Panda, and Mishra, 1999) added that language disadvantage and inequalities across languages are socially constructed and transmitted through institutionalized discrimination. Some languages are reinforced as investive in political, economic, social, and educational domains as weak languages. Unfortunately, attribution of insufficiency and weakness leads to the justification of further social exclusion and, more importantly, educational neglect perpetuating inequality. Exclusion of languages from formal education does contribute to loss of diversity due to what has been characterized as 'linguistic genocide in education,' as stated by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) and leads to educational failure. This is particularly evident in the case of the tribal peoples in India whose languages are disadvantaged due to layers of discrimination and exclusion in the system of formal education.

The Rabha Tribal children in Assam has to undergo a similar situation on their entry to school and also one of the significant factors in their poor educational performance and consequent socio-economic deprivation. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to cite that some of the Rabha organizations have played a crucial role in ushering in better development of the Rabha tribe through the language and literature. Amongst them are Rabha Sahitya Sabha, the Rabha Bhasha Parishad, the all Rabha Cultural Association, the Rabha National Council, etc. have rendered laudable contributions. The All Rabha Sahitya Sabha had the credit of introducing Rabha as Medium of Instruction (MoI) in seventy primary school education across Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam.

In 1973 a Sahitya Sabha (literary organization) was formed with the initiative of some educated Rabha youths. It was formed to shape their language in written form that can be introduced as a medium of instruction at the school level. They named the organization as "**Kraurang Runchum.**" This was later renamed as "**Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum**" (All Rabha Sahitya Sabha) and registered under the Society Registration Act, 1860, Assam, No. 2369 of 1993-94 (Baruah 1996). The "**Runchum**" prepared Rabha textbooks borrowing words from different dialects of the Rabha and the Koch for the unification of all of them through a universal language.

Ever since its formation, "**Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum**" had to go through the various phases of the mass movement to pressurize the Government to introduce the Rabha language as the medium of instruction in the primary schools of Assam. They succeeded in their movement, and on March 19, 1988, the Government of Assam introduced the Rabha language as a subject language in seventy primary schools of Assam.

In the meantime, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) was formed in 1995. It comprised of the Rabha dominated areas of Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam.

During the process of establishing the Rabha identity based on the geographical area, some of the Koch communities inhabiting within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous council geographical areas automatically got included as the Rabha tribe. This inclusion of various tribes under the Rabha Hasong autonomous council geographical territory had intensified opposition not only by the Rabha communities but also by other tribes, including Koch communities living within the geographical area of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous council (RHAC).

As a result, protect surfaced in the RHAC, leading to confusion related to the medium of instruction to be used in school. The small tribal groups speaking diverse dialect found it challenging to speak Rabha language as a medium of instruction in schools. Hence use of Rabha language as a medium of instruction had to be discontinued in all seventy primary schools.

Writing on the education of the tribal and their development Kariapuram says, one of the acute problems faced by tribal with regards to educational access is the lack of adequate facilities for education in the mother tongue. Language is central to the identity of a people and the preservation of their culture. This is an area where formal education offered by the Government has not given sufficient attention and care.

Studies have also shown that the problem of the medium of instruction used is a great hindrance to the educational development of tribal children.

Besides the above issue of medium of instruction in the mother tongue, the lack of awareness regarding the benefits of education is an essential reason for low literacy among the Rabha. As they are tradition-bound and confined to home and agriculture, they are not able to adapt to changes, and thus fruits of education have not percolated to them. As a vast majority of these children come from the illiterate rural communities. As they have no one to look up to as examples to be emulated, they remain in the age-old predicament of low literacy. Parents often feel there is no need to educate children as they will go out of their village if they are educated, and this will create a lack of helping hand in agricultural operations. This is all the more true in the case of girl children. For a Rabha, family girls do not need education as they will always remain in the house to look after the younger siblings and extend a helping hand in the agricultural field.

It has been identified that the socio-economic background coupled with lack of educational facilities and values and attitudes such as aspiration and motivation, initiative, and parental guidance, plus financial support are some of the crucial factors responsible for the slow spread of education among the Rabha. Hence, the Rabha requires special educational efforts from the local self-governing institutions as well as the state Government. Article 46 under the Directive Principle of State policies in Part IV of the Constitution states,

Any barrier to the continued use of children's home language in schools should be addressed as the imposition of another dominant language as the medium of instruction has long-term adverse effects not only on their mother tongue but also on their capabilities, entitlements, and freedom of choice. School education directly enhances opportunities through more convenient access to jobs and income and equally, and importantly it also adds to social and cultural freedom and empowers persons for adequate participation in the exercise of political rights. Dreze and Sen (2002) illustrated the substantial problems of the 'voicelessness' of the disadvantaged groups in India. Mainly the scheduled tribes are arising out of the large-scale illiteracy and lack of education, both of which impede economic development. They attribute non-attendance and school push out to lack of interest of parents as well as children and a host of discouragement effects such as alienating curricula, inactive classrooms, indifferent teachers, and social discrimination in the classroom.

Language discrimination, arising out of prevalent inequalities, is central to the relationship between illiteracy and educational failure lead to a lack of freedom and hence poverty. While education is the enabling factor for economic development, the mother tongue is the enabling factor for access to quality education. The mismatch between home and school languages and neglect of the mother tongue force the tribal children into abstract language learning in the form of submersion education in the dominant language. This leads to poor educational achievement, therefore, reinforcing inequality and leading to potential deprivation. Educational failure due to the systematic exclusion of mother tongue in school education is reflected in the economic underdevelopment and general poverty of the tribal in India, which is a complex multidimensional phenomenon.

The existing systems of formal education in India have failed to appreciate the role and consequences of the mother tongue to ensure quality education. Moreover, the system does not support the weaker languages, nor do they promote high levels of multilingual proficiency. Although, a few governments of India agencies such as the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) made substantial efforts for the development of tribal and other weaker languages and initiated experimental programmes in several states for the introduction of tribal languages in early school education. These programmes, however, could not be developed further and institutionalized into the formal educational system and eventually disappeared from the public discourse. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) emphasized on mother tongue-based multilingualism as a goal of school education in India. In the absence of specific directives on the methodology to be adopted for multilingual Education (MLE), it remains an unfulfilled task for the promotion of multilingualism through formal education. Hence unable to the preservation of the multilingual character and diversity of Indian society as a whole.

Approach to Multilingual Education

Bilingual and multilingual programmes are being implemented across the globe like in Somalia, Madagascar, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Tanzania, China, Ethiopia, Guatemala, the Philippines, and South Africa. These programmes are also being documented and evaluated in Canada, the United States,

New Zealand, and various countries within the European Union. The policy environments and cultural and family contexts of these initiatives vary a lot as do the programme models and the resources to implement them.

Theoretical understanding of bi/multilingual acquisition, along with different goals for children's language development, have provided the rationales to develop and test a range of language-in-education models. Numerous other factors influence program choices, including political agendas, costs, teacher training, standardized testing regimes, and so on. Table 8 describes the most common program models. Many variations exist in the delivery of each approach, such as the number of months spent in transition and the amount of time devoted to mother tongue maintenance. Also, as some scholars note, the approach that educators say they are using does not often match what they are doing (Cziko, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Finally, Benson (2009), in his notes, stated some approaches could not correctly be referred to as bilingual education. For example, submersion completely ignores children's first languages, and immersion may be monolingual, using a language that children do not speak at home.

Table – 8 Approach to mother tongue-based Multilingual Education

Mother tongue-based instruction	
√	The learning program is delivered entirely in children's L1.
Bilingual education ('two-way bilingual education')	
√	Use of two languages as medium of instruction.
√	Also known as dual-language instruction, in which minority and majority language children are taught in both minority and majority languages.
Mother tongue-based bilingual education ('developmental bilingualism')	
√	L1 is used as the primary medium of instruction for the whole of primary school while L2 is introduced as a subject of study in itself to prepare students for an eventual transition to some academic subjects in L2.
Multilingual education	
√	Formal use of more than two languages in the curriculum.
Transitional bi/multilingual education (also called 'bridging')	
√	The objective is a planned transition from one language of instruction to another.
√	Short cut or early exit is a term given to programs that involve an abrupt transition to L2 instruction after only 2 or 3 years in school.
√	Late transition or late-exit refers to a switch to L2 instruction after a child has become fully fluent academically in L1.
Maintenance bi/multilingual education	
√	After L2 has been introduced, both (or all) chosen languages are media of instruction. L1 instruction continues, often as a subject of study, to ensure ongoing support for children to become academically proficient in L1. This is also called additive bilingual education because one or more languages are added but do not displace L1.
Immersion or foreign language instruction	
√	The entire education program is provided in a language that is new to the child.
Submersion ('Sink or Swim')	
√	Where speakers of non-dominant languages have no choice but to receive education in languages they do not understand, the approach is commonly known as submersion or 'sink or swim' (i.e., dominant language learning at the expense of L1). This approach promotes subtractive bilingualism: that is, L2 learning at the expense of L1.

The teaching of the mother tongue alongside the second language allows the sounds and structure of the language to be transferred more quickly. The child builds on what is already known and understood. Even if the written structure of the languages is different, if the child already knows how to read in the first language, the processes of learning to read, understanding how language structure works, as well as literacy strategies, sensor motor skills, and coordination are more easily transferred. As the language development progresses, concepts already understood in the first language are more easily transferred into the second language. The transition, however, is a process whereby a student shifts from reliance on the mother tongue to his or her second language. It should begin on the first day of school when the mother tongue teacher may be using key cards with essential words. With a young child, this can be done with pictures to help them in the initial stage of schooling.

The teacher appointed to teach the mother tongue would actively point out the differences and similarities between the home and the school languages. In the classroom, the teacher may bring in the new child's first language by sharing a vocabulary word each day with the rest of the class, so the child's new friends also begin to understand something of the newcomer's home language and culture. It is essential to remember is

that the best transitions are gradual; hence children will take time to transit from home language to school language.

Some of the recommendation for mother tongue-based multilingual education

a) At least six years of mother tongue education-based education should be provided to ethnically diverse communities to ensure those speaking a different language from the medium of instruction do not fall behind. Bilingual or multilingual education programmes should be offered to ease the transition to the teaching of the official languages.

b) To fully support the implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual/multilingual education, teachers should receive pre-service training so that teachers can facilitate language transition from mother tongue to the state language.

c) Hiring a training teacher from linguistic and ethnic minorities to serve in the schools of their communities.

d) The curriculum should be developed to address issues of inclusion to enhance the chances of students from marginalized backgrounds to learn effectively. Textbooks should be provided in a language children understand. Classroom-based assessment tools can help teachers identify, monitor, and support learners at risk of low achievement.

e) Provide culturally appropriate school-readiness programmes and locally recruited bilingual teaching assistants can support ethnic minority children from isolated communities as they make the transition into primary school, including by providing additional instruction to them after they have enrolled.

f) Last but not least, Rabha tribal language has been considered an endangered language by UNESCO with a speaker of 150,000 (Maximum number of children speak their language but in the specific domain, i.e., home)

To address the issue of tribal language being endangered, proper language planning, as well as the implication of the plan, is of utmost necessity. The Government should undertake immediate measures with proper language planning covering both the corpus and the status of the languages. The speakers should be encouraged and attracted to buy and read both the rudimentary and translated literature of these languages by eminent publications. In this case, to procreate readers, it is the utmost necessity to teach the way of reading and writing the languages to the particular people speaking the languages.

The Government should encourage mass communication and broadcasting to develop programmes using tribal language. Along with this, the integrated language speaking students should be allowed to take education in these mediums even from the essential primary level. They should be made vigilant about the language, the languages to be constructed, making it apt for the future.

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