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सोसाइटी फॉर इंडेन्जर्ड एंड लेसर नोन लैंग्वेजेज की शोध पत्रिका

From Sky to Earth: The Raji Origin Narrative and Its Cultural and Linguistic Significance

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Abstract

The Raji are one of the most endangered indigenous communities of Uttarakhand whose language and oral traditions are rapidly disappearing. This paper presents and analyses the Raji origin narrative recorded during the author's fieldwork in Jauljibi Bazar, Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand. The narrative is presented in the original Raji language along with its IPA transcription and English and Hindi translations. Besides explaining the origin of the community, the narrative preserves valuable information about the Rajis' relationship with the forest, their cultural identity, and their traditional worldview. The paper examines the cultural meanings embedded in the narrative and highlights the linguistic features through which these meanings are expressed. It argues that documenting such narratives is essential not only for preserving the oral heritage of endangered communities but also for safeguarding their language and indigenous knowledge systems.

1. Introduction

Origin stories are among the oldest forms of oral tradition preserved by human societies. They explain how a community came into existence, where its ancestors originated, and how its relationship with the surrounding environment was established. Although such narratives are often associated with myths or legends, they are much more than stories of the distant past. They preserve collective memory, cultural values, traditional knowledge, and social identity, and therefore form an important part of a community's intangible cultural heritage. For many indigenous communities, whose traditions continue to be transmitted orally, origin narratives also serve as valuable linguistic records because they preserve vocabulary, discourse patterns, and culturally significant concepts that may disappear with language shift.

The Rajis, also known in the literature as *Banrajis*, *Banrawats*, *Banmanus* and *Rajbaar*, constitute one of the last surviving hunter-gatherer communities of the Central Himalayas. These names are exonyms; the community traditionally referred to itself as *bhulla*, although during recent field investigations this self-designation was found to be largely forgotten among younger generations. The Rajis first came to the notice of the British administration through Traill's report on Kumaon (1823), and since then they have attracted the attention of anthropologists and linguists because of their distinctive language and way of life. They are generally believed to be descendants of the prehistoric Kiratas, one of the earliest inhabitants of the Himalayan region. Over the centuries, however, interaction with neighbouring communities has considerably influenced both their language and culture.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Rajis depended largely on hunting, fishing and forest produce for their livelihood and were known to live in caves and temporary forest shelters. During my fieldwork, I visited two caves that members of the community identified as their former dwelling places. Today, the Rajis reside in eleven small and widely scattered hamlets located in the forested areas of *Pithoragarh*, *Champawat* and *Udham Singh Nagar* districts of Uttarakhand. Their population has always been difficult to estimate because of their earlier semi-nomadic way of life. Traill (1823)

recorded only twenty families, whereas the 2011 Census reported a population of approximately 732. A census survey conducted by the Society for Endangered and Lesser-Known Languages (SEL) in 2019 recorded a total population of 889.

The Raji language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and is now critically endangered. Language shift to Kumauni and Hindi has resulted in a rapid decline in the number of fluent speakers, and much of the community's oral tradition has already disappeared. During my documentation of the language, it became evident that the origin narrative presented in this paper is one of the very few traditional narratives that continues to be remembered by elderly speakers. It was recorded from *Basanti Devi* of *Jamtadi* village, *Pithoragarh* district, Uttarakhand, on 14 October 2017 in Jauljibi Bazar and is presented here in the original Raji language together with its IPA transcription and English and Hindi translations.

The objective of this paper is twofold. First, it documents an important example of Raji oral literature that forms part of the community's intangible cultural heritage. Second, it examines how the narrative reflects the Rajis' cultural identity, relationship with the forest, and traditional worldview. The paper also discusses selected linguistic features of the narrative, showing how kinship terminology, ecological vocabulary, deictic expressions, and discourse patterns contribute to the encoding of cultural knowledge. By documenting and analysing this origin narrative, the paper seeks to contribute both to the preservation of the Raji language and to a better understanding of the cultural history of one of India's most endangered indigenous communities.

2. The Raji Origin Narrative

The following origin narrative was narrated by *Basanti Devi*, a Raji speaker from *Jamtadi* village in Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand, and was recorded during fieldwork on 14 October 2017. It is presented in the original Raji language together with its IPA transcription and English and Hindi translations (see Appendix 1). As one of the very few traditional narratives that continue to be remembered within the community, it provides valuable insights into the Rajis' perception of their ancestry and their relationship with the forest.

According to the narrative, a long time ago a man descended from heaven. He had two sons. The elder son preferred hunting and spent most of his time in the forest, whereas the younger son remained at home. One day, while the elder brother was hunting in the forest, dark clouds suddenly covered the sky. Although it was daytime, darkness spread everywhere. Lightning flashed, hail began to fall, and heavy rain caused the rivers and streams to overflow. Unable to continue his journey, the elder brother took shelter in a cave and remained there throughout the night. When morning came, he discovered that the landscape had changed completely. Floodwaters, rocks and fallen debris had destroyed the paths leading back to his home. He searched for the way with great effort but could not find it. As darkness approached once again, he remained in the forest. When news reached the younger brother that the elder brother had not returned, he sent a message asking him to remain where he was. According to the message, the way back could no longer be found, and it would be better for him to stay there, cultivate the land, and make his living in the forest. The younger brother also advised that his descendants should continue to live there.

The narrative concludes with a statement of collective identity: "**We were born there; we are his children.**" Through this concluding declaration, the Rajis trace their ancestry to the elder brother who remained in the forest. The forest thus becomes not merely the setting of the narrative but the ancestral homeland from which the community derives its identity. Unlike many origin stories that explain creation through divine intervention or supernatural events alone, the Raji origin story explains the

emergence of the community through separation, adaptation and continuity. The elder brother's inability to return home marks the beginning of a distinct way of life closely associated with the forest. The narrative therefore serves not only as an explanation of the community's origin but also as an expression of its historical memory and cultural identity.

3. Critical Analysis of the Raji Origin Narrative

The Raji origin narrative is more than an explanation of the community's ancestry. It reflects the Rajis' perception of their past, their close association with the forest, and the values that have shaped their traditional way of life. Although the narrative is brief, it contains several cultural themes that help explain how the community understands its origin and identity.

The central event in the narrative is the separation of the two brothers. The elder brother, who spends most of his time in the forest, is unable to return home after a devastating storm changes the landscape. Flooded rivers, rocks and the disappearance of familiar paths make his return impossible. The narrative presents this event as the turning point that eventually leads to the emergence of a separate community. Rather than portraying the elder brother as abandoned, the story suggests that he gradually establishes a new life in the forest, and his descendants become the ancestors of the present-day Rajis.

The forest occupies a central place throughout the narrative. It is not merely the physical setting in which the events take place but the environment in which the community's identity is formed. Hunting, caves, rivers, mountains and forests are described as natural elements of everyday life, reflecting the traditional subsistence pattern of the Rajis. This close association between people and their environment corresponds well with historical accounts describing the Rajis as one of the last hunter-gatherer communities of the Central Himalayas.

Natural forces also play an important role in the narrative. The storm, darkness, flood and destruction of the pathways bring about an irreversible change in the life of the elder brother. These events are not explained as punishment or divine intervention; rather, they function as the circumstances that separate the two brothers and establish the beginning of a new lineage. In this way, the narrative connects the origin of the community with changes in the natural environment. Another significant feature of the narrative is its emphasis on continuity across generations. The younger brother advises the elder brother to remain in the forest and encourages his descendants to continue living there. The concluding statement—*"We were born there; we are his children"*—links the present generation directly with the ancestral past. Through this declaration, the community affirms its common ancestry and its long-standing relationship with the forest.

Like many indigenous origin narratives, the Raji narrative cannot be interpreted simply as a historical account. Instead, it preserves the community's collective memory and explains its cultural identity through symbolic events and ancestral relationships. It offers valuable insights into how the Rajis perceive their past and how they explain their distinctive way of life. When viewed alongside historical and ethnographic evidence, the narrative contributes to a better understanding of the cultural history of this endangered community.

4. Why Recording Indigenous Origin Narratives Matters

For many indigenous communities, oral traditions constitute the principal means of preserving and transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. Origin narratives occupy a particularly important place among these traditions because they explain the ancestry of a community, its relationship with the environment, and the values that shape its cultural identity. Recording such

narratives therefore contributes not only to folklore preservation but also to the documentation of indigenous knowledge systems.

For endangered language communities, the importance of documenting oral narratives extends beyond their cultural content. Narratives preserve vocabulary, discourse patterns, kinship terminology, ecological knowledge and culturally significant expressions that are often absent from elicited word lists or grammatical descriptions. They also provide examples of language in its natural communicative context, making them valuable resources for linguistic analysis as well as for future language revitalization efforts.

The need to document the Raji origin narrative is particularly urgent because the community has undergone rapid language shift during the last few decades. Increasing use of Kumauni and Hindi has resulted in a decline in the transmission of the Raji language to younger generations. During fieldwork, it was observed that many traditional oral narratives have already disappeared, and only a few elderly speakers continue to remember them. The origin narrative presented in this paper is therefore one of the last surviving examples of the community's traditional oral literature. Documenting such narratives also preserves cultural knowledge that cannot be fully understood through lexical or grammatical documentation alone. The narrative records the Rajis' traditional association with forests, hunting, caves and the Himalayan landscape, while simultaneously preserving their understanding of ancestry and community identity. Together, these elements provide a broader ethnographic context for interpreting the language.

Finally, the documentation of indigenous origin narratives contributes to the preservation of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity. Every endangered language represents a unique way of interpreting the world, and every traditional narrative reflects the historical experiences of the community that created it. By recording, analysing and preserving the Raji origin narrative, this paper contributes to safeguarding an important component of the community's intangible cultural heritage while also providing valuable material for future research in language documentation, anthropology and folklore.

5. Linguistic and Cultural Encoding in the Raji Origin Story

The Raji origin narrative is important not only because it preserves the community's traditional account of its ancestry but also because it provides valuable linguistic evidence. The narrative illustrates how language encodes cultural knowledge through vocabulary, kinship terminology, spatial expressions, repetition and discourse structure. Although relatively short, it reflects important aspects of the Rajis' traditional way of life and their relationship with the natural environment.

One of the most noticeable features of the narrative is the frequent use of kinship terminology. The two principal characters are identified simply as the elder brother and the younger brother. Their personal names are never mentioned. This pattern reflects the importance of kinship relationships in explaining the origin of the community. The narrative traces the ancestry of the Rajis to the elder brother, thereby establishing genealogy as the basis of community identity. The concluding statement, *"We were born there; we are his children,"* further strengthens this relationship by directly linking the present generation with the ancestral past.

The vocabulary of the narrative also reflects the traditional ecological setting of the Rajis. Lexical items referring to the forest, hunting, cave, river, clouds, rain, rocks and cultivation occur throughout the story. These are not incidental descriptions but represent the natural environment in which the Rajis traditionally lived. Historical accounts describe the Rajis as forest-dependent hunter-gatherers, and the

vocabulary used in the narrative corresponds closely with this traditional way of life. The story therefore preserves ecological knowledge together with the language in which it is expressed.

Another significant linguistic feature is the repeated use of deictic expressions, particularly those corresponding to "here" and "there." After the elder brother becomes separated from his home, the younger brother repeatedly asks him to remain there, in the forest. The repeated use of this spatial reference gradually transforms the forest from a temporary place of hunting into the permanent homeland of the community. Thus, spatial expressions contribute to the construction of the Rajis' cultural identity.

The narrative also contains several imperative constructions. The younger brother repeatedly instructs the elder brother not to return but to remain in the forest and cultivate the land. These repeated commands explain how the separation of the two brothers became permanent. In oral narratives, repetition of imperative expressions serves both as a discourse strategy and as a means of emphasizing culturally important events. Repetition is another characteristic feature of the narrative. Certain ideas, particularly those relating to remaining in the forest and continuing to live there, occur more than once. Such repetition is common in oral storytelling traditions, where important information is reinforced through repeated expressions. It also facilitates memorization and oral transmission from one generation to the next. The narrative begins with a conventional temporal expression equivalent to "A long time ago." Such opening lines are common in oral traditions across cultures and indicate that the events belong to ancestral rather than historical time. They prepare the listener for a narrative that explains the origin of the community and its traditional way of life.

The linguistic features discussed above show that the Raji origin narrative preserves considerably more than a traditional story. It records culturally significant vocabulary, patterns of reference, discourse organization and expressions that reflect the Rajis' social relationships and ecological environment. From the perspective of language documentation, such narratives provide examples of language in actual use and therefore complement grammatical descriptions and lexical documentation. They preserve linguistic forms together with the cultural knowledge that gives them meaning.

Table 1. Culturally Significant Lexical Items in the Raji Origin Narrative

Raji Lexical Item	English Gloss	Cultural/Historical Encoding
sərg	heaven	Marks the celestial origin of the ancestral figure.
mənəse	man/person	Refers to the ancestor from whom the lineage begins.
ɟɪʰəw bʰɑj	elder brother	Represents the ancestral figure from whom the Rajis trace their descent.
mənəŋ/ jəŋgəl	forest	The traditional habitat closely associated with Raji identity.
ʃɪkar	hunting	Reflects the traditional subsistence pattern of the community.
gohaje	cave	Indicates the earlier cave-dwelling life remembered in community tradition.
gāŋ	river	Represents the natural landscape that shapes the events of the narrative.
deho	clouds	Introduces the storm that changes the course of the story.

b^həlləl	hailstorm	Part of the natural events leading to the separation of the brothers.
k^het bari	cultivation/farming	Indicates the transition from hunting to a settled life
o^khɛ	there	A deictic expression repeatedly used to identify the new homeland
b^hulla (community autonym)	‘our people’(self-designation)	The traditional autonym of the community, reflecting indigenous identity, although not occurring in the narrative itself

Table- 1 shows that many lexical items in the narrative are directly associated with the Rajis' traditional environment, subsistence practices and kinship relations. Together, they illustrate how language preserves cultural knowledge alongside linguistic structure. Such observations demonstrate the value of recording oral narratives as part of endangered language documentation, since they preserve not only vocabulary but also the cultural meanings embedded in its use.

6. Conclusion

The Raji origin narrative is an important part of the community's oral heritage, preserving not only an account of its ancestry but also valuable evidence of its language, culture and traditional knowledge. The narrative reflects the Rajis' close association with the forest, their understanding of kinship, and their perception of community identity. Through its vocabulary, discourse structure, kinship terminology, ecological references and spatial expressions, it demonstrates how language functions as a repository of cultural knowledge. The analysis presented in this paper shows that indigenous origin narratives are significant sources of linguistic as well as ethnographic information. They preserve lexical items, patterns of discourse and cultural concepts that are often absent from elicited linguistic data. For critically endangered languages such as Raji, documenting oral narratives therefore complements grammatical and lexical documentation by recording language in its natural cultural context.

The Raji language is undergoing rapid language shift, and many traditional oral narratives have already disappeared from community memory. The origin narrative documented in this paper represents one of the few surviving examples of the community's oral tradition. Its preservation contributes not only to safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of the Rajis but also to enriching our understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Central Himalayas.

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Appendix-1

Raji Origin Story

भोत समै हीं. सर्ग मा डा मनसे उतरोउ ए. नी पयावला हीं आय. माहेडा जाव निक्क को ही नइ जिठव भाय के. होत मनडया कूहाँ नि होय. डा ज्यू जंगल्ये शिकार खेल्यो ह्वाँ. देहो पिए झिक्कले. झिक्कल देहो पीइए. देहो भोत समय के हाँड मंडे. अक् ह्वाँ हूल्या लहुंद देहो पिए माने अल कूहाँ ह्वाँ. देहो झिक्कल भल्लला पिए झिक्कल दे आय पिए गांड पिए. जिठव भाय गुहाये अल कूहाँ दइ दिस. गाइ बीतिवाइ आले. रात हियले. हाँ लई पे ठेपै पौहाँ ल्यहाँ पिए नाउयाँ. देहो आ यूँग हाँ दिओ हाँ पिए. देहो झिक्कल बिए भल्लला पिए हिं सट्टानलभियाँ ढोला गोरु घेंत हाँ पिए. मेहनत खइ हाँ लइके पे यांग खइया. वापस हाँ पिए आए अल कूहाँ ठेपै होआ. हाँ पिए खेत बारी होइं का खबर घल्लो हाँ पिए. खबर भेजा द्वा हइ अल कूहाँ ना खइत बाये ना होइ तक धा जिव अल कूहाँ नाने तेर हीं. अइ अल खइया नो अल जियात बा हुंग कट्टोआ ना. अइ अल कूइ हां ने, अइ अल विमाई उखै जाने दिन बारी खेत बारी जाने कोई नि रै देतबारि गुजारा होइ नां. अइ अल कोइदा हीं आय अल कूहाँ ही अइला लै आय गल पोया वला हीं आयला पोइदा खाही आय गल पोया वला हीं.

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bhot səmɛ hī. sərg ma ɖa mənəsɛ ʊtərou e. ni pəjaw la hī aj. mahe ɖa jaw nikk kohi nɔi jɪtʰəw bʰaj ke. hot mənənɟja ku hā ni hoj. ɖa jju jəŋgəlje ʃikar kʰeljo hwā. deho pie jʰikkələ. jʰikkəl deho piɛ. deho bʰot səməj ke hāt mənɟe. əku hā hulja ləhʊnd deho pie mane əl ku hā hwā. deho jʰikkəl, bʰəlləl pie jʰikkəl de ae pie gāŋ pie. jɪtʰəw bʰaj guhaje əlkʊhā dɔi dis. gai bitɪwɔi ale. ratt hījəle. hā lɔi pe tʰepɛ pəhā lɟhā pie naʊjā. deho a juŋ hā dɪo hā pɪ e. deho jʰikkəl bɪe bʰəlləla pie hī sətʃan ləbʰijā ɖʰola gorʊ gʰɛt hā pie. mehənət kʰɔi hā ləike pe jəg kʰəjja, wəpəs hā pie ae əl kʊ hā tʰepɛ hoə. hā pie kʰet bari hoī ka kʰəber gʰəllə hā pie. kʰəber bʰɛja dʷa hɔi əl kʊ hā na kʰɛt baje na hoɪ tək dʰa jɪw əl kʊ hā na ne ter hī. əi əl kʰəjja no əl jɪjat ba hʊŋg kətʃoə na. əi əl kʊi hā ne əi əl wiməi ʊkʰɛ jane dɪn bari kʰet bari jane koi ni rɛ detəbari gujara hoɪ. əi əl kɔɪda hī aj əl kʊhā hi əɪla lɛ aj gəl poja wəla hī aj la pɔɪda kʰahi aj gəl poja wəla hī.

English Translation

A long time ago, a man descended from heaven. He had two sons. The elder brother liked to eat meat. He mostly lived in the forest. One day he was hunting in the forest. The sky was covered with clouds. It became dark during the day. Lightning started flashing. It started raining with hail. A lot of water came from the sky and the river flooded. The elder brother went into the cave. The night passed. It was morning. When the darkness ended, he saw that he could not see the way home. Due to heavy clouds, there was a flood and the rivers and streams were flooded and stones and rocks were lying on the way. He tried very hard to find the way, he could not go back, when it became dark he stayed there (in the forest). The news that he did not come back was coming. The younger brother sent a message that (you) stay there and do not come here. He is lost there (in the forest) and will not be able to find the way. He should stay there and do farming all day, he will be able to survive. He should stay there and not come here. His sons should also stay there. We were born there, we are his children.

Hindi Translation

बहुत समय हुआ. स्वर्ग से एक आदमी उतरा. उसके दो बेटे थे. बड़े भाई को मांस खाना अच्छा लगता था. वह अधिकतर जंगल में रहता था. एक दिन वह जंगल में शिकार खेल रहा था. आसमान में बादल छा गये. दिन में अन्धेरा छा गया. बिजली चमकने लगी. ओला सहित वर्षा होने लगी. आसमान से बहुत पानी आया तो नदी में बाढ़ आ गयी. बड़ा भाई गुफा में चला गया. रात बीत गयी. सुबह हुई. अंधेरा खत्म होने पर उसने देखा कि घर का रास्ता नहीं दिखाई पड़ रहा था. ज्यादा बादल से बाढ़ आ गई और नदी-नाले में बाढ़ और रास्ते में पत्थर - चट्टाने पड़ी हुई थी. उसने बहुत मेहनत की उसको रास्ता मिल जाए, वह वापस नहीं जा पाया, अंधेरा होने पर वहीं (जंगल) रहा. वह नहीं आया यही खबर आ रही थी. छोटे भाई ने खबर भेजी कि (तुम) वहीं रहो यहाँ मत आओ. वह वहाँ (जंगल में) खो गया है रास्ता ढूँढ नहीं पाएगा. वह वहीं रह कर दिन भर खेती बाड़ी करे, गुजारा हो जाएगा. वह वहाँ रह जाए और यहाँ न आए. उसके लड़के भी वहीं रहें. वहाँ पैदा हुए हम उसके बच्चे हैं.



Recording date -14 Oct 2017

Time-10.16 AM. **Place**- Jauljibi Bazar

Name of the Informant- Basanti Devi,

Jamtadi, Didihaat tehsil,

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Phonology of Dooars Sadri

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Abstract

Sadri is a regional koine that originated in the Chotanagpur region for communication between the different tribes known as *Adivasis* belonging to diverse ethno-linguistic groups residing in the region. At present, Sadri is used as a *lingua franca* by the different tribal populations in Eastern and Central India. It is also used in the tea estates of Assam and North Bengal. The establishment of tea plantations in Assam and North Bengal in the early 19th century required a large labor force that encouraged 'indentured migration' of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, such as the Oraon, Kharia, Mundari, Santali, Nageshia, Mal Paharia, Lohara, and others to these tea estates. These tribes used Sadri for intercommunication, and eventually Sadri replaced their own varieties. This paper attempts to analyze the phonology of a variety of Sadri spoken in the tea estates of North Bengal (popularly known as the Dooars region). The Dooars region is also home to various other linguistic communities like Bengali, Rajbangshi, Lepcha, Nepali, Bodo, Rabha, and Toto. So in this paper, we would like to examine whether Dooars Sadri resembles the Sadri variety spoken elsewhere or shows any divergence as a result of contact with other languages existing in this region, especially Bengali, the state's dominant language.

Keywords: Phonology, Phonotactics, Sadri, Dooars, Koine

1. Introduction

This paper presents a discussion on the phonology of a variety of Sadri spoken in the tea estates of North Bengal (popularly known as the Dooars region). Sadri emerged as a contact language for communication among the different tribal (*Adivasi*) populations in the Chotanagpur plateau. At present, it is used as a *lingua franca* by the different tribal (*Adivasi*) populations in Eastern and Central India. There are different theories regarding the origin of Sadri. Sadri has been documented as a variety of Bhojpuri by many Western scholars (Grierson, 1903; Jordan-Horstmann, 1969). Nowrangi (1965) asserts that the term 'Sadan' is derived from Old-Indo Aryan *niṣāda* (ethnic group). Sadri has often been identified with Nagpuri, named after the region where it is spoken. There is a

consensus among scholars that Sadri emerged as a result of contact between various Eastern Indo-Aryan languages (Kiran, 2003; Laskar and Sarfaraj, 2020; Sarfaraj, 2022).

1.1 Sadri in Dooars region

Tea plantations in Assam were introduced by the British in 1837. The success of the tea industry in Assam prompted the British to expand the tea plantation economy to other parts of the country. Between 1839 and 1874, the British Raj initiated tea plantations in three regions of North Bengal, namely Darjeeling, the Terai, and the Dooars region (Sunder, 1895; Banerjee, 1996; Barua, 2008; Sarfaraj, 2022). The tea plantations in the Dooars region are spread across the districts of Jalpaiguri, Malbazar, and Alipurduar. These regions were dense jungles with very sparse populations. The tea plantations demanded a large amount of labor, so masses of tribal people, commonly referred to as ‘advasis,’ were brought in predominantly from the Chotanagpur area (covering provinces of modern Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh). This tribal population comprised various ethnic and linguistic groups, such as the Oraon, Kharia, Mundari, Santali, Nageshia, Mal Paharia, Lohara, Mahali, and Chik Baraik (Bhowmick, 1981; Laskar and Sarfaraj, 2020; Sarfaraj, 2022). The Dooars region is also home to various other linguistic communities like the Bengali, Rajbangshi, Lepcha, Nepali, Bodo, Rabha, and Toto. Bengali is the dominant language and the official language of the state. The implanted populations in Dooars came with their own distinct languages and cultures. Sadri served as a *lingua franca* among these tribal populations. Over time Sadri replaced the languages of these tribes (Laskar and Sarfaraj, 2020; Sarfaraj, 2022). We refer to the Sadri spoken in the Dooars region as Dooars Sadri (henceforth DS). Since Bengali is one of the official languages and the dominant language of the state of West Bengal, Dooars Sadri speakers in this region use Bengali for any communication outside their own tea community.

1.1.1 Data and Methodology

This study is based on 50 hours of natural data gathered from 60 Sadri speakers aged 5 to 85 in the tea estates of the Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts in the Dooars region. The data was gathered utilizing ‘sociolinguistic interviews’ and ‘participant observations’ following the Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1984; Feagin, 2002; Laskar, 2003, 2012). Sociolinguistic interview, introduced by William Labov, is used in speech community studies and is not a conventional interview. This method involves ‘one-on-one tape recorded conversational interview’ (Feagin 2002: 26). Such interviews enable elicitation of natural speech (vernacular) in natural settings by overcoming the “observer’s paradox” (Labov, 1984; Laskar, 2003; 2012; Khushboo and Laskar, 2025).

2. Phonology of Dooars Sadri

This section presents a discussion of the phonology of Sadri spoken in the Dooars region of West Bengal. The vowels, consonants, and the phonotactics of Dooars Sadri (henceforth

DS) are analyzed. The objectives of this paper are to determine: (1) whether Dooars Sadri shows more affinity with Bhojpuri, from which it emerged; (2) if Dooars Sadri has borrowed phonological features from Bengali with which it is in contact in Dooars region, where our study is conducted; and (3) if DS shows any divergence from other Sadri varieties spoken elsewhere.

2.1 Vowels in Dooars Sadri

Dooars Sadri (DS) has seven vowels /i, e, ə, a u, o, ɔ/ as shown in table 1. All vowels in DS are voiced. Vowels in DS exhibit three-way contrasts: front, central and back. There are two front vowels (i, e), two central vowels (ə, a) and three back vowels (u, o, ɔ) in DS. The vowels can also be divided based on tongue-height- high, mid and low. Vowel length distinction does not prove significant in DS (Sarfaraj, 2022).

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low		a	ɔ

Table 1. Vowels in Dooars Sadri

2.1.1 Distribution of vowels in Dooars Sadri

A discussion on the distribution of the vowels in Dooars Sadri is provided in this section. It describes the environments where the seven vowels /i, e, ə, a u, o, ɔ/ occur in Dooars Sadri.

/i/ (high front unrounded vowel)

The high front vowel /i/ can occur in the word-initial, medial, and final positions in Dooars Sadri. The vowel /i/ occur in the initial position in DS words, as shown in examples (1) – (2). This vowel /i/ can also occur in the medial position, as in examples (3) – (5) and in the word final position, as in (6) – (8).

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| (1) /ibəʈe/ | ‘this way’ |
| (2) /ig ^h re/ | ‘here’ |
| (3) /tin/ | ‘three’ |
| (4) /hãɽiya/ | ‘local wine’ |
| (5) /t ^h ika/ | ‘contract’ |
| (6) /tʃ ^h uɽi/ | ‘girl’ |
| (7) /t ^h ori/ | ‘little, very few’ |
| (8) /ləkɽi/ | ‘wood’ |

/e/ (mid front unrounded vowel)

The mid-front unrounded vowel /e/ appears in all three phonological environments in Dooar Sadri. Examples (9) and (10) demonstrate /e/ in the word-initial position. The vowel also occurs medially, as shown in (11)–(13), and finally, as illustrated in (14)–(15).

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| (9) /egəra/ | ‘eleven’ |
| (10) /ek/ | ‘one’ |
| (11) /lebar/ | ‘labour’ |
| (12) /ketʃal/ | ‘quarrel’ |
| (13) /dek ^h ek/ | ‘to see’ |
| (14) /ahe/ | ‘be’ |
| (15) /naik ^{he} / | ‘do not have’ |

/ə/ (mid central vowel)

In Dooars Sadri, the mid central vowel /ə/ prevails in the initial position in words, as in (16) and the word medial position, as shown in (17) - (18). No instances of /ə/ in the word final position were found in our data. Our data suggests that /ə/ is more common word medially.

- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| (16) /əpan/ | ‘self’ |
| (17) /dʒəntu/ | ‘animal’ |
| (18) /nədi/ | ‘river’ |

/a/ (low central unrounded vowel)

The low central unrounded vowel /a/ exists in all the three environments in DS words. Examples (19) – (21) exhibit the occurrences of /a/ in the word initial position, whereas (22) – (24) demonstrate the presence of /a/ in the medial position. It occurs in the word final position in (25) – (26).

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| (19) /ajo/ | ‘mother’ |
| (20) /admi/ | ‘man’ |
| (21) /ahe/ | ‘be’ |
| (22) /bagən/ | ‘garden’ |
| (23) /maʃi/ | ‘soil’ |
| (24) /b ^h at/ | ‘steamed rice’ |
| (25) /tʃ ^h uja/ | ‘boy’ |
| (26) /məsla/ | ‘spice’ |

/u/ (high back rounded vowel)

Dooars Sadri have high back round vowel /u/ that appears in the three environments. In (27) – (29), the vowel /u/ is found in the word initial position, whereas in (30) - (31), it

appears in the word medial position. There are also instances where /u/ occurs in the final position in DS words, as in (32) – (33).

(27) /umən/	‘they’
(28) /ugo/	‘that’
(29) /upre/	‘above’
(30) /g ^h ungi/	‘snail’
(31) /luga /	‘cloth’
(32) /dʒəntu/	‘animal’
(33) /gohu/	‘wheat’

/o/ (mid back rounded vowel)

The occurrence of /o/ is possible in the word initial, medial and final position in DS. However, the prevalence of /o/ in the word initial and final position is not very common in DS.

(34) /ohe/	‘that one’
(35) /p ^h oɽuya/	‘spade’
(36) /moɽa/	‘fat’
(37) /mor/	‘mine’
(38) /ego/	‘on’

/ɔ/ (low back rounded vowel)

The low back round vowel /ɔ/ are found only in the initial and medial position in DS as we can see in examples (39) – (42).

(39) /ɔb ^h ab/	‘scarcity’
(40) /ɔbost ^h a/	‘situation’
(41) /sɔb/	‘all’
(42) /kəsɔ/	‘pain’

2.1.2 Diphthongs in Dooars Sadri

Diphthongs are complex vowel sounds in which the tongue glides from one position to another to produce a vowel that changes from one sound to another sound. Dooars Sadri has five diphthongs, such as, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /uɪ/, /iə/, /ua/. The diphthong /aɪ/ can occur in the word initial and medial position, as in (43) – (45). The diphthong /ɔɪ/ appear in the word medial position, as shown in (46) – (47). In line with /ɔɪ/, the occurrence of /uɪ/ is predominantly observed in the word medial position as seen in (48) – (50). The diphthongs /iə/ and /ua/ occur in the word final position, as illustrated in (51) – (54).

/aɪ/

(43) /aɪl/ 'came'

(44) /dʒaɪt/ 'caste'

(45) /tʃaɪr/ 'four'

/ɔɪ/

(46) /tʃɔɪr/ 'leave'

(47) /mɔɪr/ 'die'

/uɪ/

(48) /duɪ/ 'two'

(49) /suɪ/ 'listen'

(50) /dʰuɪk/ 'enter'

/iə/

(51) /dʰaniə/ 'corriander'

(52) /hãɽiə/ 'wine'

(53) /kariə/ 'black'

/ua/

(54) /katʰua/ 'tortoise'

2.2 Consonants in Dooar Sadri

There are thirty-two consonants in Dooars Sadri, as shown in table 2 (Sarfaraj, 2022). These consonants are classified on the basis of place of articulation, the manner of articulation and voicing. In the following sections, we will discuss the consonants in Dooars Sadri.

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b p ^h b ^h	t d t ^h d ^h		ʈ ɖ ʈ ^h ɖ ^h		k g k ^h g ^h	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ tʃ ^h dʒ ^h		
Nasal	m		n			ŋ	
Flap			r	ɽ ɽ ^h			
Lateral			l				
Fricative			s z				h
Glide	w				j		

Table 2. Consonants in Dooars Sadri

2.2.1 Distribution of Consonants in Dooar Sadri

The consonants in Dooars Sadri occur in the initial, medial and final positions of a word. However, all the consonants do not occur in the three positions. A detailed description of the distribution of consonants in DS is given below.

/p/ (voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop)

In DS, the voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop /p/ occur in all the three positions in words *viz.* initial, medial and final. The prevalence of /p/ in the word initial position is illustrated in (55)–(56). The consonant /p/ rarely surfaces in the medial position, as in (57). It prevails in the word final position, as shown in example (58).

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| (55) /pəkal/ | ‘ripe’ |
| (56) /poɽuwa/ | ‘student’ |
| (57) /sapan/ | ‘dream’ |
| (58) /sāp/ | ‘snake’ |

/p^h/ (voiceless aspirated bilabial stop)

Unlike /p/, the aspirated counterpart /p^h/ occurs only in the initial position as shown in (59) – (61).

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| (59) /p ^h əras/ | ‘forest’ |
| (60) /p ^h ir/ | ‘again’ |
| (61) /p ^h əl/ | ‘fruit’ |

/b/ (voiced unaspirated bilabial stop)

The voiced unaspirated bilabial stop /b/ can occur in the word initial position as in (62) – (63), word medial (64) and word final position as in (65).

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| (62) /biha/ | ‘marriage’ |
| (63) /bihan/ | ‘morning’ |
| (64) /dabija/ | ‘sickle’ |
| (65) /dʒib/ | ‘living being/animal’ |

/b^h/ (voiced aspirated bilabial stop)

The voiced aspirated bilabial stop /b^h/ is seen in the word initial and medial position in DS. In examples (66) – (67), we can see the occurrences of /b^h/ in the initial position, whereas in (68), it is in the medial position as part of a consonant cluster.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| (66) /b ^h adur/ | ‘bat’ |
| (67) /b ^h uɽi/ | ‘intestine’ |
| (68) /lamb ^h a/ | ‘rabbit’ |

/t/ (voiceless unaspirated dental stop)

The voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop /t/ surfaces in all the three positions in DS. The plosive /t/ appears in the word initial position in (69) – (70). It is observed that in the word medial position, /t/ may occur alone, as in example (71) or as part of a consonant cluster, as in (72). It also appears in the word final position in (73) – (74).

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| (69) /tambku/ | ‘bee’ |
| (70) /tarbudʒa/ | ‘watermelon’ |
| (71) /bilarti/ | ‘tomato’ |
| (72) /binti/ | ‘worship’ |
| (73) /bɔhot/ | ‘many’ |
| (74) /rat/ | ‘night’ |

/t^h/ (voiceless aspirated dental stop)

The voiceless aspirated dental stop /t^h/ is prevalent in all the three positions in Dooars Sadri words. In example (75), /t^h/ is in the initial position, whereas in (76) it is in the medial position and in (77), it occurs in the final position.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| (75) /t ^h oɽi/ | ‘little/few’ |
| (76) /ha:t ^h i/ | ‘elephant’ |
| (77) /sa:t ^h / | ‘along with’ |

/d/ (voiced unaspirated alveolar stop)

The voiced unaspirated dental stop /d/ also occurs in all environments of a word in DS. The occurrence of /d/ in the initial position is shown in the example (78) and in the medial position as part of clusters in examples (79) – (81). We also find instances where /d/ occurs in the final position as shown in (82) – (83). The stop /d/ may occur as part of a cluster in the word final position as well (see 82).

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| (78) /dusra/ | ‘another’ |
| (79) /bədli/ | ‘replacement’ |
| (80) /badri/ | ‘cloud’ |
| (81) /konda/ | ‘dumb’ |
| (82) /tʃand/ | ‘moon’ |
| (83) /pərsad/ | ‘prasad’ (sweet offered after rituals) |

/d^h/ (voiced aspirated dental stop)

The voiced aspirated dental stop /d^h/ is found in all the three positions in DS words. The occurrence of /d^h/ in the initial position is shown in the examples (84) – (86). It also occurs in the medial position, as in examples (87) – (88) and final position, as illustrated in (89) – (90).

(84) /d ^h an/	‘paddy’
(85) /d ^h obi/	‘washer-man’
(86) /d ^h uti/	‘loincloth’
(87) /mad ^h uras/	‘honey’
(88) /ad ^h a/	‘half’
(89) /bud ^h /	‘Wednesday’
(90) /d ^h ud ^h /	‘war’

/t/ (voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop)

We have observed the voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop /t/ in our data. It can occur in the three environments in DS. It is in the initial position in examples (91) – (92), in the medial position in (93), and in the final position in examples (94) – (95).

(91) /t̠ka/	‘fresh’
(92) /t̠ek/	‘broken’
(93) /a̠a/	‘flour’
(94) /a:t̠/	‘eight’
(95) /ut̠/	‘camel’

/t^h/ (voiceless aspirated retroflex stop)

The voiceless aspirated retroflex stop /t^h/ can be found in the initial, medial and final position of words in Dooars Sadri. We can see the occurrences of /t^h/ in the word initial position in (96) – (97). It can also occur in the medial position, as in (98) and the word final position as in (99).

(96) /t ^h ik/	‘right/true’
(97) /t ^h enga/	‘stick’
(98) /mit ^h a/	‘sweet’
(99) /mat ^h /	‘field’

/d/ (voiced unaspirated retroflex stop)

In Dooars Sadri, the voiced unaspirated retroflex stop /d/ occurs in the initial and medial position only. The occurrences of /d/ in the initial position is illustrated in (100) – (101), whereas example (102) – (103) illustrate /d/ in the medial position. There were no instances /d/ in the word final position in our DS data.

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| (100) | /dʒt/ | ‘ink’ |
| (101) | /dʒhar/ | ‘road’ |
| (102) | /gudʒam/ | ‘storehouse’ |
| (103) | /madʒherdʒabri/ | ‘Majherdabri (place)’ |

/dʒh/ (voiced aspirated retroflex stop)

The voiced aspirated retroflex stop /dʒh/ occurs in the word initial position only, as exemplified in (104) – (106).

- | | | |
|-------|------------|------------|
| (104) | /dʒhakkan/ | ‘lid’ |
| (105) | /dʒhapni/ | ‘lid’ |
| (106) | /dʒheir/ | ‘abundant’ |

/k/ (voiceless unaspirated velar stop)

The voiceless unaspirated velar stop /k/ appears in all the three environments in words, that is, initial (107) – (108), medial (109) and final (110).

- | | | |
|-------|---------|----------------------|
| (107) | /kail/ | ‘tomorrow/yesterday’ |
| (108) | /kəpar/ | ‘forehead’ |
| (109) | /pəkal/ | ‘ripe’ |
| (110) | /ek/ | ‘one’ |

/kʰ/ (voiceless aspirated velar stop)

The aspirated counterpart /kʰ/ also shows up in all three positions in a word in Dooars Sadri. /kʰ/ is seen in the initial position in (111) – (112). It occurs in the medial position in (113) – (114) and in the word-final position in (115).

- | | | |
|-------|-----------|-----------|
| (111) | /kʰəkʰa/ | ‘crab’ |
| (112) | /kʰərtʃa/ | ‘expense’ |
| (113) | /tənkʰa/ | ‘wage’ |
| (114) | /bukʰar/ | ‘fever’ |
| (115) | /aikʰ/ | ‘eye’ |

/g/ (voiced unaspirated velar stop)

The voiced unaspirated velar stop /g/ occurs in all three environments, initial, medial, and final, as shown in (116) – (119).

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| (116) /gac ^h / | ‘tree’ |
| (117) /gajɾa/ | ‘rhino’ |
| (118) /suga/ | ‘parrot’ |
| (119) /sɔrg/ | ‘heaven’ |

/g^h/ (voiced aspirated velar stop)

Like /g/, the aspirated velar stop /g^h/ appears in the word initial position, as in (120) – (121), word medial position (122) and in the word final position (123).

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------|
| (120)/g ^h ungi/ | ‘snail’ |
| (121)/g ^h aɾa/ | ‘horse’ |
| (122)/ig ^h re/ | ‘here’ |
| (123)/bag ^h / | ‘tiger’ |

/tʃ/ (voiceless unaspirated palatal affricate)

In DS, the voiceless unaspirated palatal affricate /tʃ/ can be used in all the three environments in words i.e. initial, medial and final. /tʃ/ is visible in the word initial position in (124) – (125), in the medial position in (126) and in the final position in (127).

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| (124)/tʃini/ | ‘sugar’ |
| (125)/tʃaur/ | ‘rice’ |
| (126)/bitʃar/ | ‘judgment’ |
| (127)/satʃ/ | ‘truth’ |

/tʃ^h/ (voiceless aspirated palatal affricate)

In line with /tʃ/, the aspirated palatal affricate /tʃ^h/ can also occur in the word initial position, as in (128) – (129), the word medial position as in (130) and in the word final position, as shown in (131).

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| (128)/tʃ ^h uri/ | ‘knife’ |
| (129)/tʃ ^h awn/ | ‘home-shed’ |
| (130)/katʃ ^h uwa/ | ‘tortoise’ |
| (131)/gatʃ ^h / | ‘tree’ |

/dʒ/ (voiced unaspirated palatal affricate)

In our data, the voiced unaspirated palatal affricate /dʒ/ occur in the initial, medial and final positions in words. This is illustrated in examples (132) - (136).

(132)/dʒəŋgal/	‘forest’
(133)/dʒaɪt/	‘caste’
(134)/mədʒdur/	‘labourer’
(135)/adʒa/	‘grand-father’
(136)/aɪdʒ/	‘today’

/dʒʰ/ (voiced aspirated palatal affricate)

In DS, the voiced aspirated palatal affricate /dʒʰ/ is found in the word-initial position as shown in (137), the word-medial position as in (138), and in the word-final position as illustrated in (139). However, in the medial and final positions, /dʒʰ/ occurs as part of a cluster.

(137)/dʒʰuʈ/	‘false/lie’3
(138)/mədʒʰrati/	‘midnight’
(139)/sāndʒʰ/	‘evening’

/s/ (voiceless unaspirated alveolar fricative)

The voiceless unaspirated alveolar fricative /s/ can occur in all three environments in DS words. It is observed that in (140) – (141), /s/ occurs in the initial position, whereas in example (142), it is found to occur in the word medial position. In (143), /s/ appears in the word-final position.

(140) /sonar/	‘goldsmith’
(141) /səʈal/	‘rotten’
(142) /rasi/	‘rope’
(143) /dʒulus/	‘procession’

/z/ (voiced unaspirated alveolar fricative)

The voiced unaspirated alveolar fricative /z/ does not occur in word initial position in Dooars Sadri. It only occurs in word medial position as shown in (144) and word final position as in (145).

(144) /fazir/	‘early morning’
(145) /tʃiz/	‘thing’

/h/ (voiceless glottal fricative)

The voiceless glottal fricative /h/ can occur in the word initial position as in (146) – (147), medial position as in (148) and in the final position as seen in example (149).

- | | |
|----------------|---------|
| (146) /həpta/ | ‘week’ |
| (147) /hās/ | ‘goose’ |
| (148) /məhina/ | ‘month’ |
| (149) /tʃah/ | ‘tea’ |

/m/ (voiced bilabial nasal)

In Dooars Sadri, the voiced bilabial nasal /m/ appears in all three positions in words, i.e, initial, medial and final as shown in examples (150) – (153).

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| (150) /maj ^h rati/ | ‘midnight’ |
| (151) /mac ^h ri/ | ‘fish’ |
| (152) /amba/ | ‘mango’ |
| (153) /dʒanam/ | ‘birth’ |

/n/ (voiced alveolar nasal)

Like /m/, the alveolar nasal /n/ also occurs in the word-initial position, as exemplified in (154) – (155), word-medial position, as in (156) – (157), and word-final position, as in (158).

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| (154) /nala/ | ‘drainage’ |
| (155) /nənad/ | ‘sister-in-law’ |
| (156) /tʃuna/ | ‘lime’ |
| (157) /purna/ | ‘old’ |
| (158) /bhin/ | ‘sister’ |

/ŋ/ (voiced velar nasal)

The voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ occur medially as part of consonant clusters as seen in (159) – (161) and word finally, as in (162).

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (159) /g ^h uŋ ^h i/ | ‘snail’ |
| (160) /aŋri/ | ‘finger’ |
| (161) /lɔŋka/ | ‘chilli’ |
| (162) /siŋ/ | ‘horn’ |

/r/ (voiced alveolar flap)

The voiced alveolar flap /r/ can occur in all the three positions i.e. initially, medially and finally as shown in (163) – (166).

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| (163) /rait/ | ‘night’ |
| (164) /roʈi/ | ‘bread’ |
| (165) /pərab/ | ‘festival’ |
| (166) /malar/ | ‘boatman’ |

/ɽ/ (voiced unaspirated retroflex flap)

Dooars Sadri speakers also use the voiced unaspirated retroflex flap /ɽ/ in the word medial position as shown in (167) – (168) and the word final position as in (169).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| (167) /b ^h ɽa/ | ‘sheep’ |
| (168) /k ^h iɽki/ | ‘window’ |
| (169) /baɽ/ | ‘flood’ |

/ɽ^h/ (voiced aspirated retroflex flap)

The aspirated retroflex flap /ɽ^h/ is also used in Dooars Sadri. However, /ɽ^h/ occurs only word medially as in (170) – (171).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| (170) /pəɽ ^h ai/ | ‘study’ |
| (171) /buɽ ^h a/ | ‘old person’ |

/l/ (voiced alveolar lateral)

The voiced alveolar lateral /l/ can occur in all three environments i.e. initially, medially and finally. For instance, it is found in the word initial position as in example (172), word medial position in (173) – (174) and in word final position in (175).

- | | |
|-----------------|------------|
| (172) /lolo/ | ‘ear-ring’ |
| (173) /mala/ | ‘garland’ |
| (174) /piluwa/ | ‘insect’ |
| (175) /tʃinhal/ | ‘familiar’ |

/w/ (voiced bilabial semi-vowel)

The voiced bilabial semi-vowel /w/ in Dooars Sadri can occur in the word medial position either alone or as part of a consonant cluster as exemplified in (176) – (178). We do not

find the occurrence of /w/ in the word's initial and final positions in our DS data.

- | | | |
|-------|------------------------|----------|
| (176) | /kuwari/ | ‘virgin’ |
| (177) | /mætwar/ | ‘drunk’ |
| (178) | /b ^h agwan/ | ‘God’ |

/j/ (voiced palatal semi-vowel)

Similarly, the voiced palatal semi-vowel /j/ is found to occur only in the word medial position as shown in the following examples.

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------------|--------|
| (179) | /tʃ ^h uja/ | ‘boy’ |
| (180) | /hɪja/ | ‘here’ |
| (181) | /nijam/ | ‘rule’ |
| (182) | /nəja/ | ‘new’ |
| (183) | /sujor/ | ‘pig’ |

2.3 Consonant Cluster in Dooars Sadri

Consonant clusters occur in DS primarily in the medial position as shown in examples in (184) - (194). A few instances of consonant clusters in the word final position are observed that are shown in examples (195) - (196).

	Consonant Cluster	Word	Gloss
(184)	-pt-	hapta	‘week’
(185)	-pn-	d ^h apni	‘lid’
(186)	-tʃk-	taʃka	‘fresh’
(187)	-tʃ ^h r-	matʃ ^h ri	‘fish’
(188)	-mb-	amba	‘mango’
(189)	-nt-	binti	‘plead’
(190)	-kr-	kəkro	‘chicken’
(191)	-kʃ-	sikʃi	‘necklace’
(192)	-rk-	tʃarka	‘white’
(193)	-rk ^h -	purk ^h a	‘ancestor’
(194)	-st-	gustʃi	‘clan’
(195)	-nd	bənd	‘closed’
(196)	-rg	sərg	‘heaven’

2.3.1 Geminates in Dooars Sadri

Geminates are a sequence of identical adjacent segments of sound in a single morpheme (David Crystal, 2008). We find a number of geminates prevailing in Dooars Sadri as exemplified in (197)-(203). All the geminates occur in the medial position in the word in Dooars Sadri.

	Geminate	Word	Gloss
(197)	-kk-	q ^h akkan	‘lid’
(198)	-mm-	tʃəmmatʃ	‘spoon’
(199)	-tt-	patti	‘leaf’
(200)	-tʃtʃ ^h -	itʃtʃ ^h a	‘wish’
(201)	-pp-	tʃappal	‘sandal’
(202)	-nn-/-ss-	unnisso	‘nineteen-hundred’
(203)	-bb-	tʃobbis	‘twenty-four’

2.4. Syllabic Structure in Dooars Sadri

A syllable is defined as a string of segments grouped around one obligatory vowel or vowel-like (*syllabic*) element. This segment is called the syllable’s *nucleus*, while any preceding group of consonants within the syllable is the *onset*, and any following consonants form the *coda* (Steriade, 2003). The possible syllabic structures in Dooars Sadri are shown below:

Syllabic Pattern	Word	Gloss
CV	ka	‘what’
VC	ab	‘now’
CVC	sāt	‘bull’
CVCV	suga	‘parrot’
VCVC	anadz	‘grain’
CVCCV	makṛa	‘spider’
CVCVC	saṛal	‘rotten’
CVCVCV	papita	‘papaya’

2.5 Phonological Processes in Dooars Sadri

Dooars Sadri emerged as a contact language and is in secondary contact with other linguistic communities in Dooars region. These languages have exerted some influence on Dooars Sadri. In this section, we discuss the primary phonological processes that operate in Dooars Sadri.

I. Epenthesis

Epenthesis operates in DS. Epenthesis is a process of sound change in which a sound is inserted into a word (Campbell 2013: 30). Prothesis, a type of epenthesis in which a sound is inserted at the beginning of a word, occurs in DS as illustrated in examples (204) - (206). The process of anaptyxis, whereby an extra vowel is inserted between two consonants, also occurs in Dooars Sadri, as shown in examples (206) – (211).

Hindi/English		Sadri	Gloss
(204) sku:l	→	isku:l	‘school’
(205) skeɪl	→	ɪskɛl	‘scale’
(206) stri	→	istiri	‘wife’
(207) d ^h arm	→	d ^h aram	‘religion’
(208) sirp ^h	→	sirp ^h	‘only’
(209) pre:m	→	pere:m	‘love’
(210) drəm	→	ɖerəm	‘drum/barrel’
(211) glas	→	gi:las	‘glass’

II. Diphthongization

Instances of diphthongization are also observed in Dooars Sadri. Campbell (2013:36) defines diphthongization as a change of an original single vowel into a sequence of two vowel segments that together occupy the nucleus of a single syllable. In Dooars Sadri, vowel /ɑ:/ changes to /aɪ/, as shown in (211) – (213).

(211) ɑ:ɖʒ	→	aɪɖʒ	‘today’
(212) rɑ:t	→	raɪt	‘night’
(213) sɑ:s	→	sais	‘mother-in-law’

III. /f/ → /s/

In Dooars Sadri, the palato-alveolar fricative /f/ is realized as alveolar fricative /s/, as shown in examples (214) – (215).

(214) ɑ:fɑ:	→	ɑ:sɑ:	‘hope’
(215) fanti	→	santi	‘peace’

IV. /l/ ~ /r/

The alveolar lateral /l/ is often replaced by alveolar flap /ɾ/ in Dooars Sadri, as shown in (216) – (217).

(216) matʃ ^h li	→	matʃ ^h ri	‘fish’
(217) kela	→	kera	‘banana’

3. Discussion

In this paper, we have discussed the vowels and consonants in Dooars Sadri spoken in the Northern part of West Bengal. Dooars Sadri has seven vowels /i, e, ə, a, u, o, ɔ/. These

vowels are seen to occur in word-initial, medial, or final positions. But, the vowels /ə/ and /ɔ/ do not occur in word final position in Dooars Sadri. The vowel /ɔ/ is not present in Jharkhand Sadri (See Kiran and Peterson, 2011). In addition, the central vowel /ə/ is realized as [ʌ] in Sadri spoken in Jharkhand (Kiran and Peterson, 2011). The vowels in Dooars Sadri seem to be closer to Bhojpuri vowels. However, the vowel /ɔ/, which is absent in both Bhojpuri and Jharkhand Sadri, occurs in Dooars Sadri. This development may be as a result of contact with Bengali in this region (Sarfaraj, 2022). In Bengali, the vowel /ɔ/ is used very frequently. We find the occurrences of /ɔ/ in Dooars Sadri especially in words shared with Bengali like *pɔroborti* ‘next’, *sɔb* ‘all’, *ɔbost^ha* ‘condition’, *ɔb^hab* ‘scarcity’. There are five diphthongs in Sadri /aɪ, ɔɪ, uɪ, iə, ua/.

There are thirty-two consonants in Dooars Sadri. Among them, there are four voiceless plosives /p, t, t̪, k/ which form a pair with their voiced [b, d, d̪, g] counterparts. All the plosives in Dooars Sadri can be aspirated [p^h, b^h, t^h, d^h, d̪^h, t̪^h, k^h, g^h]. However, there are some constraints with regard to the occurrences of voiced aspirate stops in all the three environments in words in Dooars Sadri. Like the plosives, the affricates [tʃ, dʒ] are also aspirated by the Dooars Sadri speakers. Aspiration is quite common in Dooars Sadri. We find the use of aspirated retroflex flaps /ɭ^h/ in Dooars Sadri which is in sync with Bhojpuri phonology. However, unlike Bhojpuri, the nasals and laterals are not aspirated in Dooars Sadri. We have observed that a few phonological processes operate in Dooars Sadri. Consonant clusters are not very favored in word-initial and final positions. Hence to break the consonant clusters, a vowel is often inserted (epenthesis) in Dooars Sadri. It is also seen that the vowel /a:/ is realized as /aɪ/ in some monosyllabic words like /ra:t/ → /rait/ ‘night’, /a:dʒ/ → /aidʒ/ ‘today’. This process has been documented in many Eastern Bengali varieties (Grierson, 1903; Laskar, 2003). On the other hand, Dooars Sadri does not possess the alveo-palatal /ʃ/ like Bhojpuri. The alveo-palatal /ʃ/ changes to alveolar /s/ in Dooars Sadri, which is in line with Bhojpuri. Dooars Sadri Phonology shows proximity with Bhojpuri varieties. However, owing to contact with Bengali, Dooar Sadri has developed a few sounds. We have also seen that Dooars Sadri is not very different from the phonology of Jharkhand Sadri.

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Cultural Continuity and Change among the Koches of Meghalaya: An Ethnographic Study of Rituals, Identity and Modernity

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Abstract

The Koches of Meghalaya are an Indigenous community with a distinct socio-cultural identity and rich heritage. Their language, part of the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, is endangered, making documentation essential. However, many aspects of their everyday life and cultural practices remain underexplored. This study examines their festivals, rituals, social institutions, and language use to understand their evolving identity. Based on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tura, Harigaon, and Kumoligaon in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, the study draws on participant observation, interviews, and community narratives. It focuses mainly on marriage, birth, and death rituals, and festivals, highlighting their role in maintaining social cohesion and intergenerational continuity. The study also examines traditional practices such as matrilineal inheritance and the conditions under which property is transferred within families.

Findings reveal that while rural Koch communities continue to follow traditional practices with relative consistency, urban settings show increasing adaptation and cultural blending with neighbouring communities. Modernization has led to the simplification of rituals and changes in social institutions; however, the community demonstrates resilience through the active role of elders in preserving traditions and youth initiatives in cultural revival.

Keywords: Koch, marriage, birth, death ritual, modernization

1. Introduction

Cultural practices such as rituals and festivals play a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion, transmitting values, and shaping collective identity within human societies. Scholars like Durkheim have emphasized the role of rituals in strengthening the collective conscience, while van Gennep (1909, 1960) and Turner (1969) have highlighted their

importance in structuring social life and fostering unity. From an interpretive perspective, Geertz (1973) views rituals as systems of symbols that communicate cultural meaning. In line with these perspectives, UNESCO also recognizes rituals and festivals as essential components of intangible cultural heritage.

The Koch community of Meghalaya represents a significant example of an Indigenous group whose cultural practices are deeply embedded in ritual life. Despite their rich traditions, many aspects of Koch culture remain under documented, especially in relation to everyday practices, belief systems, and changing identity in contemporary contexts. This study attempts to address these gaps by providing a detailed account of Koch rituals, festivals, and social institutions, while also examining the impact of modernization on these practices.

1.1. The Koch Community: Language, Classification, and Sociolinguistic Profile

Historically, the Koches are believed to have originated as part of a larger Koch polity that once extended across Assam, North Bengal, and surrounding regions. Over time, socio-political changes, migration, and interaction with neighbouring communities such as the Garos, Rabhas, and Assamese contributed to the development of a distinct Koch identity in Meghalaya.

The Koches of Meghalaya are a distinct Indigenous community with deep historical roots and a rich cultural heritage. Recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in the state, they maintain a socio-cultural identity that differs from other Koch or Rajbongshi groups in neighbouring regions. Their cultural life reflects a synthesis of indigenous animistic beliefs and elements of Hindu practices, shaped through long-standing interaction with surrounding communities such as the Garos, Rabhas, and Assamese. Despite these influences, the Koches have preserved a unique identity expressed through their rituals, festivals, social organization, and language. Their cultural life reflects a synthesis of indigenous animistic beliefs and elements of Hindu practices. Traditional attire, weaving practices, and ritual observances form an integral part of their identity. Festivals, community gatherings, and shared rituals continue to play a central role in maintaining social bonds and reinforcing cultural continuity.

The Koch language forms a central component of this identity and belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, generally classified within the Bodo–Garo group. However, its exact classification has been debated among scholars. Early linguistic work by Damant (1880) placed Koch within the “Kachári–Koch sub-family,” while Grierson (1903) grouped it under the Garo subgroup. More recent scholarship, particularly by Burling (2003), argues that Koch should be treated as part of a separate Bodo–Koch subgroup, thereby recognizing its distinct linguistic status. These varying classifications reflect both the complexity of the language and its historical connections with neighbouring linguistic groups.

The number of Koch speakers has been difficult to determine due to long-standing issues of identity classification. According to the 2011 Census of India, there are approximately 36,434 Koch speakers, with the majority residing in Meghalaya and a smaller population in Assam. Although earlier estimates suggested lower figures, the available data indicate a modest increase in reported speakers. Nevertheless, the language is considered endangered, particularly due to declining use among younger generations and increasing linguistic assimilation. Internally, the Koch community is divided into several endogamous groups, each historically associated with distinct dialects. While earlier records mention nine such groups, only a few—such as Tintikiya, Wanang, Harigaya, Margan, and Koch-Rabha—continue to use varieties of the original Tibeto-Burman language. Other groups have shifted to languages like Hajong or to mixed linguistic forms influenced by Bangla and Assamese. Among the surviving dialects, Harigaya is widely understood and often serves as a common medium of communication within the community.

The Koch language does not have a standardized script and remains largely oral in nature. In Meghalaya, speakers typically use the Roman script for writing, while in Assam the Assamese script is more commonly used. Written materials in Koch are limited and are mostly confined to local magazines, often appearing alongside Assamese, English, or Garo texts. This limited literary presence, combined with the absence of a unified script, contributes to the language's endangered status and highlights the urgent need for systematic documentation and preservation.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Koch community of Meghalaya by examining their cultural practices, social institutions, and linguistic identity within a changing socio-cultural context. It also aims to explore how traditional practices are maintained, adapted, and transmitted across generations in the face of modernization.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To document the history, culture, and ritual practices of the Koch community.
- To examine major festivals and analyse their cultural significance and explore key social institutions, including marriage, birth, and death rituals.
- To understand the impact of modernization on cultural practices and traditions.
- To compare cultural patterns between urban and rural Koch communities.
- To assess the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and practices.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic approach. Primary data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal discussions with community members, including elders, ritual specialists, women, and youth. Fieldwork was conducted in Tura, Harigaon, and Kumoligaon in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya.



Figure 1: Map highlighting the villages of field visit

Secondary data from published literature, census reports, and community writings were also used to support the analysis. The data were analysed descriptively to understand patterns of continuity, change, and adaptation within Koch society.

4. Festivals and Ritual Practices

Festivals are central to Koch cultural life and serve as important markers of identity and continuity. Sacred spaces known as Wai Than function as sites of ritual worship and community gatherings. Major festivals such as Pabuni, Baos Puja, and Aandari Puja are observed with distinct regional variations.

The Pabuni festival, celebrated during April–May, marks the Koch New Year and is dedicated to Pabuni Debota, associated with natural elements. It reflects the community's close relationship with nature and their belief in divine protection.



Figure 2: *“Pabuni xali” taken during the fieldwork*

Similarly, Aandari Puja is an important ritual associated with peace, prosperity, and protection from calamities. These festivals are conducted under the guidance of ritual specialists and involve offerings, communal participation, and symbolic practices that reinforce social unity.

5. Social Institutions and Ritual Life

Traditionally, the Koch community of Meghalaya follows a matrilineal system of inheritance in which property and land traditionally pass through the female line. Daughters are considered the primary inheritors of their parents' property, particularly land, which reinforces the central position of women within the social structure. However, this right to inheritance is closely linked to residence patterns after marriage. If a daughter marries away and settles in her husband's household, she cannot claim her parents' property. Inheritance rights are retained only when the husband marries into the wife's family and resides in her parental home, a practice locally known as *Juwai Khota* or *Kilang Lini*. This system has been practiced for a long time and reflects the matrilineal and matrilocal foundations of Koch society. In recent times, however, processes of modernization, changing economic conditions, and increasing influence of patriarchal norms have led to a gradual decline of this tradition. In families where there is no daughter, parents now often divide their property among sons, indicating a significant shift from earlier customary practices.

5.1. Marriage rituals

Marriage is a significant institution with multiple forms, ranging from formal arranged marriages to simpler and love-based unions. Birth and death rituals are also deeply

embedded in tradition, involving purification rites, community participation, and symbolic practices that reflect beliefs about life, death, and rebirth. Marriage among the Koch community is one of the most important social institutions and is marked by a variety of traditional practices. The society recognizes four main types of marriages: *Mata Halang*, *Kara Halang* or *Dangua*, *Nakahuva Takani*, and *Haadi Mani* or *Dayapara Biya*. Among these, *Mata Halang* is considered the most honourable and formal form of marriage. In this type, a mediator known as *Daasu* facilitates the initial communication between the two families. The process begins with the boy informally observing the prospective bride, after which formal negotiations take place with the consent of both families and community elders. Marriage rituals are conducted in the presence of elders and relatives, often within the household. The priest, known as *Ajeng*, performs the ceremony by reciting traditional mantras in the Koch language, which outline the duties and responsibilities of married life. The couple offers respect to deities such as Shiva and Parvati, and their union is symbolically witnessed by natural elements like the sun and the moon. Traditional exchanges, such as offerings of money and rice, form part of the ritual process. Feasting is an important aspect of Koch weddings, with rice, meat, and locally prepared wine being served to guests. While *Kara Halang* follows similar rituals in a simpler form, *Nakahuva Takani* is the most minimal, involving only symbolic gestures without elaborate ceremonies. *Haadi Mani* represents love marriages, which are accepted by the community but still require social approval and customary rituals.

Marriage practices also reflect social norms such as the prohibition of marriage within the same *gotra* (*nikini*), and the general absence of practices like child marriage and polygamy. Widow remarriage is allowed, indicating a degree of social flexibility within traditional structures.

5.2. Birth rituals

Birth rituals among the Koch community are relatively simple yet culturally significant. Childbirth usually takes place within the home and is supervised by a traditional midwife known as the *Dhurni*. Although there are no strict or elaborate restrictions placed on pregnant women, certain precautions are followed, such as avoiding inauspicious events and maintaining care in daily activities. After the birth of a child, the umbilical cord is tied with a thread and cut using a thin bamboo strip, reflecting the use of traditional methods. The placenta is buried in the courtyard of the house, symbolizing a connection between the newborn and the household. The newborn is initially given a spontaneous name by the midwife, often without a fixed meaning, followed by a more formal naming ceremony after one month, which involves the participation of the community.

A tonsure ritual is performed on the seventh day, coinciding with the drying of the umbilical cord. During the early days after birth, certain taboos are observed, such as restricting the movement of the newborn outside the house and avoiding exposure to cold. The house is

later purified by a priest, and guests are invited for a communal meal. These rituals emphasize purification, protection, and the social acceptance of the newborn into the community.

5.3. Death rituals

Death rituals in the Koch community are elaborate and deeply rooted in their belief system. Upon death, the body is either buried or cremated, and purification practices follow immediately after the funeral. Members returning from the cremation or burial ground cleanse themselves with water mixed with Tulsi leaves before re-entering the household. During the mourning period, no cooking or eating takes place in the village until the initial rites are completed. The duration of mourning varies depending on the age of the deceased—three days for a young person and thirteen days for an adult. During this period, offerings of rice, meat, and wine are made in the name of the departed soul. A significant ritual known as *Aadya-Shraddha* marks the end of the initial mourning period. In this ritual, a bone fragment of the deceased is preserved in a bamboo container and kept in the courtyard with a lamp burning continuously, symbolizing the presence of the soul.

The Koches believe in the concept of rebirth, and rituals are performed to ensure the peaceful transition of the soul. Annual memorial rituals, known as *Kam-mata*, may be organized by families, involving feasting, sacrifices, and traditional songs such as *Hoko geet*. These ceremonies reflect the community's beliefs about life after death, ancestral connection, and spiritual continuity.

6. Modernity and Cultural Change

Modernity has had a visible impact on the ritual and festival practices of the Koch community, particularly in urban and semi-urban settings such as Tura. Increased exposure to formal education, wage employment, mass media, and interaction with neighbouring communities has led to changes in the way traditional rituals are observed. In urban areas, Koch festivals are often shortened, simplified, or adjusted to suit modern work schedules and economic constraints. Certain ritual elements, including elaborate sacrifices, extended feasting, and prolonged observance periods, are either reduced or omitted altogether. As a result, ritual practices in urban contexts increasingly resemble those of neighbouring communities such as the Garos and Assamese, leading to a gradual blending of cultural forms and shared modes of celebration.

In contrast, Koch communities residing in rural areas such as Harigaon and Kumoligaon continue to observe rituals and festivals with greater adherence to traditional norms. Here, festivals like Pabuni, Baos Puja, and Aandari Puja are performed according to customary rules, under the guidance of community elders and ritual specialists. Sacred spaces such as Wai Than remain central to village life, and participation is collective and community-

driven. The rural setting allows for stronger continuity of indigenous belief systems, as daily life remains closely connected to agriculture, seasonal cycles, and ancestral practices. This rural–urban contrast highlights how spatial context plays a crucial role in shaping cultural persistence and transformation.

Despite these changes, the Koch community has not passively accepted cultural dilution. In recent years, conscious efforts have emerged—especially among the youth—to revive and promote traditional cultural practices. Young community members are increasingly participating in festivals, learning ritual songs, documenting oral histories, and organizing cultural programmes during community gatherings. Some initiatives also involve the use of social media and local platforms to share information about Koch traditions, thereby creating new spaces for cultural expression and awareness. These efforts reflect a growing sense of cultural responsibility and identity among the younger generation.

At the same time, elders continue to play a central role in preserving Koch traditions. They remain the primary custodians of ritual knowledge, customary laws, and oral traditions, and their authority is especially visible during festivals, marriage ceremonies, and death rituals. Even as external influences reshape certain aspects of cultural life, elders largely adhere to established customs and serve as guides in maintaining ritual continuity. The interaction between elders and youth thus enables a process of intergenerational transmission, where tradition is not merely preserved but adapted to changing social realities. This dynamic relationship illustrates the resilience of Koch culture, which continues to negotiate modernity while retaining its core cultural values.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the cultural practices of the Koch community in Meghalaya are deeply rooted in ritual life, social organization, and collective memory, while simultaneously undergoing transformation under the influence of modernity. Rituals such as marriage, birth, and death ceremonies, along with major festivals like *Pabuni* and *Aandari Puja*, continue to function as key mechanisms for reinforcing social cohesion, maintaining continuity, and expressing a shared cultural identity. These practices are not merely symbolic but are embedded in everyday life, linking individuals to the community, the natural environment, and ancestral traditions.

At the same time, the study reveals that Koch cultural practices are not static but dynamic and adaptive. The influence of modernization is particularly visible in urban and semi-urban settings, where changing economic conditions, formal education, and increased interaction with neighbouring communities have led to the modification and simplification of rituals. For instance, elaborate marriage ceremonies are often shortened, and certain traditional elements are either reduced or omitted. Similarly, festivals that once involved extended communal participation are now sometimes adjusted to fit contemporary

schedules and resources. This process has also resulted in a gradual blending of Koch cultural practices with those of neighbouring groups such as the Garos and Assamese, especially in urban contexts.

In contrast, rural areas continue to exhibit stronger adherence to traditional practices. Rituals and festivals in villages such as Harigaon and Kumoligaon are performed with greater consistency and in accordance with customary norms, under the guidance of elders and ritual specialists. Sacred spaces like Wai Than remain central to community life, and participation in rituals is more collective and less constrained by external influences. This rural–urban distinction highlights the importance of spatial and social contexts in shaping the processes of cultural continuity and change.

Another important aspect emerging from the study is the transformation of traditional social institutions. The matrilineal system of inheritance, which traditionally ensured the transfer of property through daughters—particularly under the practice of *Juwai Khota* or *Kilang Lini*—is gradually weakening. Increasing economic pressures, changing family structures, and the influence of dominant patriarchal norms have led to shifts in inheritance patterns, with property sometimes being distributed among sons, especially in the absence of daughters. This indicates a broader reconfiguration of gender roles and kinship practices within the community. Despite these changes, the Koch community demonstrates a strong capacity for cultural resilience. Elders continue to play a crucial role as custodians of traditional knowledge, preserving ritual practices, oral traditions, and customary laws. Their authority remains significant, particularly during important life-cycle rituals and festivals. At the same time, the younger generation is increasingly engaging with their cultural heritage in new ways. Youth participation in festivals, efforts to document oral traditions, and the use of digital and social media platforms to promote cultural awareness indicate an emerging consciousness about the importance of preserving identity.

The interaction between elders and youth thus facilitates a process of intergenerational transmission that is both preservative and adaptive. Rather than a simple loss of tradition, what emerges is a process of negotiation, where cultural practices are reinterpreted and reshaped to fit contemporary realities. This dynamic process ensures that Koch cultural identity remains relevant, even as it evolves in response to changing social, economic, and cultural conditions.

Overall, the study highlights that the Koch community is actively navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity. While certain practices are being modified or transformed, the core values embedded in rituals, festivals, and social institutions continue to provide a strong foundation for cultural continuity. This underscores the importance of viewing Indigenous cultures not as static remnants of the past, but as living systems that adapt, resist, and persist over time.

8. Conclusion

This study documents the cultural practices, ritual life, and social institutions of the Koch community in Meghalaya, providing an ethnographic account of an Indigenous community whose traditions remain relatively underrepresented. By examining festivals, life-cycle rituals, inheritance practices, and changing patterns of cultural transmission, the study demonstrates that Koch cultural identity continues to be sustained through everyday ritual practices despite the increasing influence of modernization.

The findings indicate that cultural change within the Koch community is neither uniform nor indicative of cultural decline. Instead, traditional practices are being selectively maintained, modified, and reinterpreted in response to contemporary social and economic realities. The contrast between rural and urban communities illustrates how geographical location, education, occupational mobility, and interaction with neighbouring communities shape the continuity and transformation of cultural traditions. While certain customary practices, such as matrilineal inheritance and elaborate ritual observances, are gradually changing, they continue to serve as important markers of collective identity and social cohesion. The study also highlights the complementary roles of elders and younger generations in sustaining cultural heritage. Elders remain the principal custodians of ritual knowledge and customary practices, whereas younger community members are increasingly adopting new approaches to cultural preservation through documentation, community initiatives, and digital platforms. This interaction reflects the adaptive resilience of Koch culture, demonstrating that tradition and modernity coexist through processes of negotiation rather than replacement. Although this study contributes to the documentation of Koch cultural heritage, it is subject to certain limitations. The research is based on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork conducted in selected villages of the West Garo Hills district and therefore does not claim to represent all Koch communities across Meghalaya or neighbouring states. In addition, the study primarily focuses on cultural practices and social institutions and does not examine in detail the linguistic dimensions of ritual discourse, language maintenance, or intergenerational language transmission.

Future research may extend this work through comparative studies of Koch communities across regions, further investigations of cultural and linguistic change, and interdisciplinary approaches combining ethnography with sociolinguistics and language documentation. Greater attention to ritual language, oral traditions, and the role of digital media in cultural revitalization would further enhance our understanding of how Indigenous communities negotiate identity in rapidly changing social contexts. Such studies would not only contribute to the preservation of Koch cultural heritage but also enrich broader discussions on Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural resilience, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Northeast India.

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Appendices

The appendices provide supplementary materials that support the methodology and findings of this study. They include a sample semi-structured interview schedule and representative participant observation notes used during ethnographic fieldwork. These materials are intended to enhance the transparency of the research process by illustrating the methods of data collection while preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

A. Sample Interview Schedule

The following semi-structured interview schedule illustrates the type of questions used during the fieldwork to collect the required information. Depending on the respondent's role (elder, ritual specialist, woman, youth, or community leader), some of them were modified according to the understanding level of the informant and follow-up questions were asked to obtain detailed narratives. The questions were asked in Assamese and Koch.

Section A. Background Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Village:

Occupation:

Educational qualification:

Section B. Festivals and Ritual Practices

1. Which festivals are celebrated in your village?
2. Can you describe the significance of the Pabuni festival?
3. What rituals are performed during Baos Puja and Aandari Puja?
4. Who is responsible for conducting these rituals?
5. Have festival celebrations changed over the years? If yes, how?

Section C. Marriage, Birth, and Death Rituals

1. What are the different types of marriages practiced in the Koch community?
2. Can you describe the major rituals performed during marriage? (ask for each type)
3. What customs are followed during childbirth? (including the naming of the newborn child)
4. What rituals are observed after the death of a community member?
5. Are these rituals still practiced today? (modern-day practices)

Section D. Social Institutions and Cultural Change

1. How does the traditional matrilineal inheritance system operate?
2. Have inheritance practices changed in recent years?
3. What factors have influenced these changes?
4. Do younger generations actively participate in traditional rituals and festivals?
5. Section E. Language and Cultural Transmission
6. Which language(s) are used during rituals and festivals?
7. Are traditional prayers or ritual chants still performed in the Koch language?
8. How is cultural knowledge passed from elders to younger generations?
9. What challenges does the Koch community face in preserving its culture?
10. What measures would you suggest for safeguarding Koch cultural heritage?

B. Sample Participant Observation Notes

The following are some examples of field notes collected during the fieldwork that illustrate the format used for recording participant observations during ethnographic fieldwork. The data is presented in a table for convenience.

All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of the participants. Personal identifiers have been omitted to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

Date	Location	Event	Observation
15 April 2025	Harigaon	Pabuni Festival	Rituals were conducted at the Wai Than under the guidance of community elders. Offerings were made collectively, and prayers were recited in the Koch language. Community participation was high across age groups.
19 April 2025	Kumoligaon	Marriage Ceremony	The Ajeng officiated the ceremony using traditional Koch ritual formulae. Family elders supervised ritual exchanges of rice and ceremonial offerings. A communal feast followed the ceremony.
23 April 2025	Tura (Doordarshan Kendra)	Community Interaction	Younger participants frequently communicated in Garo, Assamese, and English during informal conversations, while Koch was primarily used by elders and during ritual activities. Several respondents discussed the influence of education and urban employment on changing cultural practices.
27 April 2025	Harigaon	Informal Discussion with Elders	Elders expressed concern about the gradual simplification of traditional rituals but emphasized continued efforts to teach younger generations through festivals and family gatherings.

The Classification Dilemma of Banai: Indo-Aryan Core or Tibeto-Burman Influence?

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Abstract

Banai (also referred to as Dasgaya) is spoken in the Indian districts of Dhemaji, Goalpara, and Karbi Anglong in Assam, as well as in the border areas of the Garo Hills in Meghalaya and parts of Bangladesh. The Banai community is considered a sub-group of the Koch, who have traditionally been associated with the Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. However, from a linguistic standpoint, Banai shows strong similarities with Hajong, an Indo-Aryan (IA) language. Reliable demographic information on the Banai population is lacking due to the absence of census data.

This study adopts a descriptive-comparative methodology, drawing primarily on field data collected from Dhemaji, Goalpara, and the South Garo Hills district. It investigates the linguistic affiliation of Banai by examining features shaped by language contact and bilingualism. While Banai continues to serve as the primary medium of intra-community communication, Assamese in Assam, and Garo and Bengali in Meghalaya, act as lingua francae, adding complexity to its linguistic profile. The lack of an indigenous script, along with the use of Assamese and Bengali scripts by speakers in different regions, further highlights the language's adaptive and contact-influenced nature. Through systematic analysis of Banai's structural characteristics and external influences, this paper argues that Banai is best classified as a primarily Indo-Aryan language with a significant Tibeto-Burman substratum.

Keywords: Banai, Assamese, Koch, Assam, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Meghalaya, language contact, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman

1. Introduction

The Banai community is distributed across the districts of Dhemaji, Goalpara, and Karbi Anglong in Assam, with smaller populations in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya and in parts of Bangladesh. As a relatively small and under-documented group, their exact population remains uncertain due to the absence of reliable census data. Estimates provided by the North-East India Banai Welfare Association (NEIBWA) suggest approximately 12,000 Banai speakers in Assam, concentrated mainly in Goalpara, Dhemaji, and Karbi Anglong. In Meghalaya, they inhabit areas along the Bangladesh border in the West Garo Hills, including settlements such as Ganga Nagar, Pataghat, and Borringku. The community's literacy rate is notably low, ranging between 14% and 18%.

In his *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903), Grierson identified a small group referred to as Koch or Pani Koch residing in regions such as Dacca, the Garo Hills, and Goalpara. He further classified the Koches of the Garo Hills into six divisions: Harigaya, Satparia, Dasgaya (or Banai), Chapra, Wanang, and Tintekiya, concluding that their speech represented a blend of Garo with Bengali or Assamese. Later, Allen (1960) recognized three divisions of the Koches in the Garo Hills—Dasgaya, Harigaya, and Anang—while Koch (1984) advocated for their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list of Meghalaya. Banai (1998) documented the community's clan structure, noting the existence of forty-five clans known as *Nikini*. Bareh (2001) pointed out the absence of clear historical records regarding the origin and migration of the Banai people.

Kondakov (2013), in his dialect survey, described Banai as a small, distinct group primarily located in a single village in the South Garo Hills, alongside other communities such as the Koch and Hajong in the wider region. Although their lifestyle and language closely resemble those of the Hajong, the Banai tend to identify themselves as Koch, often referring to themselves as Banai Koch—a classification also noted by Majumder (1984), as cited in Kondakov (2013).

Banai is used as the primary language for intra-community communication, while Assamese or Hindi is employed for interaction with outsiders. The Banais are predominantly an agrarian society with a distinct cultural identity. Linguistically, the language exhibits feature characteristic of Indo-Aryan languages such as Assamese and Bangla, alongside elements associated with Tibeto-Burman languages. Assamese script is used in Assam, whereas Bangla script is employed in Meghalaya, reflecting regional variation and external influence.

2. Methodology and Criteria for Linguistic Classification

The classification of a language within a genetic family requires distinguishing inherited features — those traceable to a common proto-language — from borrowed or contact-induced features. This study applies three complementary criteria. First, lexical comparison is used to identify potential cognates with Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) reconstructions (sourced from the Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus, STEDT) and with Indo-Aryan reflexes in Assamese, Bengali, and Hajong. Cognates are identified on the basis of regular phonological correspondences and semantic similarity, not mere surface resemblance. Second, morphological analysis examines case markers and inflectional affixes to determine whether they are inherited or borrowed, with particular attention to directionality — that is, whether borrowing flows from Banai into contact languages or from those languages into Banai. Third, typological profiling compares syntactic features such as word order, agreement, and classifier placement across Indo-Aryan (Assamese) and Tibeto-Burman (Garo).

A critical methodological distinction is maintained throughout: typological similarity alone does not establish genetic relatedness, as languages in prolonged contact may converge typologically without sharing common ancestry (Masica 1991; Campbell 2004). Accordingly, the classification of Banai rests primarily on the weight of lexical and morphological evidence for shared inherited features, with typological comparisons serving as supporting rather than determining criteria. Borrowed features are identified when phonological or morphological integration patterns suggest secondary adoption rather than inheritance, and when the sociolinguistic context (e.g., sustained contact with Assamese and Bengali communities) independently motivates the transfer.

3. Affinity of Banai with other Languages

Languages are classified into families based on shared features such as phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, all of which point to descent from a common ancestral proto-language. Typological classification focuses on structural similarities across languages, whereas genetic classification groups languages according to historical relatedness (Campbell 2004). Within these families, subgrouping identifies closer relationships among sister languages and maps their internal structures.

Evidence from the data collected by the researcher indicates that Banai has undergone significant lexical, morphological, and syntactic borrowing from Assamese and Bengali, and to a lesser extent from Hajong. This extensive borrowing is attributable to several sociolinguistic factors: (1) Banai is spoken across both India and Bangladesh; (2) migration of Banai speakers to Assam and Meghalaya following the East Pakistan riots of 1964 led to sustained contact with Koch, Garo, Hajong, Assamese, and Bengali communities; and (3) the language exists in an environment dominated by two Indo-Aryan lingua francas — Assamese and Bengali. Table 1 presents an overview of the principal languages spoken in Assam and Meghalaya.

	Meghalaya	Assam
Official Language	English	Assamese, Bodo and Bengali
Regional/Community Languages	Khasi, Garo. Koch, Garo and Bengali in the South Garo Hills (border areas with Bangladesh)	Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, etc. In Dhemaji: Assamese. In Goalpara: Assamese, Bengali and Garo.

Table 1: Principal Languages Spoken in Assam and Meghalaya

A close reading of Table 1 reveals that Banai speakers in Meghalaya and Bangladesh maintain contact primarily with Garo and Bengali communities. In Assam, speakers in Goalpara interact with Assamese, Bengali, and Garo speakers, while those in Dhemaji are largely in contact with Assamese-speaking populations. This distribution accounts for Banai's exposure to both Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman linguistic environments and is the key sociolinguistic driver of its mixed lexical profile. The following sections compare Banai with two sets of languages: Eastern Indo-Aryan languages (Assamese, Bengali, and Hajong) and Tibeto-Burman languages (Koch and Garo).

Table 2 illustrates the lexical word comparison among IA languages: Assamese, Bengali and Hajong with Banai.

Banai	Indo-Aryan			Gloss
	Hajong	Bengali	Assamese	
ujju, ma	mau	ma	ma,ai, amma	‘mother’
baba	baba	baba	deuta,bap,abba, pita	‘father’
magu	magu	bou	g ^h oini	‘wife’
b ^h atar	b ^h atar	džamai	giri,poi	‘husband’
džontu	džontu	džontu	ziwo-zontu	‘animal’
mas	mas	mach	mas	‘fish’
bisi	bisi	bici	guti	‘seed’
tsan	tsan	cād,condro	zün	‘moon’
gaŋ	nodi	nôdi	noi, nodi	‘river’
bosor	bosor	bôchôr	bosor	‘year’
moi	moi	ami	moi	‘I’
toi	apni/toi	tui(Informal) tumi(Casual), apni(Formal)	toi (Informal) , tumi (Casual), apuni(Formal)	‘you’ (Singular)
oi	oi	o	xi,i	‘s/he’
ami	ami	amra	ami	‘we’

tora	apnagilu/ tura	tora,tumra, tomra,apnara	tohôt (Casual),tumaluk (Informal),apunaluk (Hon.)	'you' (plural)
ora	ora	ora	xihôt, ihôt	'they'
iduu	uduu	eta	ei	'this'
uduu	hiduu	ota	xei	'that'
idete	iduni	ekhane	iat	'here'
udini	uduni	okhane	tat	'there'

Table 2: Lexical comparison of Banai with Indo-Aryan Languages (Assamese, Bengali and Hajong).

Table 2 reveals that the overwhelming majority of basic Banai vocabulary — including pronouns, kinship terms, and common nouns — aligns closely with Indo-Aryan forms, particularly Hajong and Assamese. The first-person singular pronoun *moi* is shared across Banai, Hajong, and Assamese; the first-person plural *ami* appears in Banai, Hajong, and Assamese; second-person singular *toi* occurs in Banai, Hajong, and Assamese. These pronominal parallels are especially significant because pronouns are among the least susceptible categories to borrowing (Campbell 2004), suggesting that the IA affiliation of Banai's pronominal system is more likely inherited than contact-induced. By contrast, Banai forms such as *gay* 'river' and *iduu/uduu* 'this/that' diverge from their IA equivalents and align with Tibeto-Burman forms (see Table 3), indicating selective retention of TB elements alongside pervasive IA influence.

Banai	Tibeto-Burman		Gloss
	Koch	Garô	
ujuu,ma	amai	ma·gipa	'mother'
g ^h ormun/bhatar	mia	segipa	'husband'
magu	mitʃik	jikgipa	'wife'
masaŋ	kan	bitin	'meat'
haraŋ	kereŋ	greŋ	'bone'
ninjur	dimi	ki·me	'tail'
hikru,hima	tʃater	ja·dil	'root'
meg	raŋ	mikka	'rain'
kouluu	apʻ	aram	'cloud'
gaŋ	gaŋ	c ^h ibima	'river'
bak ^h ar	biblə	baŋ·a	'many'
lebra	debra	jakkasi	'left'
k ^h atak	k ^h atakʻ	kan·dika,bakkandika	'short'
hakle	sakale	on·a	'early'
ora	oroŋ	bisimaŋ	'they'
iduu	jaʔa	ia	'this'
uduu	waʔa	ua	'that'
idete	i	iano	'here'
udini	uʻ	uano	'there'

Table 3: Banai Words with Probable Tibeto-Burman Provenance

Table 3 identifies a set of Banai lexical items that lack clear Indo-Aryan etymologies and show formal similarity to Koch and Garo. Two patterns are particularly significant. First, the demonstrative pronouns *iduu/uduu* ('this'/'that') deploy the vowels /i/ and /u/ to distinguish proximal from distal reference — a strategy also employed in Koch (*jaʔa/waʔa*) and Garo (*ia/ua*). While direct borrowing cannot be confirmed, the structural parallel across adjacent languages suggests at minimum contact reinforcement of an originally TB-derived system. Second, the phoneme /u/ — the unrounded back vowel — occurs in multiple Banai forms (*ujju* 'mother', *g^hormun* 'husband', *hikruu* 'root') and has no counterpart in Assamese or Bengali. Its presence in Tibeto-Burman languages such as Garo and Bodo, and its systematic occurrence in Banai, points strongly to a TB substratum. These items are therefore treated as probable retentions from an earlier TB-affiliated stage of the language rather than as recent borrowings from contemporary Koch or Garo.

4. Banai Lexical Words and PTB Roots

Banai words from Table 3 are compared with the PTB words which are shown in Table 4. The PTB words are taken from the Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus (STEDT).

Banai	PTB	Gloss
ujju, ma	*pwi(y)-n, *ma, *k/m-na, *n(y)u, *(y/?)ay, *neyꜜni(y), *ʔay	‘mother’
g ^h or mun/bhatar	*b/m-laŋ, *p ^{wa} , *wa	‘husband’
magu	*s-nam	‘wife’
masaŋ	*sya-n, *s-nya-kꜜhyak, *mey, *ka-y, *m-dwaŋ, *kan, *m(y/w)anꜜmin, *ta(m)-, *s/g-la, *s-na, *m/s-kam, *syi, *ni, *krukꜜs-gyuk, *(ŋ/k)wa, *bu(r)	‘meat’
haraŋ	*s/m/g-rus, *s-rus, *g-rus, *gr(w/y)a(ŋ/k), *g-ra-t, g-du(ŋ), *m-	‘bone’
	bwaŋ	
niŋkur	*m/b-gyu(ŋ/k), *mu(n/ŋ), *swap, *du, *r-mayꜜm-ray, *r-mey, *r-ŋa, *k-lyak, *r-mi, *r-may, *k(w)a(ŋ/k), *d/s-pəy, *(d/t)am, *m-daŋ, *(p/b)waŋ	‘tail’
hikruu, hima	*(b/p)ul	‘root’
meg	*r/s/g-wa, *m/s-raŋ, *tshyar,	‘rain’
kouluu	*s-dim, *mway	‘cloud’
gaŋ	*m-t(w)əy-nꜜm-ti-s, *laŋ, *kl(y)u(ŋ/k), *lwi(y), *rap	‘river’
bak ^h ar	*m(r/y)a	‘many’

lebra	*b(w)ay, *kyay	‘left’
k ^h atak	*phə ^B , *t(y)u(ŋ/n), *dəw, *s-ŋ(i/u)ŋ, *m(y)ap	‘short’
hakle	*m-na(k/p)	‘early’
ora	norecordsfound	‘they’
iduu	*m-dayꜛm-di, *(h)iꜛ(h)ay	‘this’
uduu	*wa-n, *m-dayꜛm-di	‘that’
idete	*(h)iꜛ(h)ay	‘here’
udini	*m-dzyaŋ	‘there’

Table 4: Banai Words Compared with PTB Reconstructions (STEDT)

Table 4 shows that several Banai forms have PTB etymological antecedents. The demonstrative forms *iduu* ‘this’ and *idete* ‘here’ may be related to PTB **(h)iꜛ(h)ay*, while *uduu* ‘that’ can be compared with **wa-n*. The term for ‘root’ (*hikru/hima*) is tentatively relatable to PTB **(b/p)ul*. However, caution is warranted: many of the PTB reconstructions for individual glosses list multiple competing roots, and no systematic sound correspondences between Banai and PTB have yet been established. The comparison is therefore indicative rather than conclusive. A rigorous proto-language comparison, including regular correspondence sets across a broader lexical sample, is needed to confirm or disconfirm genetic relatedness at the PTB level and remains a priority for future research.

4.1 Case Inflections

In New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages, case functions at both the syntactic and morphological levels (Masica 1991: 230). Assamese marks case through the following suffixes: $\emptyset$ (nominative), *-e* (ergative), *-[a]k* (accusative and dative), *-[a]r* (genitive), *-[o]t* (locative), *-pora* (ablative), *-oloi* (allative), and *-re/-dara* (instrumental). In Tibeto-Burman languages like Garo, the case marker is the final constituent of the noun phrase, sometimes followed by a postposition; Garo case markers include $\emptyset$ /*-a* (nominative), *-ko* (accusative), *-na* (dative), *-ni* (genitive), *-ni* (ablative), *-o* (locative), and *-c^ha* (instrumental) (Burling 2011: 43, 52).

1a. *gitu-ra* *ritu-ge* *kub-ale* **Banai**

gitu-ERG *ritu-ACC* *beat-PST*

‘Gitu beat Ritu.’

1b. *biraz-ra o-ge* *sithi* *eg-ra* *likh-ile*

biraz-ra o-ge *sit^hi* *eg-ra* *lik^h-ile*

‘Biraj wrote a letter to him.’

- 2a. *durba bitu-ke mar-l-o* **Bengali**
 durba bitu-ACC beat-PST-3
 ‘Durba beat Bitu.’
- 2b. *durba bitu-ke ek-ta sit^{hi} lik^h-l-o*
 durba bitu-ACCone-CLF letter write-PST-3
 ‘Durba wrote a letter to Bitu.’

The ablative markers *t^{hi}iki* and *t^hokon* are cognates with Bengali ablative marker *-t^heke*. *-t^{hi}iki* and *-t^hokon* are used in free variation. Let us see the following Banai and Bengali examples below:

- 3a. *moi ghor-t^{hi}iki ah-ile* **Banai**
 1SG house-ABL come-PST
 ‘I came from home.’
- 3b. *ami ghor-t^heke as-l-am* **Bengali**
 1SG house-ABL come-PST-1
 ‘I came from home.’

The locative marker *-ni* in Banai is formally identical to the genitive suffix *-ni* found in both Garo and Koch, as shown in (4). However, it functions as a locative in Banai, suggesting that this form was either retained from a TB source with a locative function or was reanalysed after contact. Its formal match with the Garo and Koch genitive *-ni* does not, by itself, demonstrate genetic inheritance; a shared TB origin remains plausible, but the functional divergence merits further investigation:

- 4a. *oi g^hor-ni* **Banai**
 3SG house-LOC
 ‘He is at home.’
- 4b. *ang-ni nok* **Garo**
 1SG-GEN house
 ‘My house.’
- 4c. *nirmal-ni bukt^hil bolan* **Koch**
 nirmal-GEN dress white
 ‘Nirmal’s dress is white.’ (Duttamajumdar2022:137).

The instrumental marker *-diu* is cognate with the Bengali instrumental marker *-die* as in

- 5a. *oi am-ra dau-diu kat-ile* **Banai**
 3SG mango-CLF knife-INST cut-PST
 ‘He cut the mango with a knife.’
- 5b. *ami c^haku-die am-ta kat-l-am* **Bengali**
 1SG knife-INST mango-CLF cut-PST-1
 ‘I cut the mango with a knife.’

Table 5 shows the case markers in Banai, Hajong, Bengali, Assamese, Koch and Garo. The possible cognates for Banai case markers are marked in bold as in Table 5.

	Banai	Indo-Aryan			Tibeto-Burman	
		Hajong	Bengali	Assamese	Koch	Garo
Ergative	-ra			-e		
Nominative	∅	∅	∅, -ra	∅		∅/-a
Accusative	-ge	-ge, -gon	-ke, [e]re -go-re	-[a]k		-ko
Dative	-ge	ge, gon	-ke, [e]re		-na	-na
Genitive	-la	-la	-[e]r -go	[o]r	-ni	-ni
Locative	-ni, -bhaj	-ni, -[o]t	-e, -te	-[o]t		-o
Allative	-bhaj, -ni	bhaj		-oloi	-waj	-chi, -ona
Ablative	-thiki/ -thokon	thiki, thokon, thaki	-theke	-pora		-oni
Instrumental	diu	diu, de	die	-re, -ere, - dara		-chi

Table 5: Case markers in Banai, Hajong, Bengali, Assamese, Koch and Garo

The overall pattern in Table 5 is revealing. The majority of Banai case markers — accusative *-ge*, ablative *-^hiki/-^hokon*, instrumental *-diu*, genitive *-la*, and allative *-b^haj* — are systematically cognate with Hajong, and to a lesser degree with Bengali and Assamese. This is strong evidence that Banai's case morphology is predominantly of Indo-Aryan origin. The one clear exception is the locative *-ni*, which aligns formally with the Garo and Koch genitive. This is best interpreted as a TB substratum feature that has been retained in the locative domain. The case system as a whole, therefore, supports an IA genetic classification while simultaneously attesting to TB contact influence in an isolated morphological domain.

5. Typological Comparison of Banai with Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman Languages

This section offers a typological comparison of Banai with Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages. The framework for Indo-Aryan follows Masica (1991; 2001), and for Tibeto-Burman follows Burling (2007: 43; 2008: 173). Examples from the Indo-Aryan group are drawn from Assamese, and those from Tibeto-Burman are drawn from Garo. It must be emphasised at the outset that typological convergence resulting from prolonged contact can produce structural similarity between languages of different genealogical lineages. The patterns documented below must therefore be interpreted alongside, not instead of the lexical and morphological evidence presented in Sections 2 and 4.

5.1 Basic Word Order

SOV order is the dominant pattern in Tibeto-Burman languages, with exceptions among Bai and Karen which follow SVO (Burling 2007: 43). NIA languages are likewise verb-final. Banai also exhibits SOV order, as illustrated in (6):

- 6a. *namchi git ringa* **Garoiⁱⁱ**
namchi song sing-NEUT
 ‘Namchi sing(s) a song.’ (Ingty2008: 74)
- 6b. *xi gaan ga-i* **Assamese**
 3SG song sing-3
 ‘He sings songs.’
- 6c. *oi gaan ga-i* **Banai**
 3SG song sing-PRES
 ‘S/he sings songs.’

SOV order is shared by both the IA and TB compranda and by Banai. This feature therefore cannot distinguish between IA and TB affiliation in Banai's case. Since SOV is an areal feature of South and Northeast Asia more broadly (Masica 1991), its presence is expected regardless of genetic origin.

5.2 Noun Phrase

The following subsections examine modifier-head ordering within the Banai noun phrase, comparing it with Assamese (IA) and Garo (TB).

5.2.1 Noun-Demonstrative

In both TB languages (such as Garo) and IA languages (such as Assamese), demonstratives precede the nouns they modify. Banai patterns identically:

- 7a. *[ia paŋ-ko] daraŋ-ba* **Garo**
 [this tree-ACC] anyone-IND
denʔ-nabe ia-de aŋ-ni-sa
 cut-NEG.IMP this-but 1S-GEN-only
 ‘Don’t anyone cut[this tree]. It is mine.’ (Burling2004:217)
- 7b. *I hadam*
 DEM place
 ‘This place.’
- 7c. *ei lora-tu* **Assamese**
 This boy-CLF
 ‘This boy.’

7d. *u* *gari*

Banai

DEM car

‘This car.’

Demonstrative-noun order is shared across both comparanda and thus provides no basis for distinguishing IA from TB affiliation in Banai.

5.2.2 Genitive-Possessor Construction

In both Garo (TB) and Assamese (IA), the possessor precedes the possessed. Banai follows the same pattern:

8a. *ang-ni* *a-chak*

Garo

My-GEN dog
‘My dog.’

8b. *mur* *kukur*

Assamese

1SG.GEN dog
‘My dog.’

8c. *mola* *kukul*
1SG.GEN dog

Banai

‘My dog.’

5.2.3 Plural Marking

Plural markers are suffixed to the noun in Garo, Assamese, and Banai alike:

9a. *mande-dan-n i* *ha?-ba-soŋ-ba*
person-PL-GEN fields- also-village-also

Garo

baŋ?-a-miŋ

much-NEUT-PST

‘The Mandis’ property (fields and villages) were plentiful.’ (Burling 2004: 180)

9b. *manuh-bur* *gol*
man-PL went.PST

‘Men went.’

9c. *mun-gilu* *dza-le*
man-PL go-PST

‘Men went.’

Plural markers are *-dan* (Garo), *-bur* (Assamese), and *-gilu* (Banai). Suffix placement is shared across both groups.

5.2.4 Adjective– Noun Order

Garo permits both AN and NA ordering (Burling 2004: 133). Assamese and Banai require adjectives to precede nouns — NA order is not permitted:

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|---|------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 10a. | <i>dalʔ-gipa</i>
NMZ | <i>achak</i>
dog | 10b. | <i>achakdalʔ-gipa</i>
dog big-NMZ | Garo big- |
| | | | | | |
| | | ‘Bigdog.’ | | | ‘Bigdog.’ (Burling2004:133) |
| | | | | | |
| 11. | <i>d^hunija</i>
beautiful | <i>suwali</i>
gi
rl ‘Beautiful girl.’ | | | Assamese |
| | | | | | |
| 12. | <i>b^hala</i>
good | <i>mun</i>
man | | | Banai |
| | | ‘Good man.’ | | | |

The fixed AN order in Banai aligns with Assamese and diverges from Garo, which is the one typological feature in the NP domain that distinguishes Banai's profile from the TB comparandum.

5.2.5 Classifiers

In Garo, the classifier and numeral follow the noun (N-Num-CLF). In Assamese and Banai, the classifier and numeral precede the noun (Num-CLF-N):

- | | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 13a. | <i>teʔrik roŋ-sa</i>
Banana | N-Num
CLF-one | Garo |
| | | ‘one banana.’ (Burling2004:248) | |
| | | | |
| 13b. | <i>e-ta</i>
one-CLF | <i>am</i>
Mango | Num-N
Assamese |
| | | ‘One mango.’ | |
| | | | |
| 13c. | <i>eg-ra</i>
one-CLF | <i>am</i>
Mango | Num-N
Banai |
| | | ‘One mango.’ | |

Banai's Num-CLF-N order aligns with Assamese (IA) and diverges from Garo (TB). This is a meaningful typological distinction that supports the IA affiliation of Banai's NP structure.

5.2.6 Subject-Verb Agreement

TB languages such as Garo lack subject-verb agreement — the verb form remains invariant across person and number (Ingty 2008: 62–63). IA languages such as Assamese mark agreement obligatorily. Banai sides with TB in lacking agreement:

- | | | | | |
|------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 14a. | <i>anga</i>
I-NOM | <i>bol</i>
tree-ACC | <i>gadoa</i>
climb-NEUT | Garo |
| | | | | |
| | | | | ‘I climb(the) tree.’ Ingty(2008: 62-63) |

14b. *na-simang bol gadoa*
 you-PL tree-ACC climb-NEUT
 ‘You (plural) climb (the) tree.’ (ibid)

14c. *Arjun hoi gadoa*
 arjun-NOM tree-ACC climb-NEUT
 ‘Arjun climbs (the) tree.’ (ibid)

It is seen in examples 14(a-c) that the verb *gadoa* ‘climb’ is the same in all these sentences. The verb form does not change irrespective of its number and person. It is only with regard to tense that the form of the verb changes.

Let us look into the Assamese sentences given in (15):

15a. *moi b^hat k^ha-l-u*
 1SG rice eat-PST-1
 ‘I ate rice.’

15b. *tohot-e b^hat k^ha-l-i*
 2PL-ERG rice eat-PST-2
 ‘You ate rice.’

15c. *gita-e b^hat k^ha-l-e*
 gita-ERG rice eat-PST-3
 ‘Gita ate rice.’

16a. *moi b^hat k^ha-le* **Banai**
 1SG rice eat-PST
 ‘I ate rice.’

16b. *tora b^hat k^ha-le*
 2PL rice eat-PST
 ‘You ate rice.’

16c. *manik-ra b^hat k^ha-le*
 manik-ERG rice eat-PST
 ‘Manik ate rice.’

Examples (16a-c) confirm that the verb *kha-le* remains invariant in Banai regardless of person or number, replicating the Garo (TB) pattern in (14a-c) and contrasting with Assamese (IA) in (15a-c). This is one of the most diagnostically significant typological features of Banai because agreement is obligatory in Assamese and Bengali but absent in TB languages of the region. The absence of agreement in Banai therefore points unambiguously toward a TB substratum influence, even if the language is genetically classified as IA on the basis of its lexicon and core case morphology.

From the above discussions, the various inflectional markers of Banai which have retained its origin are shown in Table 6.

Banai	Tibeto-Burman		Inflectional markers
	Koch	Garo	
-ra		-daŋ	Plural marker with 2 nd and 3rd person pronominals
-bun/-bun/-ibun/- ibun	-mung	-min	Perfective

Table 6: Inflectional Markers with Probable TB Origin

Table 6 presents two inflectional markers in Banai that appear to be TB-derived rather than IA-borrowed. The perfective *-bun/-bun* corresponds formally to the Garo perfective *-min* (Burling 2002: 155–158) and the Koch form *-mung/-mun*, providing evidence that the verbal aspect system retains TB morphological material even as the lexicon has shifted predominantly toward IA. These markers are not merely borrowed items but form part of Banai's core grammatical architecture, reinforcing the case for a significant TB substratum.

6. Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a preliminary analysis of the linguistic classification of Banai through comparative-historical lexical examination, morphological analysis of case and inflectional markers, and typological profiling against Indo-Aryan (Assamese, Bengali, Hajong) and Tibeto-Burman (Garo, Koch) comparanda. The central finding is that Banai is best classified as a primarily Indo-Aryan language with a substantial and systematic Tibeto-Burman substratum.

The evidence for IA affiliation is robust. Basic vocabulary items — including personal pronouns (*moi* 'I', *ami* 'we', *toi* 'you sg.') — closely parallel Hajong and Assamese forms, and personal pronouns are among the least susceptible categories to borrowing (Campbell 2004). The case morphology of Banai is predominantly cognate with IA systems: the accusative *-ge* matches Bengali *-ke* and Hajong *-ge*; the ablative *-t^hiki/-t^hokon* matches Bengali *-t^heke* and Hajong *-t^hiki/-t^hokon*; the instrumental *-diuu* matches Bengali *-die* and Hajong *-diuu*. The classifier-numeral ordering (Num-CLF-N) aligns with Assamese and distinguishes Banai from Garo. Taken together, these features across the lexicon and morphology constitute a coherent IA profile.

At the same time, several features of Banai cannot be explained by IA inheritance alone and point clearly to a TB substratum. The phoneme /u/, absent from Assamese and Bengali but present in Garo and Bodo, occurs systematically in Banai. The demonstrative system (*iduu/uduu* for 'this'/'that') parallels Koch and Garo proximal/distal distinctions. The perfective morpheme *-bun/-bun* is formally comparable to the Garo *-min* and Koch *-mung*. Most significantly, the complete absence of subject-verb agreement in Banai — a structural feature that is obligatory in Assamese and Bengali — replicates the TB pattern. These cannot plausibly all be contact-induced convergences; they suggest that the Banai people originally spoke a TB language that shifted over generations toward IA under prolonged sociolinguistic pressure, leaving identifiable TB traces in phonology, morphology, and grammar.

This interpretation has broader implications for the linguistics of Northeast India. Banai represents a case of incomplete language shift — a community that ethnically identifies with TB groups (Koch) but whose language has been restructured predominantly along IA lines. This type of contact situation, in which genetic affiliation diverges from ethnic identity and typological profile, is well attested in contact linguistics and points to the importance of integrating sociolinguistic history into genealogical classification. Northeast India, as a high-density contact zone between the IA, TB, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian families (Masica 2001), is particularly significant for understanding such dynamics. Banai's profile supports the hypothesis that TB-speaking communities in this region have been progressively incorporated into IA speech networks without fully abandoning their grammatical heritage.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The comparative analysis of PTB roots in Section 3 is exploratory; establishing genuine PTB-Banai correspondences would require systematic reconstruction of regular sound correspondences across a broad lexical sample, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, the borrowing status of individual items requires further investigation through corpus-based elicitation and verification with multiple speakers across the Assam and Meghalaya communities. Future research should also examine clause-level syntax (including causatives, complementation, and relative clause formation) and prosody, domains which may yield additional evidence for or against the TB substratum hypothesis.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the weight of the evidence — lexical, morphological, typological, and phonological — converges on a classification of Banai as an Indo-Aryan language bearing substantial Tibeto-Burman structural inheritance, and positions Banai as a critically important case study for contact linguistics and language classification in South and Southeast Asia particularly Northeast India.

Despite these features, a comparative analysis of Banai with both Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages provides sufficient evidence to classify Banai primarily within the Indo-Aryan language group, as summarized in Table 7.

Feature	Banai	Indo-Aryan			Tibeto-Burman	
		Hajong	Bengali	Assamese	Koch	Garó
Word Order→	SOV	SOV	SOV	SOV	SOV	SOV
Morphological Type →	Agglutinative	Agglutinative	Agglutinative	Agglutinative	Agglutinative	Agglutinative
Tense→	PRES, PST, FUT	PRES, PST, FUT	PRES, PST, FUT	PRES, PST, FUT	PRES,PST, FUT	PRES, PST, FUT
Subject- Verb Agreement →	X	X	√	√	X	X
Pro-drop→	X	X	√	√	X	X
Case system→	NOM-ACC with split Ergativity	NOM-ACC	NOM-ACC	NOM-ACC with split Ergativity	NOM-ACC	NOM-ACC
Num-CLF-N Order	Yes	—	Yes	—	—	No (N-CLF-NUM)

Table 7: Typological Comparison of Banai with IA and TB Languages

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Pronominal System of Kudmali: A Brief Study

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to describe the pronouns in Kudmali, the language of the Kudmi or Kurmi community. It is spoken in some pockets of West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar, and also sometimes confused with the Manbhum dialect. In recent studies, it has been recognised as a separate language, which belongs to the eastern Magahi branch of the Indo-Aryan language family. The survey of the 2011 census says that 555,465 Kudmali speakers had been identified across the previously mentioned states (Censusindia, n.d.). Although, due to major influence of the scheduled languages across these states, the majority of the second and third generation speakers do not speak the language (variety) rather opt for Manbhum dialect or other regional variety. In recent days, there have been several initiatives of revitalization within the community, resulting in publication of some written texts in the form of poetry, novels, folklores and folktales. Linguistic study on the language has not been a focus till date, except a few indigenous attempts from within the community. This study focuses on the usage of Pronouns and categorizes them accordingly, based on person (first, second and third), number (singular and plural). In this study, it is observed that the Kudmali pronominal system exhibits no gender dependency. This study also puts an enquiry in case of Honorific use of Pronoun, distinction based on proximity, animacy, and identify case based on personal pronoun usage. The data for this study are extracted from secondary sources and verified by Kudmali speakers. These sentences are then linguistically analysed to reach the desired goal.

Keywords: Kudmali, Pronominal system, Grammatical Case

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Language

Kudmi tribe is considered to be native of Chotonagpur plateau and its nearby areas. They are mainly dependent on agricultural works. Kudmi people have rich cultural traditions, they worship natural force originally. “Kudmali is a lingua-franca of Chotonagpur or broadly speaking of Jharkhand. It is the most ancient and mother of other dialectical languages known as Nagpuria, Golwary, Sadani (Sadri), Panch Pargania, Sikhria, Mathuary, Chhattisgari Habli, and Bagheli.” (Mohanta, 2011). It is known by different names such as Bedia, Dharua, Khotta, Kudmali thar, Kurumali. There are several debates about its classification under the language group; modern linguistics studies reveal that Kudmali have Indo- Aryan origin.

It is classified as Indo-European as in Ethnologue webpage. It belongs to the eastern Maghi branch of the Indo-Aryan language family. Magahi and Panchparganiya are classified as its sister language. Kudmali has no written script of its own. Kudmali literature is either published in Bengali script or in Devnagari (Hindi) script. Kudmali folk songs- jhumor , Chou dance are deeply integrated with the culture of Kudmi people.

It is observed that the language is depleting at an extensive rate after the division of Manbhum district and redistribution of state territories in 1956. The part that got attached with West Bengal gradually losing its native speakers as the new generations are much more prone to Bengali language as it is the official language

and medium of instruction in state affairs. The same observation is found in the case of areas that were part of Bihar then and now in Jharkhand. Hindi is the official language which is much dominant among the new generations.

Moreover, lack of proper documentation and lack of identification of it as a language has led it to such a catastrophic state.

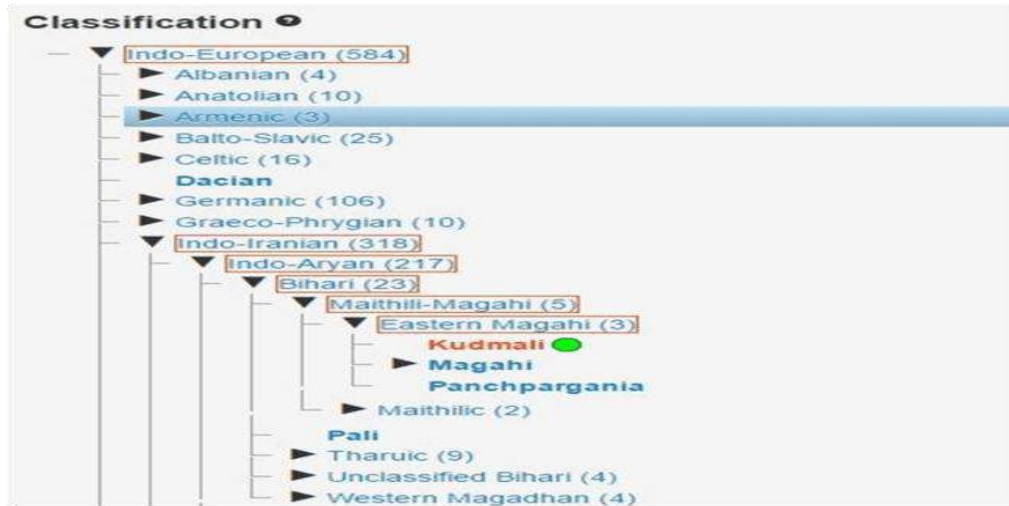


Figure-1

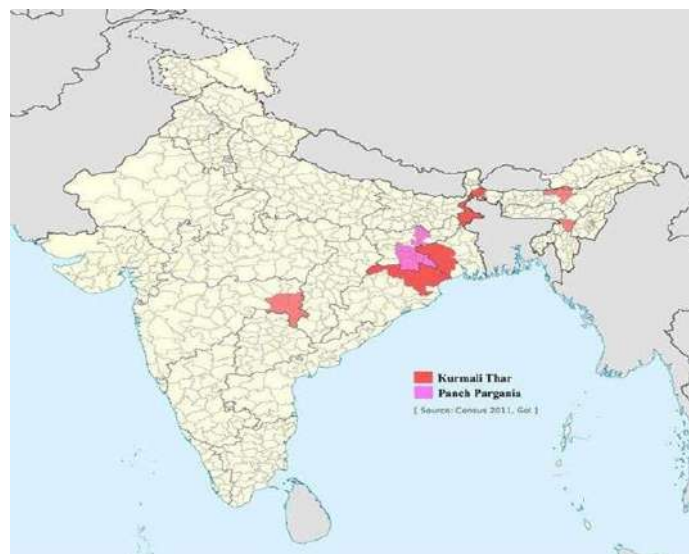


Figure-2

In the above map Kudmali is marked as Kurmal Thar(Red) and Panch Pargania(Pink).

1.3 Distribution:

The language is a widely spoken language in western parts of West Bengal, some parts of Jharkhand and Orissa. The Kudmi people are considered to be Indigenous to the Manbhum District, later which was broken down into districts like Purulia, Bankura, parts of Midnapore, parts of Bokaro and Dhanbad districts. During the British period the Kudmali language was known as Panchapargania(language of five regions). Present day those five regions are known as Bunder, Barendra, Sonahatu(split into Sonahatu and Rahe), Silli, Tamar, blocks of Ranchi district. A Large number of people of Mayurbhanj districts of Orissa also speaks Kudmali. The distribution of Kudmali according to Ethologue, IMA1997, which stated that it has around 37000 speakers.

Later in the Linguistic Survey of India, 2001, the language was identified as Kudmali Thar with 425,920 speakers. Kudmali is considered to be the mother tongue of the Mahato community primarily but it is observed that it is also the mother tongue of people of all castes and sects (even Muslims) residing in the area denoted in the map below.

1.2. Objectives of this study

The primary objective of this study is to provide a systematic description of the pronominal system in Kudmali by categorizing pronouns according to person (first, second, and third), number (singular and plural), and, where relevant, gender. The study further aims to examine the structural and functional distribution of pronouns in relation to honorification, proximity distinctions, and animacy contrasts, with particular attention to how case marking interacts with these categories.

In addition, the study investigates the morphological markers associated with various grammatical cases as they occur with personal pronouns in natural usage. The analysis is based on data extracted from secondary sources and subsequently cross-verified with native Kudmali speakers. These elicited and attested examples are then subjected to linguistic analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Kudmali pronominal paradigm.

1.3. Challenges/Motivation

The documentation and analysis of the Kudmali pronominal system present several intertwined challenges that simultaneously motivate the present study. Kudmali is an under-described Indo-Aryan language with limited grammatical resources, fragmented documentation, and inconsistent orthographic practices. As a result, the pronominal paradigm—one of the core components of grammatical structure—remains poorly understood in both descriptive and typological scholarship.

One major challenge arises from the absence of standardized grammatical descriptions. Variations in pronunciation, morphology, and syntactic usage across different speaker communities make it difficult to establish a unified pronominal inventory. Additionally, dialectal variation within Kudmali contributes to variability in pronoun forms, especially in plural and honorific distinctions. The lack of prior analytical work further complicates the task of defining case-marking patterns with confidence.

Another challenge relates to data availability. Existing studies often provide only rudimentary word lists or sociolinguistic notes, offering minimal insight into the morphological processes governing pronoun formation. Eliciting naturalistic data from speakers is time-consuming and requires sensitive methodological design, particularly when dealing with low-frequency forms such as relative, interrogative, or honorific pronouns. At the same time, these challenges create a strong motivation for the present research. A systematic description of Kudmali pronouns is crucial not only for linguistic documentation but also for understanding broader Indo-Aryan pronoun typology, where issues of number, case syncretism, and honorification play an important role. Furthermore, as Kudmali is undergoing significant influence from dominant regional languages (such as Bengali, Odia, and Hindi), documenting its pronominal system becomes an urgent task for future revitalization and comparative study.

Thus, the present work aims to address these gaps by providing a structured and comprehensive account of Kudmali pronouns, grounded in primary field data and presented through a clear typological lens.

2. Literature Review

Kudmali is an Indo-Aryan language that appears to have had substantial impact from Austric languages. A group of Kudmali speakers may be found in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha. Kudmali is a language spoken in the areas of Purulia, Ranchi, and Rourkela, as noted by (Grierson, 1907/67). It is possible to classify Kudmali as a language that is mostly spoken in rural areas. According to Grierson, Kudmali is an eastern Magahi (Grierson, 1907/67). According to Grierson, Manbhum's Kudmali Thar (Kudmali fashion) is a strange language that might be referred to as a "bilingual language." Although the language is a variation of Magahi, Bengali words, phrases, and sometimes whole sentences have a Bengali feel. The language is wrongly referred to as a Bengali dialect because it clearly contains Bengali characteristics and is written in Bengali characters.

Language convergence and linguistic blending have occurred in the region where Magahi, Bengali, and Oriya are in direct contact with one another. The region has produced a number of complex morphological languages. Creolization processes have given rise to the languages Sadri/Sadani (also known as Sadri Kol), Nagpuri, Panchpargania/Tamaria, and Kudmali. Kudmali was described by (Brian D. Joseph, 2003) as an amalgam of Eastern Hindi and Mundari (Bihari). The case of Shyampur, a village in Purulia, is discussed in the study, along with the educational and employment circumstances of the village's Kudmali-speaking residents.

In order to provide a theoretical foundation for this study on inflectional morphology, multiple researches of Indian languages and dialects have been examined. However, most of these studies have more to do with other aspects of Kudmali literature than they do with the language itself. As was already said, neither Kudmali is taught as a subject nor is it employed as the school's primary language of instruction. There are no printed grammar guides or reliable dictionaries. Nevertheless, we only find a single publication by (Mahato K. , Digitized by Stanford University, Stanford, CA in May 2009, 1973) and a short lexicon he created. Recently, (Davison) made a significant theoretical contribution by examining the typological significance of verb agreement systems in relation to the differences between mainstream Hindi/Urdu and Kudmali.

The primary sequence relationships are those created by the ego, the parents, siblings, and children of the ego make up the core sequence ties, which are, as the name implies, the core relations. There are the following kinship labels for these relations (Majumder, 2020)

(Mahato A. , 2022) analysed the pronouns in the Kudmali language in his book “An Overwhelming Discussion on the Kudmali Pronouns”. In this work eight types of pronouns were discussed based on traditional grammar.

3. Data Collection

The data for the present study were collected through field interviews using a structured questionnaire prepared in Bengali. The questionnaire was specifically designed to elicit different categories of pronouns and their usage in a variety of grammatical and communicative contexts. Since Bengali is widely understood by the speakers in the study area, the use of a Bengali questionnaire facilitated clear communication between the researcher and the informants and ensured the accurate elicitation of linguistic forms.

The primary data were gathered from native speakers of Kudmali residing in Marudahar, a village under Chitorpur in the Kotshila region of the district of Purulia. The selected informants belonged to the age group of 30–50 years. This age group was chosen because speakers in this category generally possess a stable command of the language and retain many traditional linguistic features while remaining active participants in everyday communication. All informants were fluent native speakers of Kudmali and regularly used the language in domestic and community interactions.

The study employed purposive sampling in selecting informants. Bilingual speakers proficient in both Kudmali and Bengali were preferred, as their bilingual competence facilitated effective interaction during interviews and enabled the researcher to clarify meanings, grammatical functions, and contextual nuances when necessary. The bilingual nature of the speakers also helped in cross-checking translations and interpretations of elicited forms. Data collection involved both direct elicitation and spontaneous conversation. Informants were asked to respond to questions, translate sentences, and provide examples of pronoun usage in natural speech. Additional follow-up questions were used to verify forms and identify possible variations in person, number, honorificity, case marking, and discourse functions. Whenever possible, the responses were cross-checked with other speakers to ensure consistency and reliability.

To supplement the primary linguistic data, several knowledgeable members of the Kudmali-speaking community, including local scholars, teachers, cultural activists, and elderly speakers, were consulted. These individuals provided valuable information regarding the historical development of the language, patterns of language use, regional variation, language contact, and sociolinguistic changes within the speech community. Their insights contributed to a broader understanding of the linguistic and cultural background of Kudmali and aided in interpreting the collected data.

The collected material was subsequently transcribed, organized, and analyzed to identify the structure and functions of the Kudmali pronominal system. Particular attention was given to person distinctions, number marking, honorific forms, case inflections, and the influence of neighbouring languages on pronoun usage. The findings presented in this study are therefore based on systematically elicited field data corroborated by community consultation and comparative analysis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Kudmali language exhibits distinction in Pronouns based on Person and Number. The following table gives a detailed account of Pronouns and its classification based on Person and Number.

4.1. Types of Kudmali Pronouns

The pronominal system of Kudmali reveals a clear structural pattern organized around case and number, with highly regular morphological markers across the paradigm. Based on the study consistent morphological chain is observed in the marking of personal pronouns.

Kudmali Pronouns can be broadly classified into seven major types:

4.2.1 Personal pronouns

A consistent morphological chain is observed in the marking of personal pronouns.

Number	1 st PS, NOM	E.Gloss	2 nd PS, NOM	2 nd PS, NOM (HON)	E.Gloss	3 rd PS, NOM	3 rd PS, NOM (HON)	E.Gloss
Singular	hami/ hamae/moi	I	ṭṣi	ṭṣhra	you	ṣi, æi	ɔk ^h ra	he/she
Plural	hamra	we	ṭṣhra	-	you all	ɔk ^h ra	-	they

Number	1 st PS, OBJ	E.Gloss	2 nd PS, OBJ	2 nd PS, OBJ (HON)	E.Gloss	3 rd PS, OBJ	3 rd PS, OBJ (HON)	E.Gloss
Singular	hamke	me	ṭoke	ṭṣhrake	you	oke	ɔk ^h rake	him/her
Plural	hamrake	us	ṭṣhrake	-	you all	ɔk ^h rake	-	them

Table-1, 2

First Person:

The singular nominative form takes the marker /i/ or /æ/, as illustrated in (1), while the plural nominative adds the plural marker /ra/, as in (2). For the objective case, the singular uses the marker /ke/ (3), and the plural also uses /ke/, preceded by the plural morpheme /ra/ (4).

1. *hame/hami* *b^haṭ k^hai-ke iʃkul dʒam*
1SG rice eat-FUT school go-FUT
'I will eat rice and then go to school.'
2. *hamra* *aedʒ k^heṭ dæk^he-lai dʒab*
1SG-PL today field to see-INF go-FUT
'We will go to see the field today.'
3. *hamke* *ʈaka ɖe*
me-1SG money give-PRS,IMP
'Give me money'
4. *hamrake* *kɔḍailgila ɖe*
us-1PL spade-PL give-PRS,IMP
'Give us spades'
5. *mɔi* *ṭke lei dʒab*
I-1SG,NOM you-2SG,OBJ go-1SG,FUT
'I will take you with me'

Second Person:

The singular nominative likewise takes the marker /i/ (6), and the plural nominative takes the marker /ra/ (7), mirroring the 1st-person pattern. The objective case uses /ke/ for both singular (5) and plural (8), with the plural form again containing the preceding /ra/ plural marker.

6. *ṭi* *bihane hamɔr g^ha:r aibe-ṭo?*
2SG morning my-POSS home come-FUT
'Will you come to my house tomorrow morning?'
7. *ṭhra-ni* *keʃɔn aiha ?*
2SG,HON how are(being)
'How are you?'
8. *ṭhrake* *aedʒ hiai rɔhe heṭɔhɔn*
3PL.OBJ today here-LOC stay-INF have-FUT
'You all have to stay here today'

Third Person:

The pattern continues in the 3rd person: the singular nominative appears with /i/ (9), the plural nominative with /ra/ (10), and the objective case with /ke/ in both singular (11) and plural (12). As with the other persons, plural objective forms include the /ra/ marker before /ke/.

Overall, personal pronouns consistently maintain a structural opposition between singular /i/ and plural /ra/ in nominative forms, and a uniform /ke/ across objective forms, with plural marked by /ra/ + /ke/.

9. *ṣi* *hamɔr ʃɔngi hēkei*
He/She-3SG my-1SG.GEN friend-3SG is-PRS
'He/She is my friend'

10. *ɔkʰra aedʒ kʰæt̪ gelahaʈ*

3PL today field go-PST

‘Today they went to field’

 11. *ʃke aedʒ gʰare ɖakihin*

3SG.GEN today home-LOC call-IMP

‘Call him/her to our home’

 12. *ʃkʰrake kina ɖebʃi*

3PL.GEN what give-FUT

‘what will you give them’

4.2.2. Possessive pronouns

In Kudmali language sense of possession is very prominent in all person ie in 1st, 2nd and 3rd(Possessive case)

Number	1 st Person	2 nd Person	Honorific,Singular	3rd person	Honorific,Singular
Singular	hamər	ʈəkər, , ʈəhər, ʈər	ʈəhranik,ekʰranik	əkər, ʈəkər	əkʰranik, əkʰranik,ekʰrak
Plural	hamrak, hamranik	ʈəhrak,ʈəhranik	-	əkʰrak, əkʰranik, ekʰranik	-

Table-3

Kudmali contains person-based distinctions in the form of possessive pronouns and also contrast is determined by number as in table-3:

Singular possessive: marked by /r/ (13), Plural possessive: marked by /k/ or /nik/ (14) and Honorific forms introduce an additional layer of complexity.

The 2nd-person singular honorific employs /nik/ (15), while the 3rd-person singular honorific may take either /nik/ or /k/ (18 and 19). Notably, honorific distinctions do not extend to plural forms.

 13. *hamər gʰa:r cʰəkbaide hekei*

My-1SG home chakbad-LOC there-PRS

‘My home is at Chakbad’

 14. *hamrak ihā gaiɖe pani gir-ɔ-hei /girehek*

Our’s(1PL,POSS) here-LOC very raining-PROG-PRS

‘It’s raining heavy in our place’

 15. *ram aedʒ ʈər/ʈəhrak gʰa:r dʒaʈ*

Ram today your(2SG-POSS/2PL-POSS) home-LOC go(FUT)

‘Ram will go/visit your home today.’

16. *əkər giḍərṭir kina nam hekei?*
 His (3SG,POSS) daughter what name is-PRS
 ‘What is his daughter’s name?’

17. *əkʰrak/əkʰranik gʰa:re ḍome giḍər ahə.*
 Their’s(3PL,POSS) home-LOC lots baby there.
 ‘There are lots of babies in their home.’

18. *Ram ekʰranik gʰa:rei aedʒ rəhṭei*
 Ram-NOM their (3SG-HON,POSS) house-LOC today stay-INF
 ‘Ram is going to stay in their house today’

19. *əkʰrak gāe adʒ mela laglahe*
 3SG-HON village-LOC today fair-NOM start-PRS-PERF
 ‘Fair has started from today in their village’

4.2.3 Inanimate Pronouns

Inanimate pronouns refer to non-human objects, facts and circumstances. Of the two pronouns given here, ‘*əĩ*’ can also refer to animates meaning he or she in English but *eḟa*, *uṭa*, *əhəṭa*, *əhəṭa* is always inanimate.

In Kudmali there are several demonstratives like

Nominative	<i>iṭa nai heṭṭi</i>	That won't happen
Genitive	-	-
Objective	<i>hamĩ iṭa dʒaneṭalo nihi</i>	I didn't know that
Locative	<i>əhəṭai dʒailai hæṭek</i>	We need to go that way

Table-4

The inanimate pronominal system uses distinct lexical forms with minimal case variation:

Nominative/Object: /iṭa/

Locative: /əhəṭai/

No clear genitive forms were attested in the available data. This may represent a lexical gap, productive omission, or simply a data limitation.

4.2.4 Interrogative pronouns

Kudmali too has distinction between Interrogatives for animate pronouns.

Animate	Nominative	Genitive	Objective	Locative
Singular	kone	kakor	kakra	kāha
Plural	kakra	kak ^h rak	-	-
Inanimate	kina	keʃon	-	-

Table-5

Kudmali interrogative pronouns take different markers in terms of different cases. Plural nominative case takes /**ra**/ marker, as in (21), In the genitive case the singular form takes /r/ marker as in (23), and the plural form takes /**ra-k**/ marker, as in (24). Interestingly, the objective singular form and the nominative plural form have the same /ra/ marker, as in (21).

Inanimate forms show no overt genitive marking in the current dataset.

A noteworthy structural feature is the syncretism between the singular objective and the plural nominative, both expressed through /**ra**/ (21). Such syncretic forms contribute to the typological interest of the Kudmali pronominal system.

20. **kone** kəharaholə/ k^hədʒehelo ʔəke?

Who say- PST you?

‘Who said this to you?’

21. **kakra** k^həʒdʒehə ʔəhĩ?

Whom searching(PROG-PRS) you(2SG)

‘Whom are you searching for?’

22. **keʃon** ahif/ aiha?

how are(2SG,PRS)

‘How are you?’

23. **kakor** hūa dʒabe-he?

whom(GEN) there(LOC) go(FUT) HON?

‘To whom will you go?’

24. **kak^hrak** gāe mela laglahe?

3P.PL.HON village-LOC fair-NOM start-PRS-PERF

‘In whose village is the fair being held?’

25. **kina** k^hədʒehəm?

what search-PRS.PROG

What are you searching for?

26. **kaha** dʒabe ʔəi?

Where go-FUT 2P.SG

Where will you go?

4.2.5 Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns follow on from interrogatives as their formation is based on interrogative pronouns. There are no such plural forms of indefinite pronouns. Indefinite pronouns translate as someone/anyone or something or anything.

	Nominative	E.Gloss	Genitive	Objective	locative
Animate	kehũ	someone	kakrɔ	kahũke	-
Inanimate	kuc ^h u	somethin g	-	kuc ^h u	-

Table-6

Indefinite pronouns fall into two semantic categories: animate and inanimate. Both categories are attested with nominative, genitive, objective, and locative forms, generally using the same set of markers as table-6.

However, across both categories, productive locative forms are not found, suggesting either a low frequency in discourse or an incomplete elicitation dataset.

4.2.6 Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns are used in correlative structures and follow the same logical pattern of 3rd person personal pronouns, though there is not much use is seen in the language.

/ækɔr/- 'his' Possessive case (Singular)

/æk^hrak/ – 'their' Possessive case (Singular, Honorific)

Relative pronouns show a simple and highly regular pattern. Two major morphological categories are identified:

Singular relative marker: /r/

Singular possessive relative marker: /k/

This minimal paradigm suggests a relatively streamlined relative-pronoun system, which stands in contrast with the richer personal and interrogative paradigms.

4.2.7 Deictic pronouns

Pronouns	Unmarked	Near	Far	English Gloss
Personal, Singular		eĩ, i	ɔĩ, u	
Inanimate, CL, PL	æhætʰa/uʰa/iʰi	igilan, æhægila n	ugilan, ugilin/ɔhoʰi	this/that

Time	uk ^h ɔn, ahak ^h ɔn	ik ^h ɔn	ɔhek ^h ɔn	then
Location	ɔhæ ^h ɪne, ɔhɔ ^h ɪne	ehe ^h ɪne, ɪ ^h ne	ɔhɔ ^h ɪne, ɔhæ ^h ɪne, u ^h ɪn	there, here
Direction	ɔhɔbaɛ/ubaɛa	æhæbaɛ	ɔhɔbaɛ	this/that way
Manner	tæɟɔn	æɟɔn	ɪɟɔn/eheɟhon	such
Type	ɔhanɪɔr	æhenɪɔr	ɔhɔnɪɔr	that kind
Quantifiers	ɔtæk	ætæk	ɔtæk	so much

Table- 7

The Kudmali data reveals a consistent three-way deictic contrast—unmarked, proximal, and distal—across all semantic domains, including person, inanimate, time, location, direction, manner, type, and quantity as in . Distance is largely encoded through regular vowel alternations, where /e/–/æ/ mark proximity and /ɔ/–/u/ mark distance.

In the nominal domain, Kudmali displays rich morphological variation, especially for inanimate and plural demonstratives, suggesting the presence of classifier-like forms and possible dialectal or contextual allomorphy. Locative expressions show a productive pattern combining deictic prefixes with specialized locative suffixes. Importantly, the deictic system extends beyond reference to objects and persons, grammaticalizing distinctions in time (‘now’ vs. ‘then’), manner (‘like this’ vs. ‘like that’), type (‘this kind’ vs. ‘that kind’), and quantity (‘this much’ vs. ‘that much’) as in table-7.

These observations suggest that deixis in Kudmali functions as an important organizational principle within the grammar, shaping both nominal and adverbial domains.

5. Conclusion

This study presents one of the first systematic descriptions of the pronominal system of Kudmali based on elicited data that were cross-verified with native speakers. The analysis demonstrates that although Kudmali retains the core characteristics of an Indo-Aryan pronominal system, it also exhibits several distinctive features that may have emerged through prolonged contact with neighbouring languages such as Bengali, Magahi, and various Munda languages. The findings reveal a highly regular and structurally transparent pronominal paradigm organized around person, number, case, honorificity, animacy, and deixis. Personal pronouns consistently distinguish three persons (first, second, and third) and two numbers (singular and plural), while no grammatical gender distinctions are encoded, confirming the gender-neutral nature of pronominal reference in the language. Case marking is systematic and predictable, with nominative, objective, and possessive forms clearly differentiated. The objective marker /ke/ is uniformly applied across all persons and numbers, while plural forms are regularly formed through the addition of the plural marker /ra/, producing an agglutinative and morphologically transparent structure.

The possessive system is similarly regular, expressing possession primarily through number rather than person, with /r/ marking singular possessors and /k/ or /nik/ marking plural possessors. Honorificity constitutes a restricted subsystem, being limited to singular second- and third-person forms and expressed through markers such as /nik/ and /k/. This distribution suggests that honorific marking in Kudmali is closely tied to social relations and discourse participants rather than functioning as a generalized grammatical category. Beyond personal pronouns, the language exhibits distinct subsystems for inanimate, interrogative, indefinite, relative, and deictic pronouns. Inanimate pronouns show separate nominative and locative forms but lack attested genitive forms in the present dataset. Interrogative pronouns display a relatively rich case paradigm and exhibit instances of syncretism, particularly the use of /ra/ in both plural nominative and singular objective animate forms. Indefinite pronouns are largely derived from interrogative bases and show limited pluralization and locative marking. Demonstratives encode contrasts of proximity, distance, and animacy, reflecting the importance of spatial orientation in the grammar, whereas relative pronouns form a comparatively reduced system centred on the markers /r/ and /k/.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the Kudmali pronominal system is typologically characterized by gender neutrality, agglutinative case marking, regular number morphology, restricted honorific marking, and sensitivity to animacy and deictic distance. Despite increasing language shift and sustained influence from dominant regional languages, Kudmali continues to maintain a robust and internally coherent pronominal architecture. The patterns documented in this study contribute significantly to the description of Kudmali grammar and provide valuable comparative evidence for the study of Eastern Indo-Aryan languages and language contact phenomena in eastern India. The findings also underscore the importance of further fieldwork and documentation efforts, particularly in view of the sociolinguistic pressures that may threaten the preservation of distinctive grammatical features of Kudmali in the future.

6. Limitations and Possibilities

Although this study offers a preliminary but systematic account of the Kudmali pronominal system, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the dataset is based on elicited forms and consultant-driven examples, rather than extensive naturalistic corpora. As a result, certain pronominal categories—particularly genitive forms of inanimate pronouns, locative markers in indefinite pronouns, and plural forms of honorific pronouns—remain unattested. Their absence in the current data should not be assumed to indicate grammatical impossibility.

Second, the study relies primarily on speakers from a restricted geographic area, and Kudmali is known to exhibit dialectal variation across Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha. It is therefore possible that other dialects preserve additional forms, alternative markers, or different honorific strategies not captured in this analysis.

Third, phonetic variation and morphophonemic alternations (such as variation between /k/, /nik/) could not be investigated in depth due to limited tokens. Future work combining acoustic analysis with broader sociolinguistic sampling could clarify whether such alternations reflect dialectal differences, formality levels, or phonological conditioning.

Fourth, reflexive pronouns could not be investigated due lack of sufficient authentic data. Future work might give a detailed account of it.

Abbreviation

PS	Person	1	First person
2	Second person	3	Third person
OBJ	Objective	NOM	Nominal
HON	Honorific	SG	Singular

PL	Plural	FUT	Future tense
PST	Past tense	PRS	Present tense
POSS	Possessive marker	PROG	Progressive
PERF	Perfective	GEN	Genitive case
LOC	Locative marker	IMP	Imperative
INF	Infinitive		

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The Morphological representation of adjectives in Maram Naga

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Abstract

This paper investigates the morphological patterns of adjectives in Maram Naga, an endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, India. Maram Naga (Glottolog: mara 1379, ISO: 639-3) nma is classified as the Western Naga subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman languages (Mark Post and Burling, 2017). According to the 2011 Census, the language is spoken by approximately 37,300 people in senapati district of Manipur. The study is based on primary field data. It provides a systematic description of how property concepts such as size, colour, shape, age, and dimension are investigated in attributive and predicative positions. It focuses on morphological structure, and the study also discusses the formation of comparative and superlative constructions. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the grammar of Maram and provide valuable insights into the typological diversity of adjectives within the Tibeto-Burman language family. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the grammar of Manipuri and provide valuable insights into the typological diversity of adjectives within the Tibeto-Burman language family. Furthermore, the study supports ongoing efforts in the documentation and analysis of indigenous languages and serves as a useful resource for future research in descriptive linguistics, language typology, and the grammar of Manipuri. Furthermore, the study advances the documentation of an endangered language by offering a detailed analysis of its adjective morphology, degree marking, and morphophonemic processes, which are critical for understanding its grammar and typological features.

Keywords: Maram Naga, Morphology, Positive, Comparative, Superlative, Tibeto-Burman.

1. Introduction

Maram (Glottology: mara 1379, ISO: 639-3) is one of the under-documented languages of Northeast India. It is spoken mainly in the northernmost region of Manipur, particularly within the Senapati District, and to a small extent in parts bordering Nagaland. The term Maram refers both to the ethnic group and to their language. Linguistically, Maram belongs to the Western Naga subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman branch within the Sino-Tibetan language family (Post & Burling, 2017). The languages most closely related to Maram are Liangmai, Rongmei, and Zeme. Like many Tibeto-Burman languages, Maram follows a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order in basic declarative sentences.

2. Adjectives

According to Crystal 2008, a term used in the grammatical classification of words to refer to the main set of items that specify the attributes of nouns. According to Dixon (1977, 1982), it has been widely recognised that adjective categories cross-linguistically tend to be strongly linked by morphosyntactic behaviour to either the noun or verb category, to the point that in many languages it is not clear that a distinct adjective category can be established.

In Maram, adjectives are formed through the process of prefixation to the verbal noun. The adjective *kadi* 'big' is derived from the stative verb *di*, which means 'to be big'. Thus, in the phrase *paizau kadi* 'big shirt', *paizau* means shirt (noun). This process is common in the Tibeto-Burman language family.

There are three ways in which Maram adjective can be categorised. Adjectives as property concepts, modifiers of the head noun, and occur as predicates denoting a quality of the referent of the subject noun phrase.

Morphologically, the adjectives in Maram Naga are simple, made up of one morpheme and two syllables. It describes the property or things. An adjective is derived through the affixation of the attributive prefix to a verbal noun. For example, in Meithei, there is a special category of stative verbs characterised by their ability to form adjectives through affixation of both the nominalizer and the "attributive" prefix ə-. Thus, the adjective *acawba* 'big' is derived from the stative verb *caw* 'be big': thus, *acawba mi* 'big man ', where *mi* is 'man'. (Chelliah 1997, and Singh 2002). Examples of some adjectives in Manipuri. This derivational a^ prefix can be found in many of the languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. Lepcha, for example, has a stressed variant a-, which is used to derive adverbs from adjectives, and Kachin, just as Manipuri, has a a^ prefix to derive adjectives from verbs (Lehman, 1976). In the Maram language, most of the adjectives are affixed with the prefix /ka-/. A few examples are given below. Some adjectives are illustrated below.

Table 1: Simple adjectives

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>kabi</i>	kabi	'good'
<i>kasi</i>	kasyi	'bad'
<i>katan</i>	katang	'long'
<i>kadui</i>	kadui	'short'
<i>kamazun</i>	kamazung	'cold'

3. Types of adjectives

In Maram, there are diverse adjectives that describe attributes of the nouns. According to linguistic criteria, adjectives are classified in several ways. It classifies them based on their semantic properties, syntactic behaviour, and morphological structure. Among these approaches, semantic classification is the most widely used because it categorises adjectives according to the type of meaning they contribute to the noun they modify. The types of adjectives are elaborated below with examples:

3.1 Adjectives of quantity

An adjective of quantity that indicates the quantity or amount of a noun without giving an exact number. It answers the question "how much?" rather than "how many?" and is typically used with uncountable nouns, although some may also occur with countable nouns in certain contexts. The main function is to express an indefinite or approximate quantity. Semantically, adjectives of quantity denote the extent of an entity or the magnitude rather than its specific numerical value. The examples are given below.

Table 2: Adjectives of quantity

Maram	orthography	Gloss
<i>haɲnəgə</i>	hangniiga	'many'
<i>ʃaɲnəgə</i>	changniiga	'some/little'
<i>katakara</i>	katakara	'any'
<i>apaɲ</i>	apang	'half'
<i>haɲna</i>	hangna	'two'

3.2 Adjectives of opinion

An adjective of opinion is an adjective referred to as an evaluative adjective express a speaker's personal judgment or attitude towards a person, object, event, or situation. Unlike descriptive adjectives such as red, round, or tall, which denote observable characteristics, adjectives of opinion convey subjective assessments that may differ from one speaker to another. These adjectives indicate whether the speaker considers something to be good or bad, beautiful or ugly, interesting or boring. Semantically, adjectives of opinion belong to the category of evaluative adjectives because they assign a positive, negative, or neutral value to the noun they modify. Consequently, the same referent may receive different evaluations from different speakers. The examples of adjectives of opinion are below.

Table 3 Adjectives of opinion

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>ṇaubi</i>	ngaubi	'beautiful'
<i>ṇausi</i>	ngausyi	'ugly'
<i>mahat</i>	mahat	'boring'
<i>marai</i>	marai	'like'
<i>marak</i>	marak	'active'

3.3 Adjectives of measurement

Adjectives of measurement inform about the measurable dimensions, extent, or magnitude of a noun. It specifies characteristics such as length, height, width, depth, thickness, and distance. Adjectives of measurement generally denote objective and quantifiable properties that can be determined through observation or measurement. Adjectives of measurement answer questions such as "How long?" "How high?" "How wide?" Or "How large?" Some of the examples are shown below.

Table 4: Adjectives of measurement

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>kamachet</i>	kamachat	'thin'
<i>kamakam</i>	kamakam	'flat'
<i>kataṇ</i>	katang	'long'
<i>kadi</i>	kadi	'big'
<i>kadui</i>	kadui	'short'

3.4 Adjectives of age

Adjectives of age indicate the age or stage of existence of a person, animal, object, or event. It expresses whether a referent is young or old, recent or mature, thereby locating it along a temporal dimension. An adjective of age answers the question "How old?" or "At what stage of existence?". The examples are shown below.

Table 5: Adjectives of age

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>katiṇ</i>	kating	'old'
<i>karanu</i>	karanu	'new'
<i>sadak</i>	sadak	'medium'
<i>ralə</i>	ralii	'youth female'
<i>rahaṇ</i>	rahang	'youth male'

3.5 Adjectives of climate

Adjectives of climate denote the climatic or atmospheric conditions associated with a season or environment. It describes long-term weather patterns or general environmental characteristics, and it enables speakers to characterise the typical climatic conditions of a location. Adjectives of climate answer questions like “what is the climate like?” or “what are the prevailing atmospheric conditions?”. Adjectives of climate are given in the table below.

Table 6: Adjectives of climate

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>kamazun</i>	kamazung	‘cold’
<i>katə</i>	katii	‘hot’
<i>mau</i>	mou	‘cloudy’

3.6 Adjectives of condition

Adjectives of condition express the state, conditions, or status of an object. It denotes the actual state or circumstance of the noun. These states may be temporary or permanent, depending on the context. The words of adjectives of condition are given below.

Table 7 Adjectives of condition

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>katam</i>	katam	‘rotten’
<i>kahui</i>	kahui	‘stale’
<i>kahin</i>	kahing	‘sour’
<i>kaka</i>	kaka	‘bitter’
<i>kakum</i>	kakum	‘sweet’
<i>makiek</i>	makiak	‘tasteless’

3.7 Adjectives of colour

Adjectives of colour express the colour of a person, animal, object, or natural phenomenon. It describes one of the most salient and perceptually identifiable physical properties of a referent, enabling speakers to distinguish entities on the basis of their visual appearance. These adjectives answer the question “what colour is it?” and play an important role in identifying, classifying, and describing nouns, and it also attributes a visual property to the noun they modify. Examples are illustrated below.

Table 8 Adjectives of colour

Maram	Orthography	Gloss
<i>kaha</i>	kaha	‘white’
<i>kagan</i>	kagang	‘red’
<i>kamadiek</i>	kamadeak	‘green’
<i>kamazi</i>	kamaze	‘yellow’
<i>katiek</i>	kateak	‘black’

4. Degree of comparison

In Maram Naga, adjectives have morphological marking to indicate gradation, that is, the expression of positive, comparative, and superlative degrees. This gradation is formed through derivational

morphological processes, wherein the base adjective undergoes formal modification—typically through affixation or morphophonemic alternation—to encode varying degrees of intensity.

The following data exemplify how adjective stems in Maram are morphologically derived to express degree. The positive degree represents the unmarked or base form of the adjective, conveying the inherent quality without comparison. The comparative form indicates a higher degree of the adjective's feature, most commonly derived through suffixation and sometimes by vowel lengthening or other morphophonological alternations. In contrast, the superlative degree denotes the maximal degree of the quality, typically realised through a combination of prefixation, reduplication, and the addition of a superlative suffix.

These morphological alternations indicate that gradation in Maram adjectives is expressed synthetically (for example, by adding prefixes, suffixes, or other morphological markers) rather than analytically (it uses separate words instead of changing the form of the word), reflecting a language-internal pattern of degree marking characteristic of the Tibeto-Burman typological profile.

Degree	Gloss	Example	Gloss
Positive	‘big’	<i>ka-di</i>	‘big’
Positive	‘small’	<i>ka-ʃaŋ</i>	‘small’
Comparative	‘bigger’	<i>di-bui</i>	‘big-COMP’
Comparative	‘smaller’	<i>ʃaŋ-bui</i>	‘small-COMP’
Superlative	‘biggest’	<i>ka-di-di-saŋ</i>	‘big-REDUP-SUP’
Superlative	‘smallest’	<i>ka-ʃaŋ-ʃaŋ-saŋ</i>	‘small-REDUP-SUP’

4.1 Positive degree

In Maram, a positive degree is mostly disyllabic, but trisyllabic words are also found. It is formed with a simple adjective root, often preceded by the prefix /ka-/. The adjective functions predicatively in the sentences. The prefix /ka-/ is the class or adjectival marker; in Maram, all the adjectives are prefixed with /ka-/. The morphological structure of the adjective word class is prefix + root. The examples are given below.

<i>ka-di</i>	‘big’
<i>ka-ʃaŋ</i>	‘small’
<i>ka-ha</i>	‘white’
<i>ka-gaŋ</i>	‘red’
<i>ka-taŋ</i>	‘long’
<i>ka-dui</i>	‘short’
<i>ka-ma-tai</i>	‘clean’
<i>ka-huŋ</i>	‘dirty’

ka-soi 'weak'

ka-tái 'strong'

Such prefixes are common in Tibeto-Burman languages, often marking property or stative meanings.

1. *ai paizau-nə kadi le*
this Shirt-NOM big DECL
'This shirt is big. '
2. *lau pifot-nə kaɣaŋ le*
that Shoe -NOM small DECL
'That shoe is small. '

4.2 Comparative degree

In Maram, the comparative degree is disyllabic, but it differs from the positive degree in both morphological and phonological aspects. In this formation, the prefix /ka-/ is omitted, and the suffix /-bui/, which marks the comparative degree, is attached to the adjective root. During this process, the vowel of the root undergoes lengthening. Thus, the comparative degree is formed by adding the suffix /-bui/ to the adjective root. The morphological structure of the comparative adjective follows the sequence root + suffix. The suffix /-bui/ functions similarly to the English comparative marker -er and more. Examples of comparative degree adjectives are presented below.

di-bui 'bigger'

ɣaŋ-bui 'smaller'

ha-bui 'white'

gaŋ-bui 'red'

taŋ-bui 'long'

dui-bui 'short'

ma-tai-bui 'clean'

huŋ-bui 'dirty'

soi-bui 'weak'

tái-bui 'strong'

3. *ai paizau kagaŋ dibui-le kaha suŋ ne*
this shirt red bigger-DECL white than DECL
'This red shirt is bigger than the white.'
4. *tiŋnai mazuŋbui-le ⁿdazə suŋ ne*
today colder-DECL yesterday than DECL
'Today is cooler than yesterday. '

4.3 Superlative degree

In Maram, the superlative degree is quadrisyllabic and displays both morphological and phonological modifications. In this form, the prefix *ka-* reappears, the adjective root undergoes reduplication, and the suffix */-saŋ/*, which functions as the superlative marker, is added. During this process, the vowel of the reduplicated root becomes lengthened. Consequently, the superlative degree is formed following the morphological sequence prefix + root + reduplication + suffix. Reduplication in serves to express intensification, a common feature in Tibeto-Burman languages as well as in many other Asian languages, while the suffix */-saŋ/* explicitly marks the superlative degree ('most', '-est').

ka-di-di-saŋ 'biggest'

ka-ŋaŋ-ŋaŋ-saŋ 'smallest'

ka-ha-ha-saŋ 'whitest'

ka-gaŋ-gaŋ-saŋ 'reddest'

ka-taŋ-taŋ-saŋ 'longest'

ka-dui-dui-saŋ 'shortest'

ka-ma-tai-tai-saŋ 'cleanest'

ka-huŋ-huŋ-saŋ 'dirtiest'

ka-soi-soi-saŋ 'weakest'

ka-tai-tai-saŋ 'strongest'

5. *ai bə paizau kadidisəŋ le*
this IND shirt biggest DECL
'This is the biggest shirt.'

6. *apieŋ kaktəh ai apeik-bə kaŋaŋŋaŋsaŋ le*
cup among this cup-IND smallest DECL
'This is the smallest cup among all the cups.'

4.5 Functions of an adjective in Maram

There are three ways in which Maram adjective can be categorised. It functions as a distinct word class of adjectives, modifiers of the head noun that describe the noun, and it also occurs as a predicate denoting a quality or feature of the noun used as the subject in the sentence.

7. *ai paizau kadi-le*
this shirt big-DECL
'This is a big shirt.'

8. *ai paizau dui-le*
this shirt short-DECL
'This shirt is short'.

In the sentence above, *kadi* functions as an adjective that modifies the noun (shirt), and also it functions as the predicate of the sentence.

5. Conclusion

In Maram, adjectives play a vital role in describing the qualities, states, and attributes of the noun. From the morphological perspective, the adjective of Maram is formed through the process of prefixation, specifically the prefix /ka-/, which functions as an adjective marker affixed to the root. Structurally, the adjective is simple and disyllabic and also reflects the unique morphological patterns found in the Tibeto-Burman family.

Semantically, Maram adjectives can be segmented into numerous classes like adjectives of quantity, opinion, measurement, age, climate, condition, and colour. Adjectives function both attributively, modifying the noun within the noun phrase and predicatively, describing the quality or state of the subject in the sentence. In the language, the one and two adjectives occur in the sentence modifying the noun, but three adjectives are rare.

Another interesting feature of Maram adjective is formed through the morphological process in the degree of comparison. The basic adjective, which is the positive degree usually prefixed with /ka-/. In the comparative degree, the root word is retained, but the prefix is omitted and the suffix /-bui/ is affixed to the root word to form the comparative degree. In the superlative degree, the prefix /ka-/ reappears, the root word is reduplicated, the second reduplicated root word lengthens the vowel, and also the suffix /-saj/ is affixed to the root. As per the analysis of the adjective, the formation of the word is synthetic, relying on the internal morphological changes rather than a separate word for comparative. It is clearly visible that there is a close interaction between morphology, syntax, and semantics. The overall process of prefixation, suffixation, and reduplication not only marks the adjectival categories but also reflects the broader morphological typology of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Thus, the study of the adjective contributes to the understanding of the grammatical structure and expressive capacity of the Maram language.

List of abbreviations

PREF – Prefix

SUFF – Suffix

ka – Adjectival prefix

bui – Comparative suffix

saj – Superlative suffix

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A Preliminary Phonemic Analysis of Haryanvi

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive preliminary phonemic analysis of Haryanvi (ISO 639-3: bgc), an Indo-Aryan language spoken primarily in the Indian state of Haryana. The present study specifically focuses on the West-Central variety of Haryanvi (WCH), which is natively spoken in parts of the Bhiwani district and the Hansi region of the Hisar district. Based on original lexical data elicited directly from native speakers, minimal pair analysis is utilized to establish and verify phonemic contrasts. The analysis successfully identifies an inventory consisting of thirty-two consonant phonemes, eight vowel phonemes, and three diphthongs. Crucially, this study moves significantly beyond elementary segmental description to investigate broader phonotactic distribution, syllable weight mechanisms within a moraic framework, and highly active phonological processes present in the language. These processes include the positional neutralization of aspirates, stringent retroflex restrictions in word-initial positions, and the application of schwa reduction and syncope. While the dataset utilized in this preliminary study remains limited, the analytical findings contribute substantially to the theoretical understanding of Indo-Aryan phonological typologies and provide a much-needed empirical foundation for WCH, a regional variety that remains critically under-documented within contemporary linguistic literature.

Keywords: Haryanvi, Phonology, Phonemic inventory, Indo-Aryan languages, Syllable weight

1. Introduction

Haryanvi (ISO 639-3: bgc) is a major Indo-Aryan language spoken primarily in the northern Indian state of Haryana and in adjoining regions of Delhi, Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh. Generally classified within the Western Hindi subgroup of the Indo-Aryan language family, it shares several historical and linguistic features with related varieties such as Khariboli and Braj Bhasha (Singh, 1970; Ethnologue, 2021). Despite its widespread use in everyday communication across a vast geographic region, Haryanvi has received relatively limited analytical attention in descriptive linguistic research, particularly concerning its formal phonological architecture and underlying phonological rules.

1.1 Demographic and Sociolinguistic Context

The demographic footprint of Haryanvi is substantial, though precise speaker counts are obscured by Indian census methodologies that typically subsume Haryanvi under the broader category of Hindi for administrative purposes. This subsumption often masks the distinct phonological and syntactic reality of the language. Nonetheless, Ethnologue indicates several million speakers of Haryanvi and its closely related varieties (Ethnologue, 2021). The language if needed is written in the Devanagari script, although its written use remains highly limited compared to its dominance in spoken communication. In formal contexts, standard Hindi is generally favoured, resulting in a diglossic scenario where Haryanvi functions as the basilect and Hindi as the acrolect. Moreover, Haryanvi has a significant diaspora, spoken by communities beyond India, including those that migrated to Pakistan during the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent (Madan, 1995).

1.2 Dialectal Variation and the West-Central Variety

Haryanvi is not a monolithic entity; rather, it comprises a complex dialect continuum exhibiting significant phonological and lexical variation across different districts of the state. Among the commonly recognized regional varieties are Bangru (also referred to as Jattu in earlier literature), Deswali, Khadar, Ahirwati, and Bagri (Singh, 1970; Meena and Rao, 2014).

The present study isolates the West-Central variety of Haryanvi (WCH), spoken natively in parts of the Bhiwani district and in the Hansi region of the Hisar district. WCH is strategically selected for this specific study because it occupies a central geographic and linguistic position within Haryana. It functions as a transitional linguistic zone that shares conservative phonetic features with the heavily studied Bangru variety of the north (Singh, 1970) and the Deswali variety spoken in the central and eastern regions. By documenting WCH, this paper aims to provide a baseline phonological model that can be utilized for broader comparative studies across the dialect continuum.

1.3 Research Gap and Objectives

Previous research on Haryanvi has largely focused on grammatical descriptions, prioritizing nominal morphology, verb paradigms, and syntax over the formal acoustic and phonological systems. Earlier descriptive work on related varieties, such as Bangru, provides valuable insights into the grammatical structure of the language but treats phonology largely as an introductory afterthought (Singh, 1959; Singh, 1970). Rigorous theoretical analyses of the phoneme inventory, allophonic variation, syllable weight mechanisms, and phonotactic constraints of Haryanvi remain critically scarce.

To address this critical research gap, the present study asks the following explicit research questions:

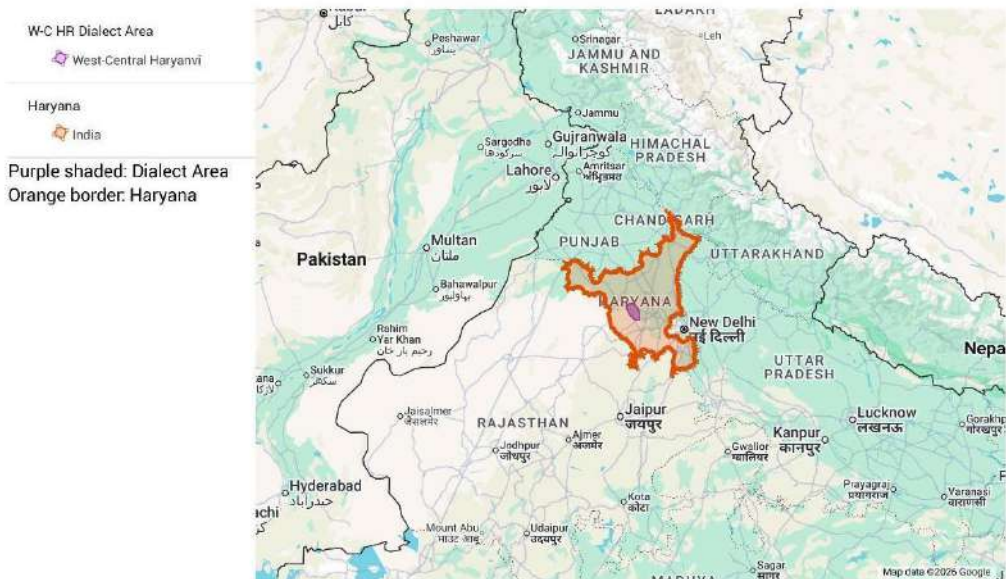
1. What is the precise phonemic inventory of vowels and consonants in WCH, justified through rigorous contrastive distribution and minimal pair analysis?

2. What are the active phonological processes and allophonic variations that dynamically condition these segments in connected speech?
3. What are the syllable structures, moraic weight assignments, and language-specific phonotactic constraints (e.g., sonority sequencing, positional neutralization) governing WCH?

2. Data and Methodology

The data analyzed in this study represent the West-Central variety of Haryanvi natively spoken in parts of the Bhiwani district and in the Hansi region of Haryana. This regional variety belongs to the Western Hindi subgroup of the Indo-Aryan language family (Ethnologue, 2021).

Figure 1. West-Central Haryanvi Variety
(Map created by author using mymaps.google.com)



2.1 Elicitation Protocol and Participant Selection

The primary dataset for this study was collected utilizing the CIIL (Central Institute of Indian Languages) basic vocabulary list, which is designed to elicit culturally and regionally relevant lexemes. The author, functioning as a native speaker of this specific variety of Haryanvi, served as the primary language consultant, providing both elicited forms and intuitive introspective judgments regarding phonotactic grammaticality.

To ensure empirical reliability and guard against idiolectal bias or external interference from standard Hindi, the lexical items, pronunciation norms, and semantic boundaries used in the analysis were rigorously verified through extended consultation with two additional native speakers. Both supplementary consultants originate from the exact same linguistic region (Bhiwani district) and speak WCH as their first language.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The resulting dataset consists primarily of approximately three hundred lexical items utilized to identify phonemic contrasts through minimal pair analysis. Additional lexical material was consulted from available academic glossaries of Haryanvi to cross-check phonological forms and semantic definitions (Jatland Glossary, n.d.).

Minimal pair analysis serves as the foundational, structuralist method for identifying phonemic contrasts in this study. Words exhibiting minimal phonetic differences within identical prosodic environments were meticulously examined to logically establish the phonemic status of both vowels and consonants. Beyond minimal pairs, the methodology incorporates an analysis of complementary distribution to identify allophones and underlying phonological rules.

2.3 Methodological Limitations

As this study represents a preliminary qualitative investigation into the phonological system of WCH, it must be explicitly acknowledged that the current analysis is based on a manually elicited, auditorily transcribed dataset. While auditory transcription by a native speaker provides high categorical accuracy, future quantitative research involving a larger corpus and instrumental acoustic verification utilizing software such as PRAAT will be necessary. Such instrumental methodologies will be critical to precisely map vowel formant frequencies (F1 and F2) and definitively verify Voice Onset Time (VOT) parameters for the robust aspirated plosive series.

3. Phonemic Inventory

3.1 Vowels

The vowel system of the West-Central variety of Haryanvi examined in this study consists of eight monophthongs and three diphthongs. The monophthong inventory includes three short vowels /ə, i, u/ and five long vowels /a:, i:, u:, e:, o:/.

Height	Front (Unrounded)	Central (Unrounded)	Back (Rounded)
Close	/i/, /i:/		/u/, /u:/
Mid	/e:/	/ə/	/o:/
Open		/a:/	

Table 1: Phonemic Vowel Inventory of WCH

As illustrated in Table 1, the WCH vowel system exhibits a pronounced structural asymmetry that is highly characteristic of New Indo-Aryan (NIA) phonologies. While the high vowels and low vowels display a robust, symmetrical quantitative length contrast (short vs. long), the mid vowels /e:/ and /o:/ are exclusively long and lack short

phonemic counterparts within the underlying inventory. This gap is a direct historical reflex of Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) phonology, where original diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ monophthongized into long mid vowels /e:/ and /o:/ in Middle Indo-Aryan, leaving a gap in the short vowel paradigm.

3.1.1 Vowel Contrasts

The phonemic status of these vowels is firmly established through minimal pair analysis, explicitly contrasting short vowels with their phonetically proximate long counterparts.

/kəl/ 'tomorrow/yesterday'	vs.	/ka:l/ 'famine'
/mil/ 'meet'	vs.	/mi:l/ 'mile'
/sun/ 'hear'	vs.	/su:η/ 'swelling'
/lai:/ 'attaching/supporting' (fem.)	vs.	/la:/ 'attach/support' (imperative)

(Note: The verbal root /la:/ in WCH specifically denotes attaching or supporting, contrasting semantically with standard Hindi inferences where a cognate might imply bringing).

3.1.2 Distributional Evidence of Vowels

To demonstrate the full integration of these vowels within the WCH lexicon, their positional distribution across word-initial, medial, and word-final positions is evidenced below. Vowels in WCH exhibit varying degrees of positional restriction.

/ə/: Occurs primarily in initial and medial positions ([ənta:] 'marble balls', [bəhmi:] 'superstitious person').

/a:/: Highly productive across all syllabic positions ([a:a:] 'a low-level shelving unit', [rə[na:] 'to mix up').

/i:/: Found predominantly in initial and medial closed syllables ([ina:m] 'prize', [i:] 'here').

/i:/: Productive across all phonological environments ([i:nt] 'brick', [d̪i:va:] 'lamp', [tʃʰori:] 'young girl').

/e:/: Can appear word-finally, a position strictly prohibited for short vowels ([eq̪di:] 'heel', [li:k̪r̪e] 'small branches').

/u:/: Productive in all structural positions ([ubʰa:ŋa:] 'barefooted', [luk] 'hidden').

/u:/: Appears in all structural positions ([u:k̪du:] 'squatting posture', [tu:m] 'heavy silver anklets').

/o:/: Attested word-initially, medially, and finally ([o:t̪ŋa:] 'to bear a burden', [mo:q̪q̪a:] 'wandering monk').

3.1.3 Diphthongs

In addition to the monophthong inventory, WCH attests three structurally distinct diphthongs: /əo/, /ai/, and /eu/. In accordance with standard Indo-Aryan metrical phonology, these diphthongs function as heavy, bimoraic nuclei within the syllable structure. Unlike monophthongs, which contrast in length, the diphthongs are inherently heavy and do not contrast with "short" diphthongs.

The positional distribution of these diphthongs is robust across the WCH lexicon, as evidenced by the following elicited items:

/əo/: Occurs primarily in word-initial and medial positions.

- [əo.səŋ.na:] ‘to mix flour with water’
- [bʰrəo.ʈa:] ‘bundle of harvested crops’

/ai/: Attested in both word-initial and word-final positions.

- [ai] ‘(she) came’
- [ɖu.kʰai] ‘to cause pain’

/eu/: Occurs primarily in word-final positions.

- [bə.ʈeu] ‘daughter’s husband’
- [beu] ‘impure, untouchable’

3.2 Consonants

The consonant system of WCH consists of thirty-two phonemes distributed systematically across several places and manners of articulation. The plosive system exhibits a symmetrical four-way contrast based on both laryngeal voicing and aspiration at four distinct places of articulation (bilabial, dental, retroflex, velar). This highly complex laryngeal phonology is a defining typological feature of the Indo-Aryan language family.

3.2.1 Consonant Contrasts

Minimal pairs are provided below to verify the phonemic inventory. These pairs strictly contrast phonetically proximate segments (differing ideally by only one distinctive feature) to isolate the exact acoustic feature responsible for the semantic shift.

Voicing Contrasts (Unaspirated)

/pəl/ (‘moment’)	vs.	/bəl/ (‘strength’)
/ʈa:l/ (‘rhythm’)	vs.	/ɖa:l/ (‘lentil’)
/ʈa:l/ (‘avoidance’)	vs.	/ɖa:l/ (‘branch’)
/ka:l/ (‘famine’)	vs.	/ga:l/ (‘abuse/cheek’)

Aspiration Contrasts

/pəl/ ('moment')	vs.	/p ^h əl/ ('fruit')
/ba:l/ ('hair')	vs.	/b ^h a:l/ ('forehead/search')
/pa:t/ ('door')	vs.	/pa:t ^h / ('lesson')
/la:k/ ('wax')	vs.	/la:k ^h / ('lakh')

Place and Manner Contrasts (Sonorants and Fricatives)

/mən/ ('mind')	vs.	/mən/ ('a unit of weight')
/bəgər/ ('bud powder')	vs.	/bəgər/ ('inner courtyard')
/bəl/ ('force')	vs.	/bəl/ ('burning/twist')
/pa:s/ ('near')	vs.	/pa:f/ ('loop, coil')

3.2.2 Consonant Inventory and Distribution

To analyze the distribution of these phonemes with theoretical clarity, the inventory is separated into Obstruents (Table 2) and Sonorants (Table 3).

Place	Voiceless Unaspirated	Voiced Unaspirated	Voiceless Aspirated	Voiced Aspirated	Fricatives
Bilabial	/p/	/b/	/p ^h /	/b ^h /	(f) ¹
Dental	/t/	/d/	/t ^h /	/d ^h /	/s/
Retroflex	/ʈ/	/ɖ/	/ʈ ^h /	/ɖ ^h /	
Palato-Alv.	/tʃ/	/dʒ/	/tʃ ^h /	/dʒ ^h /	/ʃ/
Velar	/k/	/g/	/k ^h /	/g ^h /	
Glottal					/h/

Table 2: Distribution of WCH Obstruents

Integration of Marginal Phonemes: The labiodental fricative /f/ operates as a marginal phoneme, appearing primarily in borrowed vocabulary (Perso-Arabic or English). In basilectal WCH, this segment is frequently unstable and undergoes rapid integration into the native phonological system by alternating freely with the native bilabial aspirate [p^h]. For example, the word for 'skilled' freely alternates between [fərvət] and [p^hərvət]. Similarly, 'ice' surfaces as both [bəɾəf] and [bəɾəp^h]. This reveals an active phonological filter where foreign fricatives are re-mapped to native aspirated stops.

¹ The 32-count of consonant phonemes represents the *native* phonological inventory, and the marginal/loan phoneme /f/ is excluded from that core count, even though it is mapped in the table.

Place	Nasals	Trill	Flap	Lateral	Approximant
Bilabial	/m/				/v/ / /w/
Alveolar	/n/	/r/		/l/	
Retroflex	/ŋ/		/ɾ/	/ɭ/	
Palatal					/j/

Table 3: Distribution of WCH Sonorants

3.2.3 Distributional Evidence of Consonants

The widespread productivity of the consonantal inventory is evidenced by their unrestricted occurrences in various structural positions within the WCH lexicon, with a few notable exceptions discussed later.

Bilabial plosives ([*panna:*] ‘village block’, [*bangəd*] ‘thick stick’).

Dental plosives ([*tabər*] ‘child’, [*kəd*] ‘when’).

Retroflex plosives ([*rəʰpət*] ‘slap’, [*ha:d*] ‘bone’).

Velar plosives ([*ki*[*ki:*] ‘yell’, [*fa:g*] ‘festival’).

Palato-alveolar affricates occur cross-positionally ([*tʃa:m*] ‘lather’, [*gədʒbəŋ*] ‘charming woman’, [*tʃʰe:tʃʰər*] ‘mischief’).

Alveolar sonorants are entirely unrestricted ([*na:*[*ŋa:*] ‘to deny’, [*la:mŋi:*] ‘harvesting’).

Retroflex sonorants, however, face strict positional constraints and are barred from word-initial domains.

4. Phonological Processes and Consonant Realization

The phonetic realization of segments in WCH is highly sensitive to word-position and adjacent contiguous segments. Rather than a static one-to-one mapping between underlying phonemes and surface forms, WCH relies on several active, rule-based phonological processes to negotiate articulation.

4.1 Schwa Syncope and Reduction

The short central vowel /ə/ exhibits the most significant allophonic variation in the entire vocalic inventory. In stressed initial syllables, it is fully realized with clear formant structures. However, WCH exhibits a strict Schwa Syncope rule, common in Indo-Aryan languages, where /ə/ is systematically deleted in unstressed medial syllables of multisyllabic words, or word-finally. The formal phonological rule can be generalized as an unstressed schwa deleting in a two-sided open syllable environment. This phonological process frequently results in complex derived consonant clusters at the surface level (e.g., an underlying sequence of /CəCəC/ structurally surfacing as [CCəC] or [CəCC]).

4.2 Positional Neutralization of Aspiration

A defining phonological rule in WCH involves the extensive weakening and positional neutralization of aspiration. While voiceless aspirates (e.g., /p^h/, /k^h/) and voiced aspirates (e.g., /b^h/, /g^h/) contrast robustly in the onset position of a syllable, this vital contrast is neutralized in coda positions. The Voice Onset Time (VOT) lag that distinctly characterizes aspiration is significantly shortened in medial environments, and voiced aspirates are heavily restricted or entirely de-aspirated in word-final codas. This phenomenon serves as a common typological constraint across Indo-Aryan languages designed to preserve respiratory effort at the right edge of a prosodic domain.

4.3 Assimilation and Coarticulation

WCH features highly productive assimilation processes, particularly involving nasality and voicing, to maximize articulatory ease in rapid speech.

Nasal Place Assimilation: The alveolar nasal /n/ frequently undergoes obligatory regressive place assimilation when functioning as a coda before an obstruent onset. It adopts the place of articulation of the following stop to create a homorganic cluster, surfacing as a retroflex [ɳ] before /t/ or /d/, and as a velar [ŋ] before /k/ or /g/.

Voicing Assimilation: Within consonant clusters generated by morphological concatenation, WCH strongly favors regressive voicing assimilation, where the first consonant adopts the [+/- voice] feature of the adjacent trailing consonant to prevent vocal fold interruption.

Contextual Nasalization: Vowels directly preceding nasal codas undergo strong anticipatory nasalization. The velum begins to lower during the production of the vowel. For example, the underlying phoneme /a:/ in the word /ga:m/ ('village') is phonetically realized with a lowered velum as [gã:m].

4.4 Gemination and Compensatory Lengthening

Plosives and sonorants frequently geminate intervocalically ([ed̪d̪i:] 'heel', [gətt̪t̪] 'astonishing', [pan̪na:] 'village block'). Gemination heavily dictates the preceding vowel length, typically demanding a short vowel nucleus within the metrical structure to preserve overall syllable weight limits.

5. Syllable Structure and Moraic Weight

An accurate and comprehensive analysis of the WCH syllable requires moving beyond simple consonant-vowel linear templates and engaging actively with moraic weight and sonority. The syllable serves as the primary domain for stress assignment and phonotactic rules in the language.

5.1 Attested Syllable Templates

WCH permits both complex onsets and codas, generating a maximal syllable template of (C)(C)V(V)(C)(C). The nucleus of the syllable is obligatorily filled by a vowel or diphthong; syllabic consonants are not attested in the data. The dataset demonstrates the following structural patterns:

Structure	Example	Gloss	Syllable Weight
V	/a:/	‘come’	Heavy (2 moras)
CV	/na:/	‘no’	Heavy (2 moras)
CVC	/da:k/	‘jump’	Superheavy (3 moras)
CCV	/pra/	‘prefix in loans’	Heavy (2 moras)
CVC.CCV	/dʱəm.dʱma:/	‘loose structure’	Heavy.Heavy

Table 4: Attested Syllable Structures in WCH

5.2 Syllable Weight and Metrical Phonology

In WCH, syllable weight plays a critical role in stress assignment and morphological processes. Weight is systematically calculated via moras (units of phonological length) (Hyman, 1985), where onset consonants do not contribute to the weight of the syllable:

Light Syllables (1 mora): Consist of a short vowel nucleus with no coda (e.g., (C)V). These are often targeted for reduction or syncope if unstressed.

Heavy Syllables (2 moras): Consist of a long vowel nucleus (C)VV, or a short vowel closed by a single consonant coda (C)VC. These attract primary or secondary stress.

Superheavy Syllables (3 moras): Consist of a long vowel closed by a consonant (C)VVC (e.g., /da:k/), or a short vowel closed by a consonant cluster (C)VCC. Superheavy syllables are heavily restricted and generally only permitted at the right edge (word-finally) of a prosodic domain.

6. Phonotactics and Distributional Asymmetries

Phonotactics refers to the language-specific constraints governing the permissible combinations and positions of phonemes. In WCH, these distributions are driven largely by articulatory preferences and the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP).

6.1 Systematic Positional Asymmetries

An analysis of the dataset reveals several distinct phonotactic constraints and striking asymmetries regarding where certain sound classes are permitted to surface:

1. **The Retroflex Sonorant Restriction:** A major distributional asymmetry exists

regarding retroflex sonorants. The retroflex nasal /ŋ/, the retroflex flap /ɭ/, and the retroflex lateral /ɭ/ are strictly restricted to coda and intervocalic positions. They are categorically prohibited from occurring in word-initial onset positions. This structural constraint reflects a robust, pan-Indo-Aryan phonotactic pattern rooted in the historical development of retroflexion from original consonant clusters. (Masica, 1991)

2. **The Glottal Onset Requirement:** Conversely, the glottal fricative /h/ exhibits the exact opposite distributional asymmetry. It is restricted almost exclusively to onset positions. It is strictly prohibited in coda position; even in borrowed lexical items ending in /h/, the segment is either deleted or supported by an epenthetic vowel to forcefully integrate it into an onset role, satisfying the language's acoustic requirement for the glottal fricative to release into a sonorant.
3. **Onset-Preferred Segments:** Aspirated segments, particularly voiceless aspirates like /p^h/ and /k^h/, heavily favor the onset position, aligning structurally with the cross-linguistic tendency to maximize perceptual laryngeal cues at the absolute beginning of a syllable where acoustic salience is highest. (Steriade, 1997)

6.2 Complex Onset Clusters and Sonority

Complex onset clusters (CC) are permitted in WCH but remain highly constrained by universal sonority laws. Permissible native clusters generally adhere strictly to the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP), demanding a sharp, uninterrupted rise in sonority from the peripheral edge of the syllable toward the vocalic nucleus (Selkirk 1984; Clements 1990). Consequently, valid native clusters invariably consist of an Obstruent followed by a Liquid or Glide (e.g., /pr/, /kj/).

6.3 Loanword Adaptation and Epenthesis

Clusters violating this required sonority rise (e.g., a liquid followed directly by a stop, or an /s/ + stop cluster like *st-*) are strictly prohibited in the onset. When words containing these illicit sequences are borrowed into WCH from English or standard Hindi, the language repairs the phonotactic violation by systematically triggering vowel epenthesis. An epenthetic vowel, typically /ə/ or /i/, is inserted either prothetically (before the cluster) or anaptyctically (between the consonants) to break up the illicit sequence and conform to the maximal syllable template of the native grammar.

7. Conclusion

This paper has presented a rigorous, data-driven phonological analysis of the West-Central variety of Haryanvi. Advancing well beyond previous introductory morphological descriptions, the study formally establishes an inventory consisting of thirty-two consonant phonemes, eight vowel phonemes, and three diphthongs. Crucially, the analysis analytically reveals that the segmental phonology of WCH is not static, but

is instead heavily governed by dynamic, underlying phonological processes. These processes encompass widespread schwa reduction and syncope, the positional neutralization of laryngeal aspirates in codas, productive regressive assimilation, and strict structural phonotactic constraints against word-initial retroflex sonorants. Furthermore, the syllable structure is demonstrated to be deeply influenced by moraic weight calculation and strict sonority sequencing constraints.

While the reliance on an auditorily transcribed elicited dataset without concurrent instrumental analysis serves as an acknowledged methodological limitation of this preliminary study, the presented findings provide a necessary empirical and theoretical foundation. Future acoustic verification utilizing PRAAT software, alongside comprehensive sociolinguistic research into dialect levelling and language shift within WCH, will be strictly required to further clarify the parameters of allophonic variation. Such ongoing research efforts will be vital to successfully strengthen and formalize the broader documentation of Indo-Aryan linguistic diversity in the twenty-first century.

List of abbreviations

C: Consonant

CIIL: Central Institute of Indian Languages

IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet

OIA: Old Indo-Aryan

MIA: Middle Indo-Aryan

NIA: New Indo-Aryan

SSP: Sonority Sequencing Principle

V: Vowel

VOT: Voice Onset Time

WCH: West-Central Haryanvi

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A Brief Ethnolinguistic Assessment of the Endangered Malavedan Tribe of Kerala

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Abstract

This research presents a comprehensive sociolinguistic profile of the Malavedan tribe of Kerala, a marginalized Dravidian community currently navigating a critical juncture of cultural and linguistic transition. Drawing on a comparative analysis of historical ethnography and fieldwork conducted in 2025 across the districts of Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam, the study documents a significant demographic and geographic retreat from earlier recorded habitations in Thiruvananthapuram. As the community increasingly integrates into the socio-material standards of rural Kerala, characterized by the replacement of traditional mud architecture with modern "pucca" housing and the adoption of mainstream attire, the "visibility" of their tribal identity has nearly vanished. This "visual integration" has precipitated a unique sociopolitical "crisis of authenticity" in bureaucratic spaces, where the Malaveda Bhasha (ancestral language) serves as the final, invisible proof of heritage for members seeking official tribal recognition. Additionally, this paper carries out a quantitative vitality assessment using the UNESCO Nine-Factor framework, which classifies the Malavedan language as Grade 2: Severely Endangered. Findings reveal a significant collapse in intergenerational transmission, alongside a total absence of digital media presence or institutional support. Furthermore, the study examines the dilution of the matrilineal clan system under the pressure of increasing inter-caste relationships. Ultimately, this research argues that while material and social disparities are diminishing, the Malavedan language remains the primary vessel for a distinctive cultural worldview and specialized ecological knowledge. The paper concludes by emphasizing that the preservation of Malavedan is not merely a linguistic task but a prerequisite for the survival of a unique human perspective on the natural world.

Keywords: *Malavedan, Dravidian, Kerala, Endangered Language, Indigenous Knowledge system*

1. Introduction: Socio-Demographic Profile of Tribal Communities in Kerala

According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute a mere 1.5% of the state's total population (approx. 4.85 lakh individuals) (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011). This group is not identical in nature; the tribal landscape of Kerala is known for its high level of internal diversity, with 36 Scheduled Tribes officially recognized. These groups, from the Paniyan, who are the most numerous, to the Cholanaikkan, who are very local and vulnerable, show a wide range of Dravidian language and culture.

The tribal heartland is mostly in the northern and eastern highland districts of Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad. However as we go south, to regions like Kollam and Pathanamthitta, tribal groups become less prevalent and less widespread (Scheduled Tribe Development Department, 2013). This makes it challenging to keep their languages and cultures alive.

The Malavedan community, also known as Malai Vedan, is an important area of study for both linguists and anthropologists in this larger context. The Malavedan live mostly in the southern districts of Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Thiruvananthapuram, which is different from the larger tribal groups in the north. Their name comes from the words Mala (mountain) and Vedan (hunter), which show that they have a history based on living in forests and hunting and gathering as nomads (Eberhard et al., 2025).

There is a change in scale when moving from a general understanding of Kerala's tribes to a more in-depth study of the Malavedan. The Malavedan are a "minority within a minority," which means they are linguistically isolated in a way that is different from other groups. Larger tribes may have a "critical mass" of speakers in concentrated colonies, but the Malavedan are more directly affected by the urbanizing pressures of the southern Kerala plains. This exposure puts them in a dangerous situation: their identity is closely tied to an indigenous knowledge system of the southern forests, but they need to switch to standard Malayalam with increasing frequency to survive. As a result, the Malavedan language is a weak link between an old ecological past and a rapidly changing present.

2. Geographic Displacement and Demographic Shifts

There is a significant difference between historical records and the actual demographic realities of the Malavedan group. The 2011 Census of India and earlier anthropological surveys put the Malavedan population in the Thiruvananthapuram district, however new data reveals that their geographic range has shrunk significantly. Recent findings from the The Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (2023) publication, corroborated by personal fieldwork conducted in 2025, reveal that the community is no longer reside in Thiruvananthapuram; instead, their current habitations are confined to the Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam districts (Kumar et al., 2023). This change shows a worrying "knowledge gap" in official records and how much we depend on data that is decades old and no longer reflects the real world. The lack of recent, thorough studies on Kerala's indigenous groups indicates that our current knowledge is only the beginning; it emphasizes the pressing need for new, field-based research, as there is no way to know what other demographic or cultural erasures have yet to be found because of this lack of academic attention.

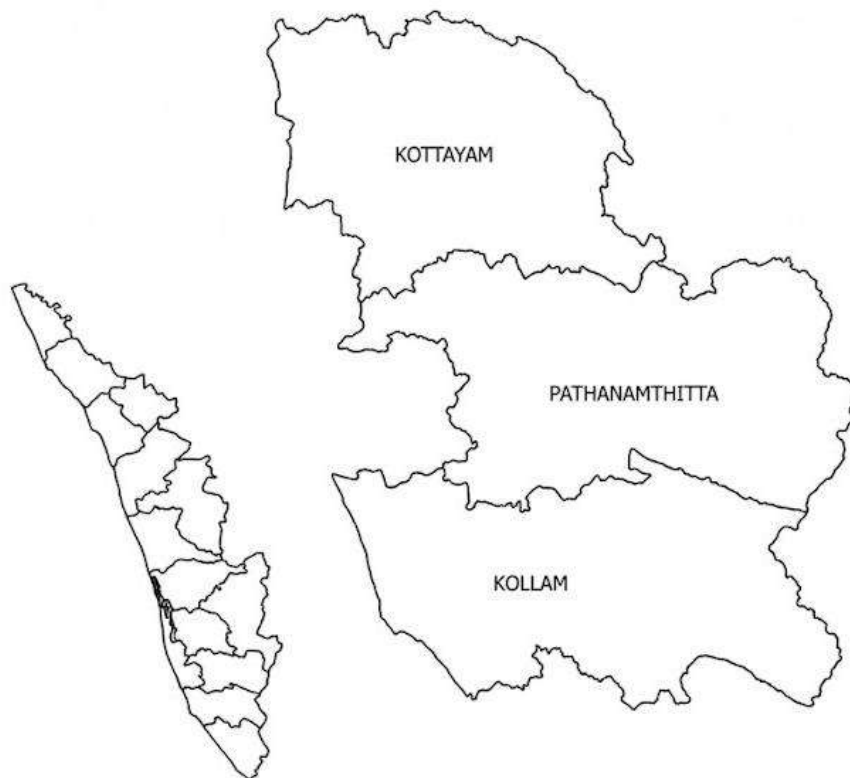


Fig 1: Concentration of Malavedan Population in Kerala: Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, and Kollam

3. Ecological Specialization and Occupation

The Malavedan community's social structure is based on their history as "forest-dwellers" and nomadic hunters, but their skills are in a field that is often ignored by mainstream anthropology. The Malavedan did not hunt "large game" like many other hunter-gatherers did. Instead, they made a living by taking care of small animals, especially the rodent populations in the forests.

This specialization is a great example of how an Indigenous Knowledge System is shaped by the needs of the environment. The Malavedan have a complex "rodent-lexicon" that name five to seven different types of rats based on habitat, behavior, and nutritional value. This linguistic depth is not just a quirk of vocabulary; it shows how they lived and worked in the past. During the British colonial era and subsequent periods of agricultural expansion, until the 80's, the Malavedan were essential to upper-caste landowners. They were often hired as skilled "rat-catchers" to keep valuable crops, especially tapioca plantations, safe from underground damage.

Their technique was a masterclass in ethno-biological observation. The Malavedan used special methods to flush rodents out of complicated underground burrows with a level of accuracy that modern farming tools cannot match. This work was part of a delicate trade between the community; they got grains or tapioca in exchange for protecting the harvest. This led to the creation of a unique food and survival culture in which the community's main source of nutrition was the day's catch and grains that were given to them. Though this unique skill set and culinary choice earned them the name '*eliye-theeni*' (rat-eater), to frame their consumption of rats, snakes, or monitor lizards as merely "primitive" is to miss the broader point of their ecological resilience. These practices represent a total, zero-waste engagement with their environment, a dignified and strategic survivalism that turned a pest-management necessity into a sustainable livelihood.

4. The Erosion of Material Culture

The shift in Malavedan life over the last three decades is most visible in the fading of their distinct material culture. In her seminal 1991 study, Hyrunnisa Beegum documented a community whose identity was worn and lived through specific cultural markers, from traditional attire to the architecture of their dwellings. However, comparing her observations with personal fieldwork conducted in 2025 reveals a dramatic transition toward mainstream rural Kerala's aesthetic and material standards. This shift is not merely a change in lifestyle; it has created a modern sociopolitical dilemma where the "visibility" of their tribal identity has almost entirely vanished.

In terms of attire, the visual boundaries that once set the Malavedan apart have dissolved. While Beegum (1991) noted specific dressing styles that identified tribal status, contemporary Malavedan men and women are indistinguishable from the general population. Women today primarily wear sarees and churidars, while the younger generation has fully adopted globalized fashion, including jeans, shorts, and t-shirts. Men are most commonly seen in shirts, trousers, or the traditional *lungi*. This adoption of "mainstream" dress has unintended effects in the world of bureaucracy. People in the community often get a lot of skepticism when they go to government offices to get important papers like caste certificates. Officials often doubt the authenticity of tribal people because they do not fit the old, stereotypical "image" of what a tribal person should look like. A Malavedan person can often only prove their identity to a suspicious official by speaking a few sentences in Malaveda Bhasha, their ancestral language. This makes the language the last, invisible proof of their heritage.

A similar transformation is evident in their domestic environment. Beegum (1991) talked about traditional huts made of mud and forest materials. These huts have mostly been replaced by "pucca" houses, which are modern buildings made of cement and concrete. Government housing programs often help people get these houses. While these provide better security and hygiene, they have erased the unique architectural heritage of the community. Inside these homes, the material culture has followed suit. The unique, traditional household articles of the past have been replaced by ubiquitous steel and aluminium cooking utensils. Today, a Malavedan household possesses almost nothing in the way of domestic tools that reflects a unique cultural lineage. Their identity has moved from the external world of objects and clothes into the internal, fragile world of their spoken language.

5. Ethnomedicinal Traditions and the Transition of Botanical Knowledge

A key part of the Malavedan Indigenous Knowledge System is their deep understanding of how forests change over time and how plants can be used as medicine. In the past, medical sovereignty was spread out across the community, and almost every home had a basic understanding of how to use plants to heal. But as fieldwork in 2025 showed, this "living pharmacy" has gone from being a shared resource to a rare practice that only a few older Ethnomedicinal Practitioners still undertake.

The Malavedan way of healing is complicated, with both "simple" and "compound" formulations. A practitioner may prescribe either a single-plant remedy or a complex decoction that includes up to ten different species, depending on how bad the illness is. A village chief and practicing healer in one of the Malavedan settlements made it clear how deep this botanical catalog is during an interview. The lexicon has a lot of very specific species, like *Sarpa-gandhi*, *Sarpa-sugandhi*, *Aana-chuvadi*, *Dandha-paala*, *Ashtha-gandhi*, etc.

Starting from common cold to snakebites, this knowledge of ethnomedicine was at its best. In the unfortunate event of a snakebite, the choice of antidote was not a simple one. It was a very specific process in which the type of snake determined the exact mix of plants needed. This indicates a profound, empirical science wherein the Malavedan could recognize both the predator (the snake) and the remedy (the botanical antagonist) with clinical precision.

Today, however, this system is in a state of "cultural fossilization." While older generations and chiefs still hold the recipes, the younger generation has almost entirely transitioned to modern allopathic medicine. Even in households where these medicinal plants are still grown, they have largely lost their functional utility. They are maintained primarily for exhibition or ritualistic sentiment, as physical reminders of a heritage they no longer know how to use. When the last of these practicing healers passes away, the specific "grammar" of these plant combinations, the knowledge of exactly *how* to mix them for a specific bite or fever, will likely vanish, leaving behind only the plants themselves without the manual to read them.



Fig 2: *Kaempferia galanga* (Kaccholan), used for diarrhoea and snake repulsion.

6. Matrilineal Clans and Ongoing Social Dilution

The Malavedan community's social structure has historically been based on a complex system of clans that serves as the main model for their family and community organization. The Malavedan follow a matrilineal tradition, which is different from the patrilineal systems that are common in most of Indian society. In this tradition, a child's clan identity comes directly from the mother (Beegum, 1991; Kumari, 1977). This clan-based lineage is the most important part of their social life. It splits the community into several groups, such as the *Medanadan*, *Kovirikal*, *Vendirikal*, *Thumbakal*, *Mayilakal*, *Churulakal*, and *Venadan*. These names are not just tags; they are part of a long-standing hierarchy that has shaped every social interaction. Some clans, like the *Medanadan*, were seen as having a higher social status on this ladder, while the *Venadan* were seen as being on the lower level.

In the past, this clan system was a strict set of rules for marriage that kept the community organized by making sure that alliances were made that fit together. In this world, there were strict rules about "who could marry whom." For example, a member of the *Medanadan* clan was expected to marry someone from the *Thumba* or *Churula* clans. These marriages were never random; they were planned to fit with the established hierarchy. For example, the *Venadan* clan could only marry into clans that were at the same social level as them, like the *Vendiri*. These rules made sure that each lineage's cultural and social "purity" was kept up, which made for a stable and predictable social order that lasted for generations.

However, the current situation seen during fieldwork in 2025 shows a community going through a major social change. The Malavedan are moving away from traditional endogamy, which is quickly breaking down the strict clan boundaries of the past. There are a lot more inter-caste and inter-religious marriages happening in the community right now. This change is so substantial that it is starting to alter the "Malavedan lifestyle" in significant ways. This dilution of the traditional social structure can be observed in big life events, such as the traditions surrounding marriage, which used to be only tribal, but are now a mix of different cultures. The customs of the outside groups they are marrying into have also had a big impact on the rituals that used to be strictly dictated by clan-specific traditions for childbirth, menstruation, and death.

In many settlements, the traditional clan-based identity is becoming less important as families put social and economic integration ahead of their tribal heritage. Marrying outside the tribe has become so common that it is hard to find a family whose traditions have not been changed by outside religious or caste practices. This change is an important matter for the Malavedan. It means they are opening up to the modern world, but it also means that the unique cultural "blueprint" that their matrilineal clans used to hold together is becoming less and less stable. The old clan names are the last quiet signs of a social system that is slowly being replaced by the tide of modern change. The strict laws of the elders and the traditional hierarchy are being replaced by a more globalized, mixed identity.

7. Lexical Distinctiveness and Urgency in Preservation Efforts

The internal social world of the Malavedan tribe, like many close-knit communities, is intricately mediated by a specific and unique system of vocatives and status markers. These linguistic elements are not merely forms of address, but rather fundamental components that codify and reinforce the social hierarchy, kin relationships, and established behavioural norms within the tribal structure. As intergenerational transmission effectively breaks, children no longer acquire these native 'insider' lexicons, operating instead within the Malayalam framework. Even among elders, the shift is visible as they default to Malayalam kinship terms like /tʃe:ttan/ (older brother) during natural speech, even when native referential terms are still known. To effectively argue for the urgent documentation of Malavedan, one must look beyond its status as a tribal dialect and recognize it as a structurally independent linguistic entity with a unique conceptual map. As Malavedan speakers shift toward standard Malayalam for economic and social mobility, the unique "insider" lexicon, used for centuries to navigate the southern forests of Kerala, is being replaced by dominant regional terms. Documenting this variety is the only way to prove its distinctiveness from Malayalam, as it contains specialized vocabulary for ecological management, social categorization, and communal protection that simply does not exist in the state's majority language. Additionally, the Malavedan language exhibits unique

characteristics in its phonology, morphology, and grammar, alongside a distinct lexicon encompassing terms for flora, fauna, kinship, and other domains. This underscores the critical and urgent need for comprehensive linguistic documentation of their language. Without a formal record, the "invisible proof" of the Malavedan people's heritage will vanish alongside the last fluent generation.

Category	Malavedan Term	Meaning	Description and Contextual Usage
Identity/ Endonym	/tʃa:ɖika:rə/	"People of caste"	An internal endonym used to define their collective tribal identity.
Security	/ki:ttuva:jan/	Police	A coded referent used specifically for communal safety and alerting others.
Exonym	/me:kkidɪ/	Nair community	A specific term used to categorize and refer to the Nair caste.
Exonym	/ku:ɭa/	Christian community	A unique lexical marker used to identify the Christian population.
Exonym	/tʃoɭli/	Muslim community	A distinct referent used within the community for the Muslim population.
Exonym	/tʃa:ɳɳa:n/	Ezhava community	A specialized term used to refer to the Ezhava caste.
Exonym	/tʃo:nti/	Mala Ulladan tribe	A term for a neighboring tribe traditionally regarded as "brothers".
Social Status	/ɳoɳɖalə/	Big-guy/Important person	Used to denote a person's status with either genuine respect or playful irony.
Kinship	/la:va:rə/	Brother	A native referential term for a brother, now being replaced by Malayalam terms.
Kinship	/la:ɖuvə/	Sister	A native referential term for a sister, now being replaced by Malayalam terms.
Verb	kaiɖə	to-go	Verbal root denoting departure

Table 1: Few distinct lexical items from Malavedan

8. A UNESCO-Based Vitality Assessment of Malavedan

The current state of the Malavedan language presents a "Linguistic Vitality Paradox": a profound ideological commitment to the language that is not reflected in its daily usage. According to a comprehensive evaluation using the UNESCO Nine-Factor Language Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) framework as per the data collected from 34 participants, who are the native speakers of Malavedan, from across five different settlements in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala, the language is classified as Grade 2: Severely Endangered (C P & Sharma, 2025). This status indicates that while the grandparent and older generations remain fluent, the parental generation has largely ceased transmitting the language to their children.

Factor	Indicator	Grade	Status
1	Intergenerational Transmission	2	Severely Endangered (Broken at parent generation)
2	Absolute Number of Speakers	2	Severely Endangered (Small, decreasing population)
3	Proportion of Speakers	2	Severely Endangered (Minority within community)
4	Trends in Domains	2	Limited/Formal (Restricted to social/ritual use)
5	New Domains & Media	0	Inactive (No digital presence)
6	Materials & Education	0	No Orthography (Oral tradition only)
7	Institutional Policies	3	Passive Assimilation (No official support)
8	Community Attitudes	4	Positive (Valued, but not spoken)
9	Documentation	2	Fragmentary (Research exists, resources scarce)

Table 2: Summary of Malavedan Linguistic Vitality Grades and Status

8.1 The Collapse of Intergenerational Transmission

The most critical indicator of this decline is the collapse of intergenerational transmission. Recent field data from the Pathanamthitta district reveals a precipitous drop in usage: while the majority of current adults were spoken to in Malavedan by their parents, 50% of these same individuals now "Never" speak the language to their own children. Consequently, the number of child speakers has dwindled to "very few" or "none" in many settlements. This shift is often a defensive reaction to the social stigma and the perceived economic prestige of Malayalam, which is viewed as the essential vehicle for education and social mobility.

8.2 Contraction of Linguistic Domains

This endangerment is further exacerbated by the language's retreat from functional domains. Malavedan has shifted from a mother tongue used universally at home to a "peer-group code" used primarily among older friends and work colleagues. It has been entirely erased from the "market" and public economic life, where Malayalam is now the exclusive medium of transaction. Most significantly, the language has failed to migrate into new media and digital domains. Without a formal orthography or digital footprint, Malavedan remains an oral-only code, rendering it effectively "inactive" in the context of modern technology and social media.

8.3 Institutional Neglect and the Identity Conflict

The "Severely Endangered" status is also a product of Passive Assimilation. There is an absence of government support for documentation or preservation, and the language is never utilized by state officials or teachers when interacting with the community. This institutional invisibility forces the community to prioritize the dominant regional identity for survival.

However, the community's own attitude remains a beacon of hope. There is a 100% unanimous desire among members to see the language preserved for future generations, with over 80% viewing it as a core component of their identity. This suggests that the "death" of the language is not a choice made by the community, but rather the result of systemic barriers and a lack of resources. Without urgent documentation, which currently remains fragmentary and largely inaccessible to the community, the Malavedan language risks moving from "Severely Endangered" to "Extinct" as the last fluent generation passes away.

9. Conclusion

There is a key juncture that the Malavedan community is currently facing, which is that the physical and social markers of their indigenous identity are being swiftly displaced by the standards of a society that is becoming increasingly globalized. A "crisis of authenticity" frequently occurs in bureaucratic spaces as a result of the fact that the "tribal" identity of the Malavedan people is no longer instantly obvious in their clothing, their homes, or their day-to-day lifestyles, as demonstrated by this study. The change from a self-sufficient forest pharmacy to a reliance on allopathic medicine, as well as the transition from a strong matrilineal clan hierarchy to a diluted, mixed-marriage social structure, both indicate a departure from a way of life that has remained stable for centuries.

It is important to note that this "visual integration" does not imply that the culture has completely vanished; rather, it indicates that it has become institutionalized. The Malavedan language emerges as the final stronghold of their history as the global environment in which they live becomes increasingly indistinguishable from that of the general population.

It is specifically within the lexicon and grammatical structure of the Malaveda Bhasha that the specialized, generationally-accumulated knowledge of sustainable forest management practices, the intricate, specialized rodent-lexicons necessary for hunting and pest control, and the delicate, precise botanical recipes essential for traditional medicine and sustenance are maintained and transmitted. Both of these aspects, the language itself and the unique ethno-ecological knowledge it contains, are particularly important for the tribe's ongoing survival and self-determination. In the critical event that this language connection is severed, the deeply rooted, empirical knowledge of their ancestral environment and its resources, developed over centuries of intimate interaction with the forest, would face irretrievable loss. The severing of this linguistic link would not only lead to the extinction of a language but would precipitate the rapid, perhaps catastrophic, erosion of their entire ecological and cultural knowledge system, threatening the very future of the Malavedan people and the biodiversity they have long protected.

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Tense, Aspect and Mood in Uchoi

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Abstract

Uchoi is a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken in the north-eastern Indian state of Tripura. Tripura is linguistically diverse as it is the home of 19 tribes belonging to different language group. The two dominant languages of the state are Bangla and Kokborok. According to 2011 census report, the number of native speakers in Uchoi is merely 2447. It is a critically endangered language, and constantly under pressure of neighbouring languages. This paper examines the Tense, Aspect and Mood in this particular language. Apart from that we have also discussed the modality markers in Uchoi some of them are /-mai/, /ma-/, /-na/, /-k^he/ and /naŋ-/. For this study both the primary and secondary data has been analysed, the data has been collected mainly from Depacherra and Ratanpur in the Gomati and South Tripura districts, respectively.

Key Words: Uchoi, Tibeto-Burman, Tense, Aspect, Mood.

1. Introduction

The need to get a deeper understanding of the concepts of tense, aspect, mood, and modality has long existed and is not limited to any one discipline, methodology, or theoretical framework. Today, there is a wide range of linguistic techniques that address the categories of Tense, Aspect, Mood, and Modality (TAM) in light of various epistemologies and methodologies, revealing both morphosyntactic and semantic-pragmatic characteristic. Travaglia (1991, p.78) asserts that modality might serve as “[...] an indication of the speaker’s attitude towards what he says.” According to the author, there are at least five different types of modalities. Specifically, the speaker must “[...] consider what is said as a situation over whose accomplishment he has control or power.” The deontic modality is associated with the obligations and standards of behaviour; the volitional modality is associated with will and desire; the alethic modality is associated with the speaker’s perception that the situation can be accomplished as something feasible, necessary, or viable; and the epistemic modality is that which reveals the enunciator’s belief in the veracity of what is produced, at the precise moment of enunciation. In addition to verbs, the modality can also be found in names, adjectives, and adverbs. It is somewhat entwined with the concept of mood. As, Vilela and Koch (2001) asserted,

‘Mood’, as the main grammatical category of the verb, is one of the privileged instruments to express ‘modality’. ‘Modality’ is a semantic-formal category in which on the one hand, a hierarchy of morphological, syntactic, prosodic and lexical means intervenes and, on the other hand, the speaker’s attitude towards the validity of the content fixed in the enunciation intervene which is presented as coincident or not coincident with reality. There are thus two basic modalities in the sentence: reality and unreality. [...] From here, possible scales can be constructed: certainty and uncertainty, supposition, condition, need, demand, possibility or impossibility of a given happening. This panel of modality possibilities are made objective by the verb moods and by other linguistic processes. ‘Modality’ can be defined as the grammaticalization of the speaker’s subjective attitudes and their transposition to the content of the statement. There are two fundamental kinds of modality: the epistemic (connected to matters of opinion, belief or knowledge) and the deontic (related to obligation or permission. There are, as it is to be expected, some problems related to modality and its expression through clauses. The indicative is the basic form of

moods: it represents the content of the statement as a fact, denoting what really exists, the predictable and what is about to happen [...]

The semantic of subjective can be defined as opposed to the one of the indicatives: it is the mood of 'not accomplished' or 'not yet accomplished' (Vilela & Koch, 2001, p.175-177).

The two ideas can therefore be confirmed to be intimately related, and they are examined in a variety of ways in different languages. In addition to modality and mood, two more categories—tense and aspect have also been the focus of numerous studies. The first category is deictic since it locates situations in time, and the second one has to do with the situation's internal time.

Tense, as viewed from a linguistic point of view, is the manner in which situations in time are described linguistically; in many languages, these statements take the form of grammatical phenomena. However, flexional morphemes and verbal particles—two grammatical categories that indicate time—form a group that allows information about the temporality of the circumstance to be expressed less precisely than it could be using other forms. Languages' grammatical categories for expressing time often only encode variables like anteriority, simultaneity, and posteriority of one circumstance in relation to another on a timeline (Comrie, 1985).

To express time, temporal structure, and modality, a verb must contain the grammatical categories of tense, aspect, and mood (TAM). TAM is typically inflected as morphemes in verbs. In contrast to aspect, which describes the dynamics of an action whether it is ongoing or completed, tense describes the expression of time, whether it is past or non-past. Likewise, the speakers' attitude toward the action—command, certainty, prohibition, wish or will, etc.—is reflected in the mood. Along with aspect and mood, tense is a category used in the grammatical description of verbs. According to Crystal (2008), the tense category mainly refers to how the grammatical category indicates the time. Comrie (1985), however, states that tense is concerned with time or the grammaticalization of time location in time and aspect as the grammaticalization of expression of internal temporal constituency that deals with the essence of the event, whether it is ongoing or finished. According to Palmer (2001), the status of the notion describing the event is what modality is all about. The grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions can be considered the modality, according to Bybee et al. (1994), who also note that mood and modality are not readily characterized as tense and aspect. Different perspectives on a situation's internal temporal constituents are known as aspects (Holt, 1943 as quoted by Comrie, 1976). There are three main implications of studying TAM in languages. First of all, it offers a language's linguistic description and interpretation. Second, it shows differences between languages. Thirdly, the linguistic categories provide us with information about the cultural subtleties of the community that speaks the mother tongue. According to Givon (2001, p.285), TAM systems demonstrate how much of grammar is paradoxical: The pragmatics, or connectedness, of the sentence in relation to its discourse context is its functional scope, rather than the propositional semantics of the atomic event or condition, even though morphology is a component of clausal structure.

2. Methodology

For this study, data from both primary and secondary sources were used. Secondary data is obtained from a variety of sources, including books, journals, articles, records, and the internet. The primary data collection was mostly based on fieldwork carried out in March and April, 2025, with the aid of the interview approach with community speakers from South Tripura District and Gomati District. Total 10 (5 males, 5 females) native speakers have been interviewed for this study, divided the participants into 3 age groups, 1 participant from 10-18 age group, 4 informants from 20-40 age group, and 5 informants from 45-70 age group. A questionnaire has been prepared for data collection, apart from these folk narratives and oral literature has been recorded for comprehensive data analysis. The data was recorded and digitized using a Zoom H4N Pro audio recorder and a Nikon D5300 digital camera.

3. Research Objectives

The purpose of this work is to conduct a thorough analysis of the tense, aspect and mood featural distribution in Uchoi language. The following are the main objectives of this paper:

- a. To explain the way in which the language expresses tense and aspect characteristics.
- b. To determine the morphemes (free or bound) and individual lexical items (if any) that indicate the language's aspect and tense.

4. Discussion

Tense is a category used in the grammatical description of verbs (along with aspect and mood), referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place (Crystal, 2000, p.384). On the otherhand, according to Payne (1997), tense is “the grammatical expression of the relation of the time of an event at some reference point of time, usually the moment the clause is uttered.” Languages can classify tenses in the three-way distinction (past, present and future) and two-way distinctions (past vs non-past, future vs non-future, and present vs non-present) in the given meaning. For instance, Angami (Giridhar, 1980), Dimasa (Longmailai, 2014) from the Bodo-Garo group, and Mongsen Ao (Coupe, 2007) from the Naga group are among the Tibeto-Burman languages that frequently distinguish between future and non-future tenses¹.

4.1 Tense in Uchoi²

The word ‘tense’ originates from the Latin version of the Greek word ‘khronos’ which means time (Lyons, 1968). We can define the present tense in Uchoi as a situation that occurs temporally with or during the moment of utterance, the past tense as occurring before the moment of utterance, and the future tense as occurring after the moment of utterance, since tense locates the time of a situation in relation to the moment of utterance (Comrie, 1976). The three tenses—past, present and future are being discussed in the following examples. Although suffixes traditionally interpreted as past, present, and future markers occur in the language, their distribution suggests that Uchoi may more accurately be analysed as exhibiting an aspect-modality dominant system with limited tense grammaticalization.

1. *ram* *tʰaŋ-oi*
ram go-PRS
‘Ram goes’
2. *čala* *tʰaŋ-toŋ-oi*
man go-PROG-PRS
‘The man is going’
3. *bo* *tʰaŋ-hã*
3SG go-PST
‘She went’
4. *sita* *tʰaŋ-pai-hã*
sita go-COMPL-PST
‘Sita had gone’

¹ For further details, kindly go through *A Study of tenselessness in Rengma* by Monali Longmailai, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages4040089>

² This study focuses on the Jawlai dialect of the Uchoi language, which is spoken in the Gomati and South Tripura districts. By examining one specific version, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the language's structure and usage, with a focus on the TAM. We believe that this study will advance our knowledge of the Uchoi language and its distinctive features.

5. *ram* *t^haŋ-nai*
 ram go-FUT

‘Ram will go’

6. *laksmi* *t^haŋ-toŋ-nai*
 laxmi go-PROG-FUT

‘Laxmi will be going’

In the above examples, 1—2 denotes the present tense with a marker /-oi/, past tense, examples 3—4 is marked by /-hã/ and lastly the future tense is marked with the suffix /-nai/. Tense in Uchoi is marked by different suffixes which is again elaborated in the following examples 7—9.

7. *ram* *nəja* *sabrum t^haŋ-hã*
 ram yesterday Sabroom go-PST

‘Ram went to Sabroom yesterday’

8. *ram* *tini* *monu* *t^haŋ-oi*
 ram today Monu go-PRS

‘Ram goes to Monu today’

9. *sita* *k^hana* *agortola* *t^haŋ-nai*
 sita tomorrow Agartala go-FUT

‘Sita will go to Agartala tomorrow’

Despite occurring with varying adverbial times, the underlying word /*t^haŋ*/ ‘go’ stays the same in the examples above. The morphemes /-oi/, /-hã/, and /-nai/ are added to denote distinct time and place, though. The verb is inflected by distinct time and place, though. The verb is inflected by distinct markers for each tense, or indicated by distinct suffixes. In the below table we have shown the schematic presentation of tense markers in Uchoi.

Tense	Markers
Past Tense	/-hã/
Present Tense	/-oi/
Future Tense	/-nai/

Table—1 Tense Markers in Uchoi

However, unlike in other Tibeto-Burman languages, the tense in Uchoi is frequently not very distinct and apparent. Uchoi’s indistinctive tense is one of its structural characteristics. These are some sentences 10—12.

10. *bo* *tini* *mai* *ča-pai-hã*
 3SG today rice eat-COMPL-PST

‘She has eaten rice today’

11. *laksmān* *nəja* *mai* *ča-pai-hã*
 laxman yesterday rice eat-COMPL-PST

‘Laxman ate rice yesterday’

12. *aŋ* *k^hana* *biskit* *ča-nai*
1SG tomorrow biscuit eat-FUT

‘I will eat biscuit tomorrow’

Despite having different adverbial times (i.e., /*tini*/ ‘today’ and /*naja*/ ‘yesterday’), the verb endings in examples 10 and 11 are identical; in other words, there is no particular agreement between the adverbial time and the verb endings, so time reference is not grammaticalized. Additionally, the aforementioned examples demonstrate that the main distinction that the verb makes is between the realis and irrealis form, which is also true for negative sentences as illustrated below.

13. *a-p^ha* *tini* *nou-wo-kroi*
PRO.EMPH-father today house-LOC-NEG

‘Father is not at home today’

14. *a-p^ha* *naja* *nou-wo-kroi*
PRO.EMPH-father yesterday house-LOC-NEG

‘Father was not at home yesterday’

15. *a-p^ha* *k^hana* *nou-wo-kroi*
PRO.EMPH-father tomorrow house-LOC-NEG

‘Father will not be at home tomorrow’

The above-mentioned examples 13—15 show that the time reference is not grammaticalized in Uchoi language, the only distinction is made between realis and irrealis. Thus, it is relevant to discuss about the aspect in Uchoi.

4.2 Aspect

According to Crystal (2000, p.29), aspect is “a category used in the grammatical description of verbs, referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the duration or type of temporal activity denoted by the verb.” Thus, aspect in Uchoi denotes an action’s time dispersion. A situation or event’s internal temporal constituency can be viewed in a variety of ways using its aspects. To put it another way, aspect shows how an event or circumstance is organized within. The following section is a broad analysis of aspect in Uchoi.

4.2.1 Simple Aspect

A simple aspect in Uchoi conveys a straightforward assertion, universal truth, and habitual meaning. As far as the simple aspect is concerned, Uchoi exhibits a two-way contrast in tense: present and past tense, which are represented by the morphemes /-oi/ and /-hã/, respectively. The following examples are illustrated the simple aspect in Past and Present tense.

16. *məs* *čuŋ-no* *abo-toi* *ri-oi* (generic statement)
cow we-DAT breast-water give-PRS

‘The cow gives us milk’

17. *p^hotoi* *se* *sa-no* *katiŋ-oi* (universal truth)
earth EQU sun-ACC around-PRS

‘The earth moves round the sun’

18. *bo* *mai* *ča-oi* (habitual truth)
3SG rice eat-PRS

‘S/he eats rice’

19. *ram* *nə-no* *ha-yau-oi* (stative verb)
 ram 2SG-ACC love-PTCL-PRS

‘Ram loves you’

20. *sita* *mai* *ča-hã* (simple past)
 sita rice eat-PST

‘Sita ate rice’

The above examples 16—19 show how the general statements, universal truth and habitual truth form the simple present aspect in Uchoi, whereas in example no 20, one can find how the simple past constructed in Uchoi with the past tense marker /-hã/.

4.2.2 Completive Aspect

In Uchoi, the completive aspect denotes the completeness of an action. As a result, the completive describes an action that is carried out and finished. The following sentences demonstrate how to obtain the complete form of a verb by appending the past tense marker /-hã/ and the completive suffix /-pai/ ‘complete’ to the active verb.

21. *sami* *mai* *ča-pai-hã*
 sami rice eat-COMPL-PST

‘Sami had eaten rice’

22. *bo* *snun-pai-hã*
 3SG learn-COMPL-PST

‘S/he had learnt’

4.2.3 In completive Aspect

In Uchoi, an unfinished action is specified by the in completive aspect. A faulty action at a specific point in the past is referred to by the in completive aspect. As demonstrated in the following instances, the verb’s in completive form is produced by appending the suffix /-ye/ to the verbal root.

23. *aŋ* *t^haiču* *pai-ye* *ča-hã*
 1SG mango buy-ICPL eat-PST

‘I bought a mango and ate’

24. *ram* *nə-no* *k^hutai* *kai-ha* *pai-ye* *ri-hã*
 ram 2SG-ACC shirt CLF-one buy-ICPL give-PST

‘Ram bought a shirt for you’

4.2.4 Progressive Aspect

In Uchoi, the progressive aspect denotes the action’s continuance. As far as the progressive aspect is concerned, Uchoi displays a three-way difference in tense—past, present and future. /-toŋ/ is the marker used to express the progressive aspect. Here are some sentences that illustrate the nature of progressive aspect in Uchoi.

25. *aŋ* *t^haiču* *ča-toŋ-oi*
 1SG mango eat-PROG-PRS

‘I am eating mango’

26. *aŋ t^haiču ča-ye-toŋ-hã*
1SG mango eat-ICPL-PROG-PST

‘I was eating mango’

27. *aŋ t^haiču ča-toŋ-nai*
1SG mango eat-PROG-FUT

‘I will be eating mango’

4.2.5 Irrealis Aspect

In Uchoi, irrealis, or unrealized aspect, is used to denote an action that will occur soon; as a result, it is only articulated in the future tense and lacks a distinct marker of its own. Here are some illustrations of the irrealis aspect.

28. *bo ut^huŋ t^huŋ-ha kəta pai-nai*
3SG rope CLF-one new buy-FUT

‘S/he will buy a rope’

29. *aŋ hat^hi-wo t^haŋ-nai*
1SG market-LOC go-FUT

‘I will go to the market’

4.3 Mood in Uchoi

According to Palmer (2001), mood refers to the grammatical and morphological characteristics of verbs rather than the verbal inflections that enable speakers to convey their attitude toward what they are saying. On the otherhand, mood is a term used in the theoretical and descriptive study of sentence/clause types, and especially of the verbs they contain (Crystal, 2000, p.247). The next section goes into detail about the various moods that may be found in Uchoi.

4.3.1 Indicative Mood

Uchoi uses the indicative mood to express habitual and factual properties. In connection with the speech act, it also alluded to the moment the action occurred or its current status. According to the discussion that follows, Uchoi’s indicative mood is designated for three tenses i.e. past, present and future.

In Uchoi, the present indicative denotes the activity occurring or the situation at the moment of the speech act. Furthermore, it permits to the factual claims and the regular action. Uchoi uses the present tense marker */-oi/* to express the present indicative suffix.

30. *aŋ ba-haŋ soŋ-oi*
1SG chicken-flesh cook-PRS

‘I cook chicken’

31. *aŋ sa-boi hat^hi-wo t^haŋ-oi*
1SG day-every market-LOC go-PRS

‘I go to market everyday’

The past indicative in Uchoi refers to the deed that occurred prior to the speech act. To frame the past indicative suffix for both active and stative verbs in Uchoi, the non-future suffix */-mi/* is added. As illustrated below in examples 32—36.

32. *aŋ masa-mi*
1SG dance-NF

‘I danced’

33. *bo kha-mi*
3SG run-NF

‘S/he ran’

34. *nə nu-mi*
2SG see-NF

‘You saw’

35. *bo-ni ut^hai toŋ-mi*
3SG-GEN fruit EXIS-NF

‘S/he had a fruit’

36. *nə mastor toŋ-mi*
2SG master EXIS-NF

‘You were a master’

The future indicative denotes a course of action that is determined or planned to be carried out after the speech act. In Uchoi, the future tense marker */-nai/* stands for both the definite and the dubitative future suffix. When dealing with both active and stative verbs, the future suffix */-nai/* is applied, as illustrated below.

37. *braŋ snuŋ-nai* (Active)
3PL learn-FUT

‘They will learn’

38. *aŋ mastor toŋ-nai* (Stative)
1SG teacher EXIS-FUT

‘I will be a teacher’

4.3.2 Imperative Mood

The imperative mood in Uchoi indicates that the listener is being ordered or requested to carry out a specific action. In the imperative mood, the subject is always in the second person and is frequently not stated explicitly. By appending the imperative suffix */-di/* to the active verb, the verb’s imperative form is created as discussed in example (39—40). Nonetheless, the prefix */sa-/* ‘please’ is added to the active verb to create the polite form of the imperative, such as in example no (41). The imperative marker */-le/* and the particle */-ga/* are frequently added to the underlying verb in Uchoi, especially when the speaker is making a request or trying to convince someone, as illustrated in examples (42) to (43).

39. *t^haŋ-di*
go-IMP

‘(You) go’

40. *p^hai-di*
come-IMP

‘(You) come’

41. *sa-p^hai-di*
please-come-IMP

‘Please come’

42. *bo-no* *sa-reŋ-ga-le*
3SG-ACC please-call-PTCL-IMP

‘Please call him’

43. *bo-ni* *tak^hoŋ* *aŋ-no* *sa-ri-ga-le*
3SG-GEN duck 1SG-ACC please-give-PTCL-IMP

‘Please give me your duck’

4.3.3 Hortative Mood

In Uchoi, the hortative mood is employed to express a specific desire or to imply that something will happen. The hortative suffix */-noi/*, */-na/*, or */-t^hoi/* is added to the active verb in Uchoi to produce the hortative form of the verb. In the hortative mood, the subject is always in the first or third person. Uchoi employs the hortative suffix */-noi/* for first-person singular numbers and */-na/* for plural numbers. In all other situations, the suffix */-t^hoi/* is used.

44. *bo-no* *mastor oŋ-ga-noi*
3SG-ACC teacher become-PTCL-HORT

‘Let him become a teacher’

45. *aŋ* *t^haŋ-na*
1SG go-HORT

‘Let me go’

46. *aŋ* *ča-t^hoi*
1SG eat-HORT

‘Let me eat’

4.3.4 Modal Construction in Uchoi

There are certain modal constructs in Uchoi that express the subjunctive mood. The simple finite verbs in Uchoi are modified by adding specific affixes to create the modal constructions. The discussion of the various modal construction types is elaborated in the following examples.

The use of */-mai/* typically indicates the modal of ability in Uchoi. */-mai/* is added to the basic verb with the tense marker to create the modal of ability in Uchoi, as shown in the example (47) & (48). On the otherhand, modal of certainty is formed by prefixing the finite verb of the present, past and future indicative with */ma-/* as shown in example (49) & (50). Further, the modal of probability is constructed by suffixing */-na/* to the finite verbs; it can also be indicated by the optional addition of the word */p^ho/* ‘also’ as discussed in the example of (51). The conditional mood in Uchoi is conveyed by appending */-k^he/* ‘if’ either to the active or to the copulative verb */oŋ/* ‘to happen’ as illustrated in examples of 53—

55. However, the prefix /*naŋ-*/ is added to the present, past and future tense markers in Uchoi to form the modal of necessity as elaborated in example (56) to (59).

47. *aŋ masa-mai-oi*
1SG dance-MOD-PRS
'I can dance'
48. *aŋ masa-mai-nai*
1SG dance-MOD-FUT
'I will be able to dance'
49. *aŋ twi ma-nuŋ-oi*
1SG water MOD-drink-PRS
'I must drink water'
50. *aŋ twi ma-nuŋ-hã*
1SG water MOD-drink-PST
'I must have drunk'
51. *aŋ t^haŋ-na p^ho toŋ-oi*
1SG go-MOD also EXIS-PRS
'I may also go'
52. *bo t^haŋ-pai-ha-na*
3SG go-COMPL-PST-MOD
'S/he might have gone'
53. *nə aro toŋ-k^he*
2SG there EXIS-MOD
'If you were there'
54. *aŋ bubagra oŋ-k^he aŋ toŋ-sa-hã*
1SG king happen-MOD 1SG EXIS-tell-PST
'If I were a king. I could tell.'
55. *bo t^haŋ-k^he aŋ p^hai-nai*
3SG go-MOD 1SG come-FUT
'If s/he goes, I will come'
56. *bo nə-ni čəbamuŋ naŋ-nai*
3SG 2SG-GEN help MOD-FUT
'S/he will need your help'
57. *aŋ poiča le-ha naŋ-oi*
1SG paisa CLF-one MOD-PRS
'I need a paisa'
58. *aŋ mat^hi ča-na naŋ-oi*
1SG medicine eat-to MOD-PRS

‘I need to take medicine’

59. *aŋ* *rəča* *naŋ-oi*
1SG sing MOD-PRS

‘I need to sing’

The following table—2 represents the various moods and their markers as available in Uchoi language.

Mood	Marker(s)
Indicative	Past: /-mi/
Imperative	Command: /-di/ Request: /sa-/ or /-le/
Hortative	/-noi/, /-na/, /-t ^h oi/
Subjunctive	Ability: /-mai/ Certainty: /ma-/ Probability: /-na/ Condition: /-k ^h e/ Necessity: /naŋ-/

Table—2 Mood and Modal markers in Uchoi

5. Conclusion

It is observed that the language used aspect and mood affixes to indicate the temporal location of the event or action that the verb is describing, rather than marking the tense. Uchoi privileges aspect and modality over tense. The tense in Uchoi can broadly divided into three types—past, present and future, though under certain condition past can also be marked by non-future marker /-mi/. While discussing the aspect in Uchoi, it can be analysed into four ways, namely—simple aspect, completive aspect, incompletive aspect, progressive aspect. Though in the case of irrealis the language does not have any specific marker, it can only dependent on the context. Temporal interpretation depends significantly on adverbials/ context. The mood in Uchoi can be divided into four types such as indicative, imperative, hortative and subjective. Indicative mood does not carry any marker in present and future though it is marked by /-mi/ in past tense. Imperative mood can be marked by few markers for example /-di/ is used while giving order and /sa-/ and /-le/, while asking for request. Further, hortative mood is marked by 3 suffixal markers as /-noi/, /-na/, and /-t^hoi/. Lastly, subjunctive mood is analysed with the properties of modality. For instance, the markers such as /-mai/, /ma-/, /-na/, /-k^he/ and /naŋ-/ are used to mark various modals as modal of ability, certainty, probability, condition and necessity. Interestingly the non-future marker and past indicative mood marker are same though semantically they are polysemous. Thus, there is a scope for the future researcher on how the language distinguishes semantic differences in the selection of verb forms with the same meaning.

Abbreviations

3SG—third person singular

MOD—Modal

ACC—accusative case

NF—non future

CLF—classifier

PRS—present

COMPL—completive

PROG—progressive

EXIS—existential copula

PST—past

FUT—future

PTCL—particle

GEN—genitive

PRO.EMPH—emphatic pronoun

HORT—hortative

IMP—imperative

ICPL—in completive

LOC—locative

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Marriage System among Karbis of Assam and Meghalaya

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Abstract

Karbi is a minority community who mainly resides in Karbi Anglong district, Assam. The Karbis are also found in other districts such as Kamrup, Morigaon and Biswanath. They are also to be found in West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia hills districts, Meghalaya, in the foothills around Dimapur in Nagaland, Manipur and in Papumpare district, Arunachal Pradesh, and Bangladesh and Myanmar. Ethnically, they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race. They have their own language, folklore, customs, dress patterns, cuisine, games, songs, dances and traditional religion. Though formerly they were known as Mikirs, the Karbis refer to themselves as *arleng*, meaning 'man'. The present study focuses on the traditional marriage system in Karbi, with reference to Karbis of Kamrup Metropolitan district, Assam and Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya. Even though studies have been conducted based on Karbi marriage system, they focus on Karbi Anglong district, and do not emphasise on marriage rituals. For the current study, two districts from different states of Northeast India where the Karbis reside, are taken into consideration, to observe whether the traditional Karbi marriage system is followed in the studied areas, and to understand if the marriage system and rituals are similar or differ to each other.

1. Introduction

Karbi is the name of the community and the language spoken in various parts of Northeast India, including Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. They are also found in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Karbi belongs to the Tibeto-Burman sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Karbis belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race ethnically. They retain their own language, oral folklore, folk customs, and traditional religion, which testify to the indigeneity of the tribe (Hanse, 2017). There are namely two major dialects- the Hills variety (ISO code 'mjw') or Standard Karbi, and the Plains variety (ISO 693-3 code 'ajz'), also referred to as Dumrali, Dimoria or Amri Karbi. The Karbis living in the hills refer to the ones living in the plains as Thoi Karbis. The total population of Karbis is 5,11,732 (Census of India, 2011). Ethnologue (Eberhard, Simons & Fenning, 2019) mentions that there are 1,25,000 native speakers of Amri Karbi. Based on the UNESCO's assessment of language endangerment, Karbi can be considered as vulnerable. The EGIDS classifies Karbi language at Level 5, i.e., written. Karbis use both Assamese and Roman scripts. They call their language as *arleng alam*, literally, the language of *arleng*, meaning man.

2. Historical Background

Barua (1951) states that Karbis are one of the earliest groups of Tibeto-Burman speakers inhabiting Assam and were originated from western China. According to Medhi (1974), the hilly region between Nagaon and Sibsagar (present Jorhat) districts was their early habitat. The traditions of the race point to the eastern portion of the Khasi-Jayanti hills as their original abode (Stack & Lyall, 1997). Gogoi (1999) views that the Nongpilar hill, situated in the north-eastern part of Assam, was their earliest settlement from where they came down and settled in the Lumbajong hill. They were the earliest settlers on the banks of the Kolong and Kopili rivers and within the entire Kaziranga area, according to Phangcho (2008). There is no written history within the Karbi community. They trace their origin through oral traditions.

3. Socio-Cultural Background

Karbis have different traditional dresses, with a slight regional variation in the hill and the plain areas, such as, the females wearing *pini-pekok* in the hills, and *paning-ringkok* in the plains. *Vamkok* (waist band) is worn in both the areas. According to Barua et.al (2020), the Karbi men wear *choi hongthor* (shirt), *choi ang* (jacket), *poho* (turban), *chopang* (harness) and *peh-seleng* (lower garment). The Karbis also wear *jarong* (traditional bag) and traditional ornaments. Karbi cuisine consists of *kangmoi* (alkaline), *kalangdang* (boiled) and *han-thor* (sour or acidic). The culinary styles include *kemung* (cooked in bamboo tube), *kangthu* (wrapped with banana leaves and shoved into hot charcoal- ashes), *kephi* (roasting), *karnu pakreng* (frying without oil) and *ke-ur* (smoking). Rice is their main food and pulses are added occasionally. Hor is their traditional rice beer. Some of the festivals include *chomangkan* (celebrated for the welfare of the spirits of the dead), *rongker* (celebrated to appease the territorial deity for the welfare of the village, and to ward off diseases and natural calamities), *cho-jun* (a festival of eating and drinking) and *hacha-kekan* (observed after the harvest of paddy). The traditional institutions in Karbi society include 'me' (village council), 'farla' or 'jirkedam' (bachelors' dormitory) and 'kerung amei' (the grain bank) (Borah, 2012). The major clans or *kurs* are- *Ejang* (Enghi/Inghi), *Tungjang* (Timung), *Kronjang* (Teron), *Lijang* (Ingiti) and *Hanjang* (Terang). The Karbi society is patrilineal and patriarchal in nature.

4. Language Classification

The earliest classification of Karbi is by Grierson (1903) and the recent classification is by Burling (2003). Grierson (1903), in his *Linguistic Survey of India*, considered Karbi as a member of the Naga-Bodo sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman group. Lyall (1908), in his *The Mikirs* stated that Karbi belongs to the Indo-Chinese speech called Tibeto-Burman under the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Shafer (1974) and Bradley (1997), in their *Introduction to Sino-Tibetan*, and Tibeto-Burman languages and classification, respectively, classified it as Kukish. According to DeLancey (1987), in his Sino-Tibetan Languages, it can often be classified as close to Meithei. Burling (2003), in his Tibeto-Burman Languages of North-East India, prefers to consider Karbi in a separate category in

spite of its resemblance with Mizo-Kuki, as the resemblance was not found enough to be considered with it.

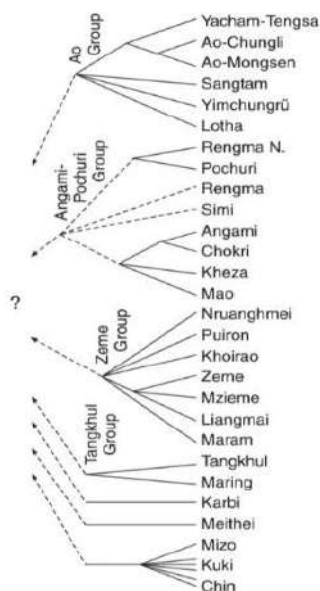


Figure 1: Genetic classification according to Burling (2003)

The above figure shows language classification of Karbi by Burling in his ‘The Tibeto-Burman Languages of Northeast India’.

5. Literature Review

Some of the previous works on Karbi include- *A Grammar of Karbi* by Konnerth (2014). A Sociolinguistic Study of Amri Karbi (ajw) in Northeast India by Abraham and Daimary (2021), Understanding Marriage System of Karbi Tribe of North-East India by Swami (2013), An Appraisal to the Marriage System of the Karbis of Assam by Zaman (2008). *An Approach to the Cultural Life of the Karbi People of Assam- A Discussion* by Sultana (2019), Marriage System in the Tribes of Assam with Special Mention to Mising, Tiwa and Karbi by Das & Chutia (2020), and Karbis- the Unsung Tribe of Assam by Gogoi & Senapati (2020).

As there is no such study on the Karbi marriage system in Kamrup district of Assam and Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya, the present study tries to look into the marriage system followed in these areas with a detailed view of the ritualistic practices in their marriages.

6. Objectives & Methodology

The objectives of the study are to discuss the traditional marriage system in Karbi community, with reference to the Karbis in Sonapur and Upper Hengrabari areas of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam and Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya. These also

include the marriage rituals conducted before the marriage, on the day of marriage and post-marriage. With these, it tries to understand whether the surrounding cultures impact on the marriage system of the Karbis in these areas.

Field studies were conducted in Teteliguri village of Sonapur town and Upper Hengrabari locality of Kamrup Metropolitan district, Assam and Marmain village of Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya. A few of the middle-aged and elderly respondents from the above-mentioned areas were interviewed, considering their knowledge regarding the study. These included both males and females. The current study also consists of both primary and secondary sources of data, focusing mainly on analyses from the fieldwork.



Map 1: Kamrup Metropolitan District highlighting Hengrabari and Sonapur (<https://www.kamrupmetro.assam.gov.in/information-and-services/maps-kamrup-metropolitan-district>)



Map 2: Map of Meghalaya highlighting Ri Bhoi District (<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/meghalaya>)

Map 1 and Map 2 above show Hengrabari and Sonapur areas of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam, and Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya, respectively.

7. Marriage System in Karbi

Durkheim (1897) defines marriage as ‘a moral and social bond that regulates human desires and integrates individuals into society’. Westermarck (1891) states that ‘it is a more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring’. According to Lowie (1920), ‘marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates.’ Malinowski (1929) views that ‘it is a contract for the production and maintenance of children’. Radcliffe-Brown (1931) says that ‘marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society, determined by parenthood in the social sense’. Lundberg (1939) describes marriage as ‘the rules and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife with respect to each other’. Lévi-Strauss (1949) defines marriage as ‘a system of social exchange and alliance rather than just a biological bond’. Murdock (1949) argues that ‘it is a universal institution that involves residential co-habitation, economic co-operation and the formation of the nuclear family.’ ‘Marriage is the public joining together, under socially specified regulations of a man and woman as husband and wife’ (Lee, 1961). Horton & Hunt (1964) views that ‘it is the approved social pattern whereby two or more people establish a family’.

Karbi society is exogamous. Marriage within the same clan is prohibited, as the Karbis believe that members of the same clan are brothers and sisters. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred, i.e., a boy is expected to marry the daughter of his maternal uncle. There is no bride price, separation is permissible, and widow remarriage is allowed. After marriage, the bride does not change her clan, nor her surname. A widow is not allowed to marry her husband’s elder brother, but can marry his younger brother. There are different stages before marriage- the stage of asking for the bride’s hand by the groom’s family, the stage of confirmation and the stage when the day and date of the marriage are fixed. In every stage, when the groom’s family visits the bride, they take certain things along with them, like betel nuts and leaves. The main marriage function is known as *adam achar*, when the bride and the groom adorn themselves with traditional attires. Traditionally, the married Karbi woman do not wear vermilion and mangalsutra. But at present times, wearing of those is seen due to the influence of Hindu traditions. Swami (2013) states that the Karbis have marriage circle rules, as in, by custom a Terang and its sub-clans should marry an Ingti girl, a Timung should marry an Enghi, an Ingti should marry a Timung and a Teron should marry a Terang. There is also folk belief related to marriage in Karbi culture. Marriages are conducted in Karbi rituals.

8. Karbi Marriage in Sonapur, Kamrup (M) (Assam)

In Teteliguri village of Sonapur town of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam, Karbi marriages cannot happen between members of the same clan. Roles of the society and the groom's maternal uncle play an important role in a marriage. There are mainly three types of marriages- *horhak*, *bokabuchom* and *rongbong luka ghor dekha*. In arranged marriages, the preference is always for the boy's maternal uncle's daughter. If that could not be the case, only then the groom's family look for some other girl. In case if a girl elopes with a boy of the same clan, they can be ex-communicated. In this case, a fourth type of marriage is conducted called *rongbong kapalut*, where the girl is being converted to some other clan. Certain rituals are conducted in three phases, i.e., pre-marriage, on the day of marriage and post-marriage. Even if one marries a girl from a different community, the rituals have to be conducted in Karbi traditions post-marriage. Significances of gourd of rice beer called *bong*, and betel nuts and leaves are observed during the rituals.

a) Pre-Marriage

At first, the groom's family seeks for his maternal uncle's approval for looking for a bride for the groom. If he approves, the groom's family visits the bride's paternal home to see her, which is called *osokipudam*. After that day, the groom's family waits for the approval of the bride's family. When approved, the groom's side takes 4-6 people along with them to the bride's house, to fix the date of the marriage, called *arikahorthing*. Along with that, they take a gourd of rice beer, i.e., *bong*, sealed with banana leaf, and tied with rope. This means the marriage is fixed, and if the girl or the boy breaks this bond, a fine is imposed as punishment. On another day, a ceremony called *lekrol* is conducted when the groom's side visits the bride's place and adorns her with jewelleryes. *Lek* signifies jewellery worn on neck, and *rol* signifies bangle.

b) Types of Marriages

(i) *Horhak*

The grandest wedding is *horhak*. The *hak* plays a crucial part, which is a basket, filled with things asked by the bride's family. The bride's side sends a list of items like *bong*, betel nuts and leaves, money, rice grains, dry snakehead fish, mustard oil, salt, cigarettes, and tobacco. On the day of marriage, *hak* is carried by a female called *samari*, on her back, with a rope tied with it, and worn on the head. The *samari* is from the groom's side who carries the *hak* to the bride's house. When the groom, along with some people, enter the bride's place, a poetic conversation happens between them and the bride's side. After they take their seat, the groom's side insists the bride's side to look whether they fulfilled the list of items sent. If the bride's side see any mistake, they impose fine on the groom's side. In the bride's place, there is a boy *samari*, who distributes betel nuts and leaves, and a girl *samari*, who distributes rice beer. The bride and the groom pray together to a pole and a pot, representing God, called *nungpe* and *rangtik*, respectively. They also pray to the ancestors, called *sarkidum*. Earthen lamp is lit, betel nuts and leaves are placed, and rice beer is spread on the floor. They take blessings from the parents, family and the elders with

betel nuts and leaves, with the groom on the right side and the bride on the left. This again ends with a poetic conversation between the bride and the groom's side.

(ii) *Bokabuchom*

This is less grand than *horhak*. In this type of marriages, instead of the *hak*, the *samari* carries a bag called *chulbong* on her back. It is tied with a knot called *sinam* that opens easily when being tried.

(iii) *Rongbong luka ghor dekha*

This is the least grand marriage. It is conducted when only the family members of both the bride and groom's sides are involved. It happens when either of the families, or both the families, cannot afford a grand wedding. Even in that case, this has to be informed in the society. Some members are invited to the bride's house, who are fed rice beer. Then an odd number of people are selected, who, along with an advocate called *atamsar*, visits the groom's place. This involves a poetic conversation between both sides. The fine which is to be imposed on the groom's family is then decided. The fine is paid in a court called *tarang ahem*, on the first Tuesday of the month of January.

c) Post-Marriage

After the marriage, the leftovers are thrown in a water body, to ward off negative energies. Before entering the groom's house, a ritual called *birkilut* is conducted, which involves purification. A priest called *kathar* purifies the family by pouring water from a bamboo tube, called *kipho*, on them, along with sacred utterances, near a water body. Two bamboos are placed on both sides of the water body in cross-shape, and on top is placed a small traditional basket containing some items, like ring and egg. Fire is burned, whose smoke is to be taken by the family members. The *kathar* breaks the egg. A bamboo is cut into half, and the sides are thrown on the land. One side should face upward, and the other downward. Rooster is cut, and then distributed among the family and the guests. On the eighth day, the bride visits her paternal home, along with the groom and a few people, a ritual which is called *akengbotkarmil*.

9. Karbi Marriage in Upper Hengrabari, Kamrup (M)

In Upper Hengrabari locality of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam, Karbi marriages are conducted in a similar way as are conducted in Teteliguri village of Sonapur, except in few occasions. Unlike Sonapur, where the wedding ritual can be conducted in front of the guests outside, in Upper Hengrabari it is always conducted inside the house. Before the day of the wedding, the bride invites her friends and some people to her home to have the last meal together, where she serves everyone. Jewelleries are exchanged as gifts between them and the bride. The bride gifts handkerchiefs to the guests. On the day of marriage, before the groom enters the bride's place, his feet are washed by a girl. For fun, the *samari* has to have rice beer, even a very small amount. Before the bride leaves her home, the girls play

a fun game with the groom's side, similar to tug of war, to win the bride. The bride is welcomed by washing her feet before entering the groom's house. She is hand fanned, covered with a white cloth and then brought inside.

10. Karbi Marriage in Marmain, Ri Bhoi (Meghalaya)

In Marmain village of Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya, Karbi marriages are conducted in a traditional way as well as by abiding by the Christian rules. The traditional marriage function is known as *jorme pachihap*, and the marriage system is exogamous in nature. Marriage between the same clan leads to social sanctions or excommunication. There is preference of cross-cousin marriage, and involvement of the community is observed. Monogamy is highly prevalent, though polygamy exists rarely. Widow remarriage is accepted. Marriages between different communities are also prevalent. Forced marriage is disapproved. Animistic rituals are emphasised invoking deities like Hemphu. There is no dowry system. The wedding is conducted in six stages-

Stage 1: *Nengpi nengso kachingki*- The boy's mother approaches the girl's mother and gives an informal proposal.

Stage 2: *Piso kehang*- There is formal negotiation between elders of both the families, often involving gifts.

Stage 3: *Kepatani or banta kachingthum*- The bride and her family give their consent, and rituals like exchanging betel nuts or clothes, is conducted for solidifying the bond.

Stage 4: *Ajo arni keri*- Pre-wedding preparations begin, like rice beer brewing, ritual offerings to ancestors for blessings, and feasting.

Stage 5: *Jorme pachihap or adam kangthur/kepengri*- The wedding ceremony when the couple is publicly declared husband and wife, with chants and sacrifices, and symbolic wearing of garlands.

Stage 6: *Peso riso kethondun*- The post-wedding rituals follow, including the bride's integrating into the groom's house, final feast, and exchanges to seal clan ties, sometimes postponing it to another day later.

Christian Karbi marriages are conducted in churches, but Karbi costume called *pini-pekok* and *ricong-choihongthor* are used. This involves Christian rites like biblical vows and blessings by a pastor, scripture readings, prayers and ring exchanges, solemnised under Christian theology.

10. Conclusion

It can be observed that the traditional marriage system is followed by the Karbis residing in all the areas been studied. Marriage between the same clan is prohibited, and if it happens, this leads to social sanction or excommunication. There are various terminologies used in marriage traditions, involving ritualistic practices. The wedding is conducted in three phases, i.e., pre-wedding, wedding day and post-wedding. Community involvement is seen in all the studied areas, and social attitude is seen as positive. Marrying someone from a different community is accepted in all the three areas. There is no bride price or dowry system prevalent. Betel nut and rice beer play very important roles in marriages, along with discussions between both the bride and the groom's sides. The bride and the

groom wear their traditional Karbi attire on the day of the wedding. The bride does not change her surname after marriage, even if the Karbi society is a patriarchal society. Both traditional and Christian weddings are conducted in Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Karbi marriage system is similar in Sonapur and Upper Hengrabari areas of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam and Marmain village of Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya. The Karbis in these areas follow their traditional marriage customs. In addition, as there are significant Christian Karbi population in Ri Bhoi, the Karbis in the area also conduct Christian marriages.

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Appendix

Photos of Karbi Marriages



Figure 2: Traditional Karbi Marriage in Sonapur, Kamrup (M)



Figure 3: Traditional Karbi Marriage in Marmain, Ri Bhoi



Figure 4: Christian Karbi Marriage in Marmain, Ri Bhoi



Figure 5: Christian Karbi Marriage in Marmain, Ri Bhoi

Folk Faith and Belief Systems in Kannauji Society: A Socio-Cultural Study

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Abstract

In today's time of rapid social and cultural change, many regional belief systems are often considered outdated. However, in Kannauji society, folk faith continues to play an active and meaningful role in everyday life. This paper studies the folk beliefs of the language as a strong social and cultural system that shapes rituals, moral values, and community identity. Although the variant has a rich oral tradition, its belief practices have received limited academic attention. This study presents these beliefs not as mere superstitions but as meaningful systems of traditional knowledge deeply rooted in daily life. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in rural areas of Kannauj district. Data were collected through interviews with elderly narrators, women who perform vrat-kathas, local ritual specialists, and village elders. The study also includes observation of life-cycle rituals and seasonal ceremonies. It documents practices such as kul-devata worship, childbirth protection rituals, farming-related beliefs connected to the monsoon, omen interpretation, and ancestor worship. Through the analysis of folk songs, proverbs, and ritual narratives in Kannauji, the paper shows how these beliefs are expressed in language and passed from one generation to another. These traditions serve not only as religious practices but also as guides for moral behavior, social unity, and harmony with nature. The study further examines how education, migration, and modern media are influencing these beliefs, while their core values continue to survive within families and communities. This paper strongly argues that documenting Kannauji folk beliefs is not only an academic responsibility but also a cultural necessity. Preserving these traditions means protecting a living heritage that gives strength, identity, and emotional belonging to the community even in changing times.

Keywords: Kannauji society, folk faith, belief systems, oral tradition, ritual practices, indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural study, cultural identity.

1. Introduction

Belief systems form a fundamental part of the cultural worldview of traditional societies. They represent accumulated knowledge developed through generations of experience, observation, and interpretation of the natural and social environment. In rural communities across India, beliefs related to agriculture, health, social relations, and spirituality continue to influence everyday life.

Folk beliefs often coexist with organized religious traditions and are expressed through rituals, proverbs, myths, and oral narratives. These cultural practices help communities interpret natural events, manage uncertainty, and maintain moral and social order.

The Kannauji-speaking region of North India presents an important example of such cultural continuity. It is spoken mainly in districts such as Kannauj, Farrukhabad, Etawah, Hardoi, and surrounding regions of Uttar Pradesh. Linguistically, the language belongs to the Western Hindi group of Indo-Aryan languages (Masica, 1993). Historically, the city of Kannauj served as an important political and cultural center during the early medieval period. Despite the rich cultural heritage of the region, the belief systems of Kannauji society have received limited academic attention. Most linguistic research has focused on the classification and structural features of the dialect, while the cultural knowledge embedded in the language and oral traditions remains under-documented.

This study therefore aims to examine the folk faith and belief systems of the language society as meaningful cultural practices embedded in everyday life. By combining ethnographic fieldwork with linguistic analysis, the research explores how these beliefs shape social behavior, cultural identity, and community relationships.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of folk belief has been widely discussed in anthropology, folklore studies, and sociology. Several theoretical perspectives help explain the social and cultural functions of belief systems.

Émile Durkheim (1912) argued that religious beliefs and rituals function as mechanisms that strengthen social solidarity. According to Durkheim, collective rituals create shared experiences that reinforce the unity of a community. In rural societies, communal rituals often serve to maintain social cohesion and collective identity. Bronislaw Malinowski (1948) suggested that belief systems frequently emerge in situations characterized by uncertainty. Rituals provide psychological reassurance in contexts where outcomes cannot be fully controlled, such as fishing, agriculture, or illness. This perspective is particularly relevant for agricultural communities where farmers depend on unpredictable natural conditions. Alan Dundes (1980) further argued that folklore—including proverbs, songs, and rituals—reveals the collective worldview of a community. These cultural expressions preserve traditional knowledge and social values.

3. Methodology

This research is based on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork conducted in villages of the Kannauj district between 2023 and 2025. Ethnographic methods are particularly appropriate for studying folk traditions because such practices are deeply embedded in everyday social life.

Data were collected through three main methods: interviews, participant observation, and documentation of oral traditions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with elderly villagers, ritual specialists, farmers, and women who perform *vrat-kathas*. These informants possess extensive knowledge of traditional practices and community beliefs.

Participant observation was used to document life-cycle rituals, seasonal ceremonies, and village gatherings. Observing these events allowed the researcher to understand the symbolic meanings associated with different practices. In addition, several proverbs, ritual narratives, and folk songs in the Kannauji dialect were recorded and transcribed. These linguistic materials provide valuable insight into the cultural worldview of the community.

4. Folk Faith in Everyday Life

In Kannauji villages, belief systems are closely integrated with everyday activities. People often invoke divine blessings or recall traditional sayings before beginning important tasks.

For example, farmers frequently say:

“भगवान का नाम लेके काम शुरू करो।”

bhagwān kā nām leke kām śurū karo.
(Begin work by remembering God.)

This expression reflects the belief that divine blessings ensure success and protection in daily activities. Such practices demonstrate that religious and cultural beliefs are not limited to formal ceremonies but are woven into the routine practices of village life.

5. Life-Cycle Rituals and Childbirth Beliefs

Life-cycle rituals mark significant stages in an individual's life, including birth, marriage, and death. These events are accompanied by specific beliefs and protective practices. Childbirth is considered a particularly vulnerable period. During fieldwork, villagers frequently explained that newborn children are susceptible to negative influences such as the evil eye. One widely observed practice is the application of a **black mark of kajal** on the child's forehead or behind the ear.

Villagers believe that this mark diverts attention and prevents jealous or harmful gazes.

For instance, one elderly woman explained:

“बच्चा के माथे पे काजल लगा देत हैं, ताकि बुरी नजर ना लागे।”

baccā ke māthe pe kājal lagā det hain, tāki burī nazar nā lāge.

(We apply kajal on the child's forehead so that the evil eye does not affect the baby.)

Another protective practice involves tying **black threads or protective amulets (ताबीज)** around the infant's wrist, waist, or neck. These objects are believed to act as spiritual shields. Such rituals reflect symbolic associations between protection, purity, and social care within the community.

6. Agricultural Beliefs and Environmental Knowledge

Agriculture remains the primary occupation in many Kannauji villages, and numerous beliefs are associated with weather prediction and crop protection. Farmers often observe natural signs such as bird calls, wind direction, and cloud formations. One commonly cited proverb recorded during fieldwork is:

“काग बोले त बरखा होय।”

kāg bole ta barkhā hoy.

(If the crow calls, rain will come.)

Although such sayings may not always be scientifically accurate, they represent generations of ecological observation and experience.

Anthropologists often describe such practices as forms of indigenous environmental knowledge developed through long-term interaction with nature.

7. Omens and Symbolic Interpretation

Interpretation of omens is another important aspect of Kannauji belief systems. Villagers often interpret certain events as signs of good or bad fortune. For example, hearing a crow calling near the house is sometimes interpreted as an indication that guests may arrive.

A commonly heard statement is:

“कौवा बोले तो मेहमान आने वाले हैं।”

kauvā bole to mehmān āne vāle hain.

(If the crow calls, guests are coming.)

Such interpretations help communities make sense of unexpected events and uncertainty in daily life.

8. Language and the Transmission of Beliefs

Language plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions. In Kannauji society, many beliefs are expressed through oral forms such as proverbs, ritual narratives, and folk songs.

Proverbs often convey moral lessons.

Example 1:

“जैसा करोगे वैसा भरोगे।”

jaisā karoge vaisā bharoge.

(As you act, so shall you receive.)

This proverb reflects the belief that actions lead to consequences, emphasizing moral responsibility.

Example 2:

“जैसन बोवै किसान, तैसन काटै खेता”

jaisan bovai kisān, taisan kāṭai khet.

(As the farmer sows, so the field yields.)

This proverb emphasizes the cultural belief that **human actions determine future outcomes**. It is commonly used by elders in everyday conversation to advise younger members of the community about responsibility, effort, and moral conduct. In rural Kannauji-speaking areas, agricultural metaphors are frequently employed in proverbs because farming forms a central part of social and economic life. Through such expressions, ethical values and practical wisdom are transmitted orally from one generation to another, reinforcing collective norms within the community.

Similarly, ritual songs sung during weddings and festivals contain references to deities, ancestors, and family relationships. Through repeated performance, these songs transmit cultural knowledge across generations.

9. Ethnographic Observations of Ritual Practices

Field observations during village rituals reveal that belief practices are not only religious activities but also social events that strengthen community bonds.

During one field visit, women gathered in the evening to perform a vrat-katha ritual. They sat together in a courtyard carrying offerings such as flowers, lamps, and sweets. The ritual involved storytelling followed by devotional songs in the Kannauji dialect.

An elderly participant explained the significance of the ritual by saying:

“ये परंपरा हमारे बड़ों से चली आ रही है, इससे घर में सुख-शांति बनी रहती है।”

ye paramparā hamāre baṛon se calī ā rahī hai, isse ghar meñ sukh-śānti banī rahtī hai.
(This tradition has come from our ancestors and it brings peace and harmony to the household.)

Such rituals create shared cultural experiences that reinforce social relationships.

10. Modern Influences and Cultural Transformation

Modernization has introduced significant changes in rural life. Education, urban migration, and digital media have exposed younger generations to new perspectives and lifestyles. Despite these changes, many traditional rituals continue to be practiced. Families often maintain rituals related to festivals, ancestor worship, and life-cycle ceremonies as expressions of cultural identity. In many cases, these traditions are preserved not only for religious reasons but also because they represent a connection to ancestral heritage.

11. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that folk faith and belief systems remain deeply embedded in the cultural life of Kannauji society. These beliefs function as systems of indigenous knowledge that guide moral behavior, strengthen community relationships, and maintain cultural continuity.

Rather than dismissing these practices as superstition, it is important to understand their symbolic meanings and social functions. Rituals, proverbs, and oral traditions provide insight into the worldview of the community and help preserve cultural memory.

Documenting such traditions is essential for protecting the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Kannauji-speaking region. Future research combining linguistics, anthropology, and folklore studies can further explore the relationship between language, belief, and cultural identity in rural North India.

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Sharda Sinha and her Chhath songs

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Abstract

Folk songs are non-interchangeable and exclusively sung as a part of a ceremony or a festival in various communities. In modern days, songs for Chhath stand out culturally as an image of Bihar. A veteran singer 'Sharda Sinha' will be remembered for her contributions to folk songs and the image of Bihar. In later years of her career, a variety of themes and videos were released on the occasion of this festival. One of them were on calling back workaholic or busy residents of Bihar living outside the state to return home for the festival. Similarly, doing Chhath along with fighting the challenge of Covid had millions of views and brought the viewers together despite social distancing. This study focuses on some Chhath songs sung/composed by Sharda Sinha, Chhath song videos and some interviews where she had been interviewed or is being talked about. Through this discourse the study presents a case study of a popular folk artiste of Bihar.

Keywords: Chhath, Folksongs, Sharda Sinha, Bihar

1. Introduction

Folk songs act as a way of community communication. A folk artiste acts as a harbinger of 'developmental and socially relevant messages' (Kumar 2012, 4). Chhath as a festival in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is considered to be a social, religious and a cultural event that is related with a sense of 'regional identity' (Yadav and Chandra 2024, 1). Following the life and career of a folk artiste provides a peek into 'political and cultural aspirations of a nationality' (Saikia 2011, 29). In this paper, I have chosen to understand the challenges and achievements of the folk artiste Sharda Sinha.

1.2. Her life

Sharda Sinha (Oct 1, 1952 – Nov 5, 2024) is remembered as Bihar Kokila and as a famous folk songs' composer/singer. Her awards include Padma Shri 1991, Sangeet Akademi Award 2000, Padma Bhushan 2018, Padma Vibhushan (posthumously) in 2025. She was chosen as a Brand Ambassador by Election Commission in 2014 for Bihar.

This paper records her journey as a folk artiste who had started singing in school, Durga Puja performances, wedding ceremonies, festivals etc. She learnt music from Pandit Ramchandra Jha, Pandit Raghu Jha, Pandit Sitaram Hari Dandekar and *thumri, dadra* from Smt Panna Devi (Shakshiyat with Sharda, 2015). Her first song recording was also a folk wedding song *dwar ke chekai*. Her songs earned her the popularity to become a social icon to have been chosen as an ambassador to urge people to vote during elections or follow social distancing during COVID as it is an otherwise a festival of social gathering. Her voice brought a regional yet a culturally powerful image of Bihar in Bollywood Cinema through Hindi songs like *kahe tose sajna* (1980), *babul jo tumne sikhaya* (1994), *tar bijli* (2012). In the era of digitalization, her recorded songs and videos keep the folksongs not just well-documented but also rendered and remembered by her followers. Her interviews leave an interesting story for the people of Bihar to trace her experiences with singing, which begins from singing for her brother's wedding where in a local ritual a sister does *dwar chekai* 'stops the groom' from entering *kohbar* 'newly-wed's room' and sings to ask for *neg* 'a negotiable amount of money.' This study picks the interview discourses where she talks about her experiences while recording songs, song videos and doing live shows.

1.3. Lyrics and music composition

In a TV interview with Abhiranjan Kumar (2012), she mentions that many of her songs are folk songs that have been sung through generations for years, some are written by literary artistes like Bhikhari Thakur, Vidyapati, and some were improvised by her team. In her audition in 1971 with HMV (judged by Begum Akhtar in Lucknow) she sang *dwar ke chekai neg* and *sita ke sakal dekhi* (usually sang for kanyadaan) that she learnt from her sister-in-law. She sings the two versions of these songs to demonstrate how she improvised only the tune by minimizing lengthening of vowels done usually in folksongs and maintaining the lyrics in actual rendition with a high pitch intermittently.

She sang literary poems by ‘Gopal Singh Nepali’ like *ghunghat ghunghat naina nache*, as well as ghazals by ‘Abdul Hamid Adam’ like *ek zamaana beet gaya*. Her first recorded Chhath song was *kelwa ke paat par* in 1986, which made Chhath song composition popular and many other artistes after this also recorded Chhath songs. The tune of her Chhath compositions she says were mostly the same and she sung about 50-100 songs herself. However, she says she altered the tune a bit in songs like *aath hi kath ke kotharia*. She recorded a cassette *Shraddhanjali*, which has 8 Vidyapati songs, a commentary by Pandit Narendra Sharma and Tabla rendition by Ustad Nizamuddin Khan. Having listened to and impressed by this HMV recording, Rajshree Productions gave her this opportunity to sing *kahe tose sajna* for the movie *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989), which had been an inspiration of *kaini ka kasoor*, a Bhojpuri film song sung by her. Later she also sang a *bidai geet* ‘a song when bride leaves her parents’ house after wedding’ *babul jo tumne sikhaya* for the movie *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994). In 2021, she sang *sarkar bidhwa banavali* for a Hindi film *Kaagaz*. She sang in Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Angika, Bajjika, Hindi and Urdu.

1.4. Challenges and Career Growth

She mentions in her interview that she had given performances in Manipuri dance post-marriage as well. But gradually with a social stigma of it being improper for a married woman to perform on stage, she moved into focusing on singing as a career than dancing. Singing in public or recording songs as a daughter-in-law was not easy, but she mentions to have a few members constantly supporting her (her father and her husband) and gradually after her recording was received well, it became an accepted profession in her family as well. By 1980s she was a successful artiste with a good number of HMV, T-series recordings and Padma Shri awards. However, she mentions she had to take a break from singing for 7-8 years (in response to a question from the viewers in Lallantop 2018) to do justice to her family and job. She mentions as a working mother, it is not easy but women should not lose motivation. She taught music at a Women’s college in Samastipur in Bihar University, and was promoted to be the Head of Music Department. However, she also complained that she was paid half her salary despite her fulfilling all the expectations professionally.

A few serious challenges discussed in *muha-muhin* (YouTube posted 2012) include her struggles in political or linguistic scenario. There is a mention of her not receiving her award money from Bihar government after Jagannath Mishra died. She had received the award in a ceremony, which was also published, but the award amount never reached her. In another event, she mentions that when 100 years of Bihar was being celebrated in 2012, she was not only not invited to perform but also not included in any way during the cultural performances. Sadhana Sargam and Udit Narayan were invited to perform instead. One of her song videos was used for an ad of the same celebration without her permission or knowledge. She further recounts her experience when a female politician from Supaul (her in-laws’ city) demanded her to give a voice test to be judged by this politician when she was invited to sing in a forthcoming fest at Mauritius. She turned down the offer to go for this voice test because she wanted a trained musician to judge her.

In the beginning of her career, and many a time, she also had to face disapproval from Maithili community (Mithila mirror interview 2015), who considered her Maithili language to be not pure after she sang Bhojpuri songs, singing which she supposedly gained popularity. In one of her live performances, she had to wait until the last to sing a demanded song *Jagdamba ghar me*. She points out that just because her Bhojpuri songs or slogans sung during elections or otherwise became more popular

compared to the ones sung in Maithili and Magahi, she was looked down upon by some Maithili speakers. She wittingly learnt to perform (gives credit to Harimohan Jha for this) and recorded the same renditions with different verb endings to cater to the speakers of both the languages.

Jagdamba ghar me diara baar aini he (Bhojpuri)

Jagdamba ghar me diara bair aelaun e (Maithili)

This prowess also reflects in her singing completely different songs and compositions for different parts of Bihar to promote voting as she was the chosen Brand Ambassador by the Election Commission in 2014. She sang these slogans in Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi and Hindi to appeal to the voters of different regions of Bihar.

dadi maiya chachi chaccha mausa mami babuni ho

bhauji bhaiya kaaki dani mami bhaiya babuni ho

bhote diha ho ii aapan adhikar ba

na gawainha ho ii aapan adhikar ba (Bhojpuri)

paanch barakh par paawan chunao ke sange manaebai o

duie dinak chhutti la gaam aebai sange bhote khasaebai o (Maithili)

tohar bhote ke ho mol anmol

batania dabaiyihin jarur (Magahi)

chunav ka parv hai, soch lijiye, har ek mat hai kimti vote dijiye

saal atharah pure chal dijiye, yuva warg aage barh ke vote kijiye (Hindi)

A major challenge was brought up in the same interview. After being popular with Chhath songs, she did not have any further successful recordings, because she did not wish to cater to the market of vulgar songs. However, her early strategy of using interviews to put forth her challenges and choosing it to be one of her ways to market her songs seem impressive. In current times, this trend of using interviews posted on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TV news etc. to promote their recordings is followed by almost all the artistes. She did mention that she is proud to keep her image of a deep, husky voice singer from Bihar and does not worry if Bollywood does not approach her for more songs. She believed in her style and preferred doing few songs but more quality ones.

Chhath songs sung by her were the most well-received over the years. She did sing different forms of folksongs and literary compositions, but her image of a singer of Chhath songs became the most predominant. After she had created an audience for herself within and outside India, she also noticed a variety of singers started singing her compositions without giving her any credits for it. This part remains unclear. As it was a folk song any singer could sing it, but because she improvised many compositions it seemed like a copyright issue in some cases. Her interviews suggest she did not worry enough to stop this or ask for justice.

2. Her Chhath song/song videos

Chhath is a difficult fast and requires many preparations starting only after Deepavali. As Sharda Sinha herself mentions, singing these songs made the difficult preparations seem easier. Also, it is a festival where the family comes together otherwise living in different cities to support and enjoy the festival and visiting family. The song renditions carry the context of preparations, feelings involved as a devotee, describing many things used during the festival. Two Gods worshipped include The Sun God referred to as *Deenanath* ‘God of poor’ and ‘Goddess of Chhath’ *Chhathi Maiya*. However, there are no idols made or worshipped. Even though it is considered to be a difficult fast and a festival with good observations to dos and don’ts, there are actually many variations we see in ways of doing Chhath. In this respect, it is truly a folk culture because there is no *purohit* ‘priest’ involved in this worship.

In Chhath songs, singing about various preparations for the festival like buying coconut, banana, *sup* ‘a container weaved with bamboo’ or digging ground to fill water for a *ghat*, decorating *ghat* with banana stem and/or sugarcane are parts of the lyrics.

*sup lele thad bare dom dominiya dekhabe he chhathi maiya
ohi supe arag devae*

We find description of the beauty of nature including the songs that have praises of sun, river (water in general) and the beauty of *ghat* itself as in one of the songs *ghat sajavali manohar*:

*kelwa ke paat par ugelan surujmal jhanke-jhunke
nadiya ke teere teere aael chhathi maiya sewak tohar*

Requesting and encouraging people around to help with the preparations are shown in some songs where brother, relatives are requested to join and help for Chhath.

*gram ke adhikari jo hain badka bhaiya ho...pokhari khanaye diya he
tu hi babu arag dilaiha arag dilaiha babu nirmal hoiha pari pari suruj ke chhaiya*

Appreciating the sense of devotion and power of worshipping Chhath Goddess and Sun God are parts of many of these songs. Singing praises of doing the *brat* ‘fast’ and the miracle of getting healed of physical ailments are part of some of these songs. This

*baat me bhetiye gel ge abla ekta anhra purukh
mangila ham bardan he ganga maiya
suga gire muruchaye...aadit hou na sahaye*

After 20 years of recording her first Chhath song, in 2000, Sharda Sinha started making videos to promote her Chhath songs. Older songs were uploaded on YouTube and some were recorded with a video version. A video released in 2016 (Bejod team and Nitin Neera Chandra directed) *pahile pahil ham kaini* has an interesting storyline of a mom calling off her plans for doing Chhath because of her poor health, and her working daughter-in-law deciding to do Chhath. A public advertisement from Ministry of Health during Covid in 2021 has Sharda Sinha’s composition *aisan bipati ayel*, where social distancing is promoted during this festival, which usually involves a family gathering together. In 2022 video *chhath ke baratiya* the son was shown to be starting the fast of Chhath instead of his mother. In last few videos, a social message to encourage younger generation to continue doing Chhath has been inspiring. Her last recording *dukhwa mitayin Chhatthi maiya* (2024) was released by her son while she was hospitalized and coincidentally, she died during one of the days of Chhath on November 5, 2024.

3. Contemporary Artists

She talks about the Talent shows and says that it does give a platform to singers but it promotes a specific type of performances and rehearsals. She mentions she had been a judge for many of these shows. Singers who won these talent shows according to her found it difficult to sustain their career because focus on basics or foundation went missing, while preparing just for the show. However, she does

mention that it did give a good platform to winners like Sunidhi Chouhan and Shreya Ghosal who are good singers and had strong foundations and could thrive despite the later tests in the career. She confirms that the singers are judged for their singing and not physical appearance in such shows.

Her early interviews mention about her failing radio test. She mentions Vindhyawasini Devi as a stalwart in Chhath songs, who propagated these songs through radio. She reminisces her first audition where Beghum Akhtar used encouraging words for her to continue rehearsing and complimenting her voice. Malini Awasthi in one of her interviews (YouTube posted 2024) addresses Sharda Sinha as an encouraging elder sister and says that they once sang *koel bin bagiya na sobhe raja* together and *im promptu* on the stage. In the conversation about clean yet varied songs, not just devotional songs (Mithila Mirror YouTube posted 2015), she mentions that we need a governing body to regulate release of songs and song videos to maintain quality in recording industry. Maithili Thakur, a young artiste, who sings good quality songs has been mentioned and appreciated in singing a variety of good quality songs.

4. Current Scenario

Over the years, since 2010 a market for Chhath songs has really flourished, which is shown in the YouTube posts and viewership. Singers of different skillsets and voice quality have tried Chhath songs since then. We already have many recordings by famous established singers like Alka Yagnik (2018) and Anuradha Paudwal (in different years) as well as budding artistes like Kalpana Pattowary (2020) and Maithili Thakur (many recordings over the years). We as listeners and followers of Chhath songs have an enriched genre to listen to. Even though this career path of singing folk songs was not started by Sharda Sinha, her predominance and consistency in recording as well as digitalizing the tradition of these songs has really made a big difference to its popularity and viewership. Her last few videos are part of the trend to paint an image of culturally rich Bihar through Chhath and Chhath songs. These videos have an appealing storytelling and the good news is that other contemporary artistes, singers and filmmakers continue to make such videos of Chhath songs to cater to a market of interested viewers and listeners.

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Negation marker in Thang Hrangkhol

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to discuss the negation marker in Hrangkhol, a Kuki-Chin sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman Language family spoken mainly in Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura in Northeast India and some parts of Myanmar. There are two varieties: Sak (hills) and Thang (plains) of Hrangkhol. This paper primarily focuses on the Thang variety speakers, mainly in the state of Tripura, North-east India. There are seven negative markers in Hrangkhol. This paper investigates the seven negative markers /-min/, /-mun/, /-mak/, /-mai/, /-no/, /-loi/, /nimak/ in Thang Hrangkhol and examines their distribution and functions. These negative markers are also known as a negative suffix as they occur in the post-verbal. The functions of these negative markers in different sentence types are also discussed. The paper also discusses double negation and its formation in Hrangkhol. There are four double negations in this variety, and it is all paired with /loi/, for instance, /loi/ with /min/, /loi/ with /mun/, /loi/ with /mai/, and /loi/ with /mak/. The pairing of /loi/ with /min/ is used for first person singular and /loi/ with /mun/ is used for first person plural; /loi/ with /mai/ is used for third person plural, /loi/ with /mak/ is used for third person singular. This research paper continues to discuss and show the examples of negative strengthening as well.

Keywords: *Hrangkhol, Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman, Negation marker*

1. Introduction

Hrangkhol (Rangkhoh) or Hrangkhawl is one of the endangered Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast India (UNESCO, 2009). The term Hrangkhol is a compound word: hrang ‘courageous warrior’ and khol ‘gathering group’, which means ‘a group of courageous warriors staying together’ (T. Hrangkhol). The Hrangkhol language is spoken mainly in Dima Hasao and Karmiganj, Hailakandi, Cachar districts of Assam, and Shipahijala, Khowai, and Dhalai districts of Tripura. Hrangkhol has a dialectal variation in Assam and Tripura. According to Ethnologue (2022) the total population of Hrangkhol speakers in India is estimated to be about 18,000-20000 speakers. It has a different orthography (Roman) in Assam and Tripura (eg, Hrangkhol in Assam and Hrangkhawl in Tripura). Hrangkhol belongs to the Central Kuki-Chin subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family (VanBik 2009). Hrangkhol is vulnerable and endangered. It is highly mutually intelligible with Ranglong, Khelma (Sakachep), and Biata. Very little research has been done on the Hrangkhol languages so far, and some of the work done on the Sak variety by the linguist scholar is Kritika Barman and Nawaf Z. Helmi, focusing only on the Dima Hasao district of Assam, and S. Debbarma has worked on the basic grammar of the Thang variety of Hrangkhol.

Fieldwork was conducted primarily in the Sepahijala, Khowai, and Dhalai districts of Tripura. The total number of respondents is 5 from each area, based on districts. The respondents were grouped into four age groups, including youth, adult, middle-aged, and the aged. Consultants from the age groups 20–30 and 35–60 were included in the fieldwork, both male and female. Primary data were collected along with the sentences, narratives, and word lists through audio-visual recordings, photographs, observation and participation methods.

2. Negation

Negation is a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis that typically expresses the construction of some or all of a sentence’s meaning (David Crystal: A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics). Negation is a statement that denies another statement or action. In Thang Hrangkhol, the

normal expression of negation is a negative suffix of the verb (post-verbal). when the sentences are being negated, normally the verb occurs before the negation. The negative suffixes always follow the verb (V-Neg). sometimes, in some sentences, it occurs immediately after the verb but in some sentences, it is not necessary to occur immediately after the verb. Like many other languages, the Thang variety of Hrangkhoh also has several sentence types of sentence construction i.e., Declarative sentence, Interrogative sentence, Imperative sentence, and Negative sentences. Thang variety has two plurals for each person, for first person plural /kəi-ni/ (used only for two persons) and /kəi-ni-ŋai/ (used for more than two persons), for second person plurals /naŋ-ni/ (used only for two persons) and /naŋ-ni-ŋai/ (used only for more than two persons), for third person plurals /a-ni/ (used for two persons) and /a-ni-ŋai/ (used for more than two persons).

There are seven negative suffixes used in Thang Hrangkhoh. They are:

/-miŋ/ is used as a first-person singular negative marker.

/-muŋ/ is used as a first-person plural negative marker.

/-mak/ is used in the second person singular and plural negative marker.

/-mai/ is used in the third person plural negative marker'

/nimak/ is the future tense negative marker.

/-no/ is used in the imperative negative sentence.

/-loi/ is a negative adjective suffix.

All six negative suffixes are bound morphemes, and only one negative suffix i.e., /nimak/ is independent. The six negative markers are always dependent on another morpheme. The seven negative markers of Thang Hrangkhoh occur based on the person and number in the sentences. Their occurrence depends on the sentence types i.e., declarative sentence, imperative sentence, and interrogative sentence and each of these negative markers is discussed with an example in the following section.

2.1 The negative marker/- miŋ/

The negative marker /-miŋ / is a first-person singular negative marker. It can only be used if the sentence has a first-person singular pronoun as its subject. This negative marker follows the verb and occurs as a negative suffix. It can also occur in a realised negative sentence.

Example,

(1) kəi nisa kɔ-mu

1SG sun 1pp-see

'I saw the sun'

(2) kəi nisa mu-miŋ

1SG sun see-NEG

'I do not see the sun'

(3) kəi kabadi kɔ rɔdai tʰəi

1SG kabaddi 1SG play can

'I can play kabadi'

(4) kəi kabadi rɔdai- tʰəi-miŋ

1SG kabadi play- can-NEG

'I cannot play kabadi'

2.2 The negative marker /-muŋ/

/-muŋ/ is a negative marker that is used in the first-person plural. It is exclusively employed in sentences with first-person plural subjects. In a sentence, this negative marker also appears as a negative suffix after the verb. In a sentence, no other subject can take the place of the negative marker /-muŋ/. There are two second-person plurals in Hrangkhoh: naŋ-ni-ŋai (more than two individuals) and naŋ ni (just for two individuals)

Plurals for two individuals:

(5) kɔini kan se tʰei

1PL 1pp go can

‘We can go’

(6) kɔi-ni se tʰei-muŋ

1P-PL go can-NEG

‘We cannot go’

(7) kɔi-ni tʰeihai kan sak tʰei

1P-PL mango 1pp eat can

‘We can eat mango’

(8) kɔi-ni tʰeihai sak tʰei-muŋ

1P-PL mango eat can-NEG

‘We cannot eat mango’

Plural for more than 2 persons:

(9) kɔi-ni-ŋai kan-se-tʰai

1PS-PL-PS 1pp-go-can

‘We can go’

(10) kɔi-ni-ŋai se-tʰai-muŋ

1P-PL-PS go-can-NEG

‘We cannot go’.

2.3 The negative marker /-mak/

The negative marker /-mak/ is commonly used as a suffix to verbal roots or stems to negate positive statements. Two negative sentence constructions, simple declarative sentences and question negative sentences, can employ the negative marker /-mak/. This negative marker is used in interrogative constructions with both second-person singular and plural subjects. The negative marker /-mak/ comes after the number marker /-tʰe/ when a number is in the second person singular.

Example,

(11) naŋ la na-tʰo tʰei-mo?

2SG song 2pp-do can-IN

‘Can you sing a song?’

- (12) naŋ la t^ho t^hei-mak-t^hei-mo?
 2SG song do can-NEG-SG-INT
 ‘Can’t you sing a song?’

For the second person plural number, the number marker /-t^hei/ is used and followed by the negative marker /-mak/

Example

- (13) naŋ-ni hla nan-t^ho t^hei-mo?
 2PL song 2pp-do can-INT
 ‘Can you sing a song?’
- (14) naŋ-ni hla t^ho-t^hei-mak-t^hei-mo?
 2PL song do-can-NEG-PL-INT
 ‘Can’t you sing a song?’

In simple declarative type of sentence, the negative marker /mak/ is used only in third person singular number.

Example

- (15) ama a rɔtəi t^hei
 3SL 3pp run can
 ‘She/He can run’
- (16) ama rɔtəi t^hei-mak
 3PL run can-NEG
 ‘She/he can’t run’

2.4 The negative marker /-mai/

The third person plural number negative marking is /-mai/. Only when the sentence contains a third-person plural number as a subject can this negative marker be used. Both simple declarative and interrogative sentences can be constructed using this negative sign, /-mai/.

For a simple declarative sentence:

Example

- (17) anni joga an rɔsəi
 3PL yoga 3pp practice
 ‘They practice yoga’
- (18) anni joga rɔsəi-mai
 3PL yoga practice-NEG
 ‘They don’t practice yoga’

For an interrogative sentence:

Example

- (19) anni joga an rɔsəi
3PL yoga 3pp practice
'They practice yoga'
- (20) anni joga rɔsəi mai-mo?
3PL joga practice NEG-INT
'They don't practice yoga?'

2.5 The negative marker /nimak/

The future tense negative marking is /nimak/. This marker occurs only in future-tense constructions; /a/ serves as the future tense marker in Thang Hrangkhoh. In the statement, the negative marker /nimak/ does not have a specific person or number as a subject. In a sentence in the future tense, it can appear in both the person and the number. In actuality, this negative marker is the only lexical item in this language. Because of this, it does not come right after the verb. The future marker, or particle /ra/ appears between the verb and the negative marker.

Examples

- (21) anni an se-ra
3PL 3pp go-FUT
'They will go'
- (22) anni an se-ra nimak
3PL 3pp go-FUT NEG
'They will not go'
- (23) kɔi lekha-bu ka tep-ra
1SG book 1pp read-FUT
'I will read the book'
- (24) kɔi lekha-bu ka tep-ra nimak
1SG book 1pp read-FUT NEG
'I will not read the book'

2.6 The negative marker /-no/

The Thang Hrangkhoh language uses the marker /-no/ as one of its negative markers in imperative negative sentences. As a negative suffix, this marker /-no/ is immediately appended to the verbal roots to negate the positive statement. For instance, the SG number of the command marker /-ro/ is being added to the sentence and is preceded by the negative marker /-no/.

Example

- (25) se-ro
go-IMP
'Go'
- (26) se-no-ro
go-NEG-IMP
'Do not go'

In case of the PL number of the command marker /-roi/ is added to the sentence and is preceded by the negative marker /-no/.

Example

- (27) naŋni se-roi
 2PL go-IMP
 ‘You go’
- (28) naŋni se-no-roi
 2PL go-NEG-IMP
 ‘You all don’t go’

2.7 The negative marker /-loi/

The negative marker /-loi/ is a unique kind of negative marking suffix in Thang Hrangkhoh. When this negative suffix is added, a subclass of adjectives known as negative adjectives is created, and the base itself is an adjective. This negative marker /-loi/ is always bound and dependent on another morpheme.

Example:

- (29) kɔi miriam t^ha ka mu
 1SG human good 1pp see
 ‘I saw a good human’
- (30) kɔi miriam t^ha-loi ka mu
 1SG human good-NEG 1pp see
 ‘I saw a bad man’

However, the negative marker /-loi/ can also occur as the negative suffix of a verb.

Example:

- (31) kɔi bu nek-zoi ka hong
 1SG food eat-finish 1pp come (PST)
 ‘I came after having the food’
- (32) kɔi bu nek-loi ka hong
 1SG food eat-NEG 1pp come (PST)
 ‘I came without eating food’

3. Double Negation

According to Yashwanta Singh, (2010:119-120) Double negation, generally in various languages, is used preferably in literary expression.

When two negative words or a negative marker appear in the same sentence, it is called double negativity. The double negative is uncommon in Thang Hrangkhoh and is considered strange. Nonetheless, the double negation is present in the language. It is employed when someone gets irritable and perplexed or when someone confronts them for not attempting to act. The future tense is frequently employed. Positive is usually indicated by double negation in this language. There are four double

negative marks in Thang Hrangkhol. With those four negative marks, the negative marker /loi/ may appear.

The occurrence of /-loi/ with the four negative markers:

/loi/ with /miŋ/

/loi/ with /mai/

/loi/ with /muŋ/

/loi/ with /mak/

(a) /-loi/ with /-miŋ/

/loi/ with /miŋ/ occurs if the subject is first person singular. For example:

- (33) kei sikull se-loi ra ti-miŋ
 1SG school go-NEG FUT say-NEG
 ‘I din’t say that I will not go to school’.

(b) /-loi/ with /-mai/

/loi/ with /mai/ occurs if the subject is third person plural.

- (34) anni se-loi ra ti-mai
 3P-PL go-NEG FUT say-NEG
 ‘They did not say that they will not go’

(c) /-loi/ with /-muŋ/

/loi/ with /muŋ/ occurs when the subject is first person plural.

- (35) kɔi-ni se-loi ra ti-muŋ
 1P-PL go-NEG FUT say-NEG
 ‘We did not say that we will not go’.

(d) /-loi/ with /-mak/

/loi/ with /mak/ occurs when the subject is third person singular.

- (36) ama se-loi ra ti-mak
 3SG go-NEG FUT say-NEG
 ‘S/he did not say that s/he will not go’.

As demonstrated in the previous examples, the only way to create the four double negative markers is to attach them with the negative marker /loi/. Four double negative markers exist in this language, and each of the four negative markers is associated with /loi/ identically.

4. Negative Strengthening

In many languages, negation is reinforced by additional words, such in English, never, at all. In Thang Hrangkhol, there is only one negative strengthening morpheme i.e. ‘maipen’. In the following example below, the sentence is already negative, and this negative sentence is further strengthened by the lexeme ‘maipen’ which compels the listener to believe the speaker.

Examples:

- (37) kei maipen zu ka-in-ra-nimak
 1SG NSTR wine 1pp-drink-FUT-NEG
 'I will never drink wine'.
- (38) kei maipen ka-se-ra-nimak
 1SG NSTR 1pp-go-FUT-NEG
 'I will never go'.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, Negation in Thang Hrangkhoh (in fact, in all human languages) is the process that negates the positive statement in sentences. There are seven negative markers in Thang Hrangkhoh, and they are all post-verbal. This indicates that negation in Thang Hrangkhoh is post-verbal. Hrangkhoh is a Tibeto-Burman language family, and most of the TB languages have pre-negative markers. From the above discussions and examples given, we can see that negation in different negative markers occurs in different sentences with different persons and numbers. For instance, /-min/ is used only in first person singular; /-mun/ is used in first person plural, /-mak/ is used in simple declarative sentences and interrogative sentences. /-mai/ is used in third person plural number, /nimak/ is a future tense negative marker, /-no/ is used in imperative negative sentences. /-loi/ can be used both in negative adjectives and negative verbs. Interestingly, double negation is also available in this language. There are four double negative markers. They are /-loi/ with /-ming/; /-loi/ with /-mung/; /-loi/ with /mai/, /-loi/ with /-mak/. All four double negative markers are paired with /loi/. Surprisingly, there is one negative strengthening morpheme in this language, i.e., maipen, which means never. This negative strengthening, just as the name suggests, helps to strengthen the negative marker in all sentences.

List of Abbreviations

SG – Singular	PL – Plural
PP - Pronominal Pronoun	NEG – Negative
FUT – Future	IMP – Imperative
INT – Interrogative	NSTR – Negative Strengthening
COMD – Command	1pp – First person pronominal
2pp – Second person pronominal	1SG – First Person Singul
3pp – Third person pronominal	1PL – First Person Plural
2SG – Second Person Singular	3SG – Third Person Singular
2PL – Second Person Plural	3PL – Third Person Plural

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Bibliometric Review Study on Ethnolinguistics, Language and Culture Based on Scopus from 2003 to 2024: A Literature Overview

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Abstract

This study scrutinizes the research trends of Ethnolinguistics, Language and Culture, utilizing a database of 39 Papers within a span of 21 years (2003-2024). However, it is found that more general Bibliometric research is lacking in this territory. Thus, the study analyses, and quantifies a map for the years of 2003-2024 using Scopus core record database. During the analysis, the study excavates data from various authors, countries, topics, articles and journals, books, etc., by using biblioshiny. In this study, VOS viewer was used for the visual representation of keywords through pie charts, tables and figures.

Therefore, this study provides a relatively fresh outlook through which more research courses of action can be found for the widening of the Bibliometric study.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistics, Language, Culture, Bibliometric analysis, Scopus database.

1. Introduction

With the rise of the digital era, the popularity of scientific research has led to an increased interest in emerging fields such as ethnolinguistics, language, culture, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, etc. This development added a new idea of exchange in modern technology.

Ethnolinguistics is concerned with the study of the interrelation between language and cultural behavior in an ethnic community. The essential aspect of Ethnolinguistics is to trace early works that have been done. In other words, ethnolinguistics describes the study of a unified group that shares both common ethnicity and language. Misra (2000; 20) defines that 'the study of language within the context of anthropology and the inevitable overlap between the studies of language and culture has been long recognized by the fathers of the discipline of anthropology, which has been known as Ethnolinguistics'. In the Linguistics perspective of culture, Palmer (1996:3) emphasizes that 'language is the play of verbal symbols that are based in imagery' and this imagery is culturally constructed. Another renowned researcher like Claire (2000; 5) also mentions "the screws that language and culture impose on nature correspond to various forms of socialization or acculturation" as language can be derived from history and the absolute advance to the culture ethnicity.

The interaction between language and culture has naturally embedded in the context- phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, and lexically - functioning as one aspect and forming an integrated system of communication. Cultural identity has strong influences on all aspects of self, which is self-worth through sentimental expressions of belongingness and behaviors or acts or thinks and views the world. 'Linguistically, one must have knowledge of the ways of speaking of the community' as observed by Hymes (1980:139).

2. Methodology

Bibliometrics has been increasingly used among current scholars in recent years as a source of quantitative study of the literature resources. It is to investigate meta-data by using scientific methods and statistical measurement to improve quality research.

The study is based on a Bibliometric approach that provides a relatively objective and reliable analysis in terms of gaining a rapid understanding of a large field. A large amount of literature information has been analyzed for the development of ethnolinguistics, covering language and cultural aspects. The literature analysis for this study is based on the VOSviewer core collection because of their sky-scraping qualities which provide and access its data easily.

The data for this study was source from Scopus covering peer-reviewed journals, journals, books, articles and book chapters. The search was limited to English Language publication between 2003 to 2024. The search process involved the use of specific keywords ethnolinguistics, language and culture. The inclusion criteria were established to refine the search filters to select works that contained the specific keywords.

A total of 39 documents met the inclusion criteria for the analysis, with the majority classified under Arts and Humanities with 47.5%, followed by Social Sciences with 42.7%. The analysis of this paper consists of published 39 documents, showing a progressive rise in the recent years 2022 to 2024 compared to the initial year (2003). Among the selected documents, 82% were Articles while books accounted for the least with 3%.

The study primarily focused on the keywords ethnolinguistics, language and culture. However, terms such as identity, linguistics, and ethnolinguistics identity were also commonly observed. Biblioshiny has been used to extract data from various authors, countries, topics, articles, journals, books, etc. The findings were visually represented through pie charts, tables and figures using VOSviewer for clarity and interpretation.

3. Result And Discussion

The approach of this study is to fill the gap between current trends in ethnolinguistics and pedagogical strategies on language, culture and identity of the ethnicity. It is observed that the ethnolinguistics approach arbitrates in traditional knowledge to enhance the vernacular preservation of the community. In order to get accurate data, the results of the scientific analysis are interpreted in the tables and figures.

4. Research Productivity

4.1 Documents by Year

Table No. 1 below, presents the year of publication on ethnolinguistics, language and culture for 21 years (2003-2024). It is seen that there was no recorded publication between 2005- 2017, suggesting a period of limited academic interest in this field.

However, we can see a notable increase in this field over the recent years particularly from 2022 to 2024 where each year accounts for 12.82 % of total publication. This indicates a growing interest among the academicians in the field of ethnolinguistics.

Table 1: Documents by Year

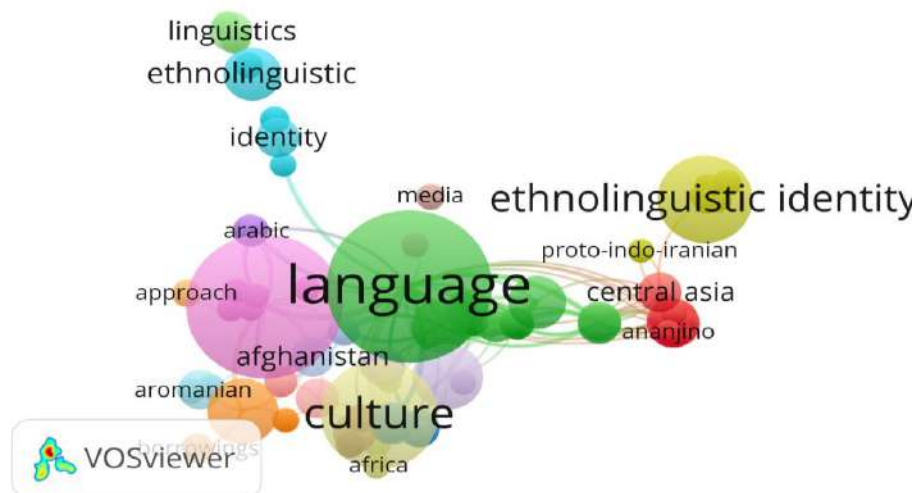
	Documents by Year	
Year	No. of Doc	%age
2024	5	12.82
2023	5	12.82
2022	5	12.82
2021	3	7.69
2020	4	10.26
2019	3	7.69
2018	2	5.13
2017	0	0
2016	0	0

2015	3	7.69
2014	0	0
2013	2	5.13
2012	1	2.56
2011	1	2.56
2010	0	0
2009	0	0
2008	0	0
2007	0	0
2006	2	5.13
2005	0	0
2004	1	2.56
2003	2	5.13
Total	39	100%

4.2 Keyword Analysis

As we can see in the **fig. no 1**, the keywords used by the authors have been counted as an essential element to identify key themes and research trends in ethnolinguistics, language and culture. The common keywords used by the author are shown in VOSviewer (fig no. 1). The visualization indicates the relationship between keywords through color coding, font size, circle size, thickness and the connecting lines or web. The biggest fonts and thicker green circle indicate the most prominent keywords connecting with ethnolinguistics, language, culture, identity and linguistics. The connecting lines highlight the associations between different keywords demonstrating their interconnection with the data set.

Figure No. 1 Keyword

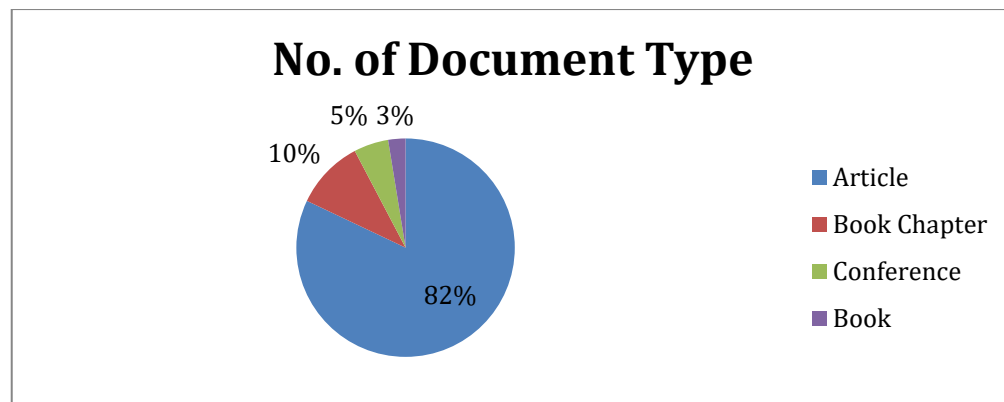


4.3 Document and Source Type

In this study, 39 published documents have been filtered from the Scopus database with the focused only on the English language publications. The analyses of the selected documents are from books, articles, book chapters and conferences.

As illustrated in **fig no. 2**, maximum numbers of works cited are from journal articles with 82% indicating that most research contribution in ethnolinguistics, language and culture in scholarly published while the least works cited are from the books at 3% highlighting the limited representation within the data set.

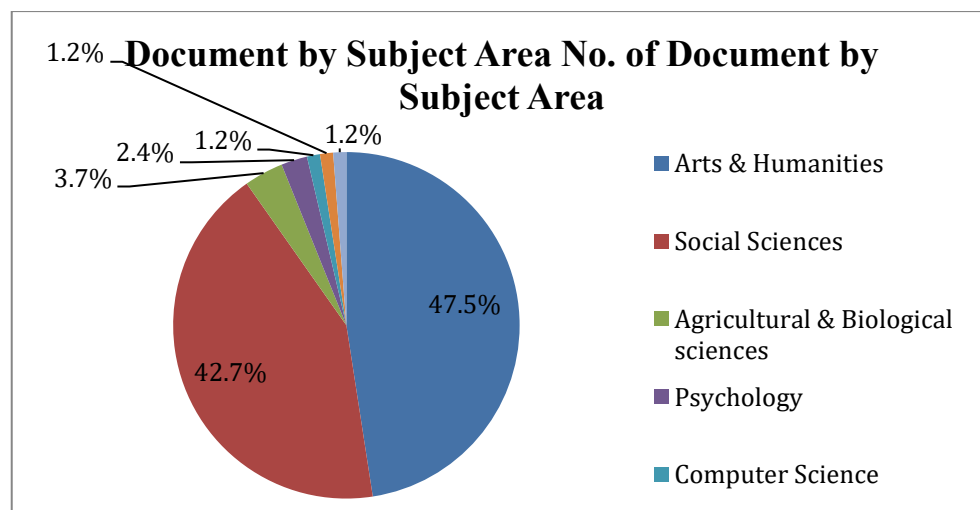
Figure 2. Document Type



5. Subject Related Area

As presented in Fig. No. 3 the study of Ethnolinguistics, language and culture is predominantly associated with Arts and Humanities with 47.5% followed by Social Sciences with 42.7%, respectively. It is seen that both Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences serves as the primary academic dominant for studies in this field. Other subject areas show minimal representation highlighting that ethnolinguistics, language and culture is less commonly explored.

Figure No. 3 Subject Area



6. Publication by Affiliated Institution

The number of publications by universities serves as another indicator to measure the research productivity in ethnolinguistics, language and culture. The highest results among the Institutions/Universities are the University Paris Nanterre, University of Ghana, Russian Academy of Sciences, L.N. Gumilyov E National U showing 14.28% respectively. This indicates that there are more institutions interested in publishing works on ethnolinguistics, language and culture in recent years.

Table No. 2 Subject Area

Document by Affiliation			
Institution/ University	No. of University		%age
University Paris Nanterre	2		14.28
University of Ghana	2		14.28
Russian Academy of Sciences	2		14.28
L.N. Gumilyov E National U	2		14.28
IRCAM	1		7.14
Institute of Slavic Studies	1		7.14
Virgina Commonwealth U	1		7.14
Helsingin Yliopisto	1		7.14
The George Washington University	1		7.14
Arizona State University	1		7.14
	14		100

7. Documents by Country or Territory

The number of publications by countries serves as another indicator to measure the research productivity in ethnolinguistics, language and culture. As seen in **table no. 3** Indicating US with the highest works on ethnolinguistics, language and culture with 30.30% of total publications, followed by the Russian Federation with 15.15%. Meanwhile, Canada and Finland contributed the least publication with 3.03% each. It is also seen that countries like France, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, UK, Ghana and Poland are growing research interest in the field of ethnolinguistics, language and culture.

Table No. 3 Documents by Country or Territory

Documents by Country or territory		
Country/Territory	No.of C/T	%age
US	10	30.30
Russian Federation	5	15.15
France	3	9.09
Indonesia	3	9.09
Kazakhstan	3	9.09
UK	3	9.09
Ghana	2	6.06
Poland	2	6.06
Canada	1	3.03
Finland	1	3.03
Total	33	100

8.
Co-

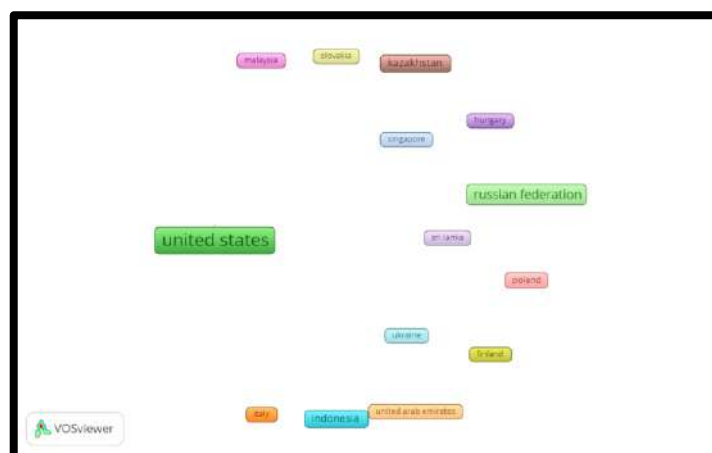
Author country

The **fig. no.4** below illustrates the contributions of co-author's countries which are considered significant in the field of ethnolinguistics, language and culture. The commonly used keywords by the co-author's countries are shown in VOSviewer.

Similar to keywords analysis, elements such as color, font size and thickness represent the relationships between the keywords of the author.

The biggest fonts and thicker green indicate the most prominent country. The United States stands out as a central contributor, with the largest font size in thick green followed by Russian Federation while Italy shows the least work among the others co-author's countries.

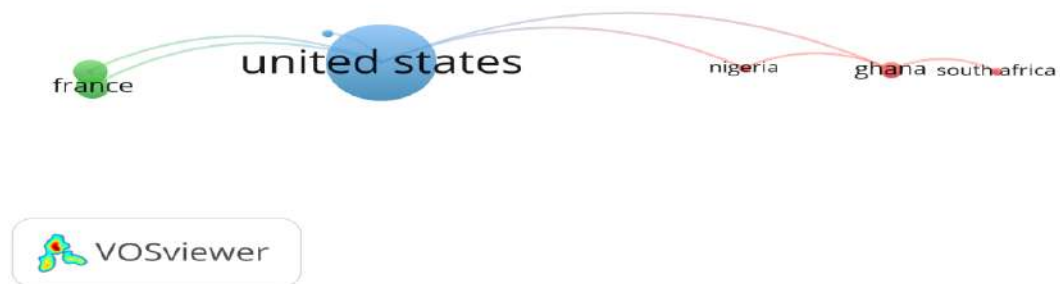
Figure No. 4 Co-Author Country



9. Author's Connection

Bibliometric analysis was used to assess the network connectivity of authorship networks across countries as illustrated in **figure no.5**. The results indicate that the collaboration network is predominantly centered around the United States, which maintains extensive links with countries like France, Nigeria, and Ghana. In contrast, it is seen that South Africa has a limited level of research work in ethnolinguistics, language and culture as well as affiliation to only a single country. This shows that there is more limited level of collaborative activity.

Figure No. 5 Author's connection



10. Conclusion

The study offers a comprehensive review of academic publications on ethnolinguistics, language and culture spanning from 2003 to 2024. Using biblioshiny data were extracted from range of sources including authors, countries, topics, articles and journals and books resulting to the selection 39. These findings were represented through pie charts, tables and figures using VOSviewer visualization.

Notably the United States leads 30.30% of the contributions, while Canada and Finland with 3.03% each account for the least among the countries.

Looking into the publication works done by the universities, notable contributions come from University Paris Nanterre, University of Ghana, Russian Academy of Sciences and L.N. Gumilyov E National U each contributing 14.28% indicating of the work on ethnolinguistics, language and culture.

The VOSviewer visualization illustrates the relationships among keywords. This can be easily visible by the color, font size, circle size, thickness and the connecting lines or web showing the relationship of the keywords. The larger font size and circle with thick green indicates that 'Ethnolinguistics', 'identity' and 'linguistics' are central to the network. Additionally, the bibliometric mapping shows significant international collaboration with the United States working with other countries such France, Nigeria, and Ghana whereas it seen that South Africa shows connection with only one country.

While the bibliometric approach has its limitation such as potential gaps in data or the challenge to achieve complete reliability, this study however, offers valuable insides into global research trends. One can browse any kind of information related to the considered field and easily review works by using bibliometric papers. Despite limited sources, the study attempts to develop an in-depth study by mapping the landscape of research trends in the field of ethnolinguistics, language and culture through bibliometrics analysis and providing insights on previous literature trends.

Suggestions:

In today's world, technology and AI are transforming every field. To remain progressive, we must integrate this advancement into our theoretical knowledge and traditional knowledge. By embracing modern skills, young researcher can bridge the gap between conventional practices and the digital era.

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Exploring Argument Structures in Kumauni

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Abstract:

This paper explores the argument structure patterns of Kumauni, a lesser-studied Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand in India. Drawing on the elicited data from the native speakers this study investigates how core and oblique arguments are structurally realized within Kumauni syntax. The analysis is situated within contemporary theories of argument structure, particularly the vP -shell hypothesis, Lexical Relational Structure, and the Minimalist Program. The key areas of focus include verb valency, case marking, alignment of patterns and argument alternations, i.e. causativization and passivization. By situating the findings within a broader typological and comparative context, particularly with respect to other Indo-Aryan languages, the study contributes to both theoretical discussions on argument structure and the documentation of a lesser-studied South Asian language,

Keywords: Argument structure, Kumauni, Pahari language, vP shell, passivization, causativization.

1. Introduction:

Argument structure plays a fundamental role in syntactic theory, representing how verbs determine the number and configuration of their syntactic arguments. While major Indo-Aryan languages have received considerable attention in this area, the argument structure of Kumauni remains relatively unexplored. Kumauni is a Central Pahari language (Grierson, 1922) spoken in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. This language exhibits noteworthy typological features including split ergativity, complex predicate constructions, and rich case marking. This paper focuses on the formal properties of the argument structure, examining how verbs licence arguments syntactically, and how they interact with case marking, verb classes and grammatical agreement. The analysis is formed by using different theoretical models such as Grimshaw's Theory of Argument Structure (1990), Hale and Keyser's Lexical Relational Structure (1993) and, more recent developments within the Minimalist Program.

2. Aims and Objectives:

This paper predominantly tries to answer the research question, “how are syntactic arguments structurally projected and morpho-syntactically realized in Kumauni verbs, and what do these patterns reveal about the argument structure of the language?”

This paper classifies Kumauni verbs according to their grammatical structure and examines the syntactic mechanisms through which these arguments are projected. This study also investigates morphosyntactic processes, i.e. passivization, causativization and how they affect argument structure. Finally, the paper attempts to contribute to the syntactic documentation of Kumauni and situate its argument structure within the broader typological profile of Indo -Aryan and Pahari languages.

3. Literature Review:

Verbs come with inherent argument structure and set of thematic roles that determine how many and what type of arguments a verb requires (Grimshaw, 1990). She defines argument structure as a *structured representation that represents prominence relations among predicates*. The thematic properties of the predicate determine the prominence relations according to her. take. Argument structure refers to the syntactic configuration projected by a lexical item. They are built the same way as a thematic hierarchy. This hierarchy looks like: (Agent (Experiencer (Goal/Source/Location (Theme)))). Grimshaw identifies three main types of arguments, i.e., external argument, internal argument, and optional argument. The external arguments are introduced outside the verb phrase (VP), whereas internal arguments are introduced inside the verb phrase by the lexical verb itself, traditionally as its complement. Grimshaw (1990) argues that not only arguments, verbs also reflect an aspectual hierarchy, describing how complex or structured the event is denoted by a verb is. It is known as Aspectual Dimension Hierarchy. It captures how events unfold over time. The hierarchy is grounded in the semantic classification of predicates, which reflects a verb’s inherent temporal and causal properties. It offers a structured approach to understanding how different verb types project syntactic structure based on their event-theoretic profiles. This hierarchy can be outlined like: STATE < PROCESS < TRANSITION (Change of State).

While Grimshaw’s model considers argument structure to be represented in the lexicon, and realised through thematic hierarchy, Hale and Keyser consider argument structure to be derived from syntactic configuration rather than stored lexical information (Hale & Keyser, 1993, 2002). Their Relational Theory of Argument Structure argues that verbs are products of hierarchical syntactic structures where roots with event-type heads (e.g., causative, result, etc) merge into lexical component (Hale & Keyser, 1993). Each event head contributes a theta role; for example, CAUS head increases an argument of the verb by adding an Agent.

Recent works on syntax (Chomsky, 1995; Kratzer 1998) propose vP-shell hypothesis where a light verb v layer is introduced as a higher functional structure than VP, carrying external argument in its specifier position (Spec-vP). Little v can have semantic properties like

agent-introducer. It is also responsible for assigning the accusative case to the object. Unaccusatives (e.g. arrive, fall) lack a little *v* that introduces external argument, thus, no agent. Unergatives and transitives have a little *v* that introduces an agent. Different kinds of little *v* can change the interpretation, i.e. Active *v* introduces an agent and Passive *v* suppresses the external argument.

In his *Linguistic Survey of India (Vol 11, Part 4)*, Grierson (1922) addressed the Kumauni language alongside other Pahadi languages, providing insights into its linguistic characteristics. Existing works on Kumauni have primarily explored the language history, dialectology, phonology, and morphology (Grierson, 1922; Sharma, 1985, 1994). Although Central Pahadi languages altogether are comparatively underexplored, unified typological works on Indo-Aryan and other South Asian languages reveal detailed accounts of argument realization, quirky subjects in Nepali whereas the Garhwali was examined for case marking, agreement patterns, and complex predicates (Butt, 1995; Butt & King, 2004; Bhatt, 2003). Despite its linguistic significance, Kumauni lacks adequate linguistic description of its argument structure. Consequently, it remains inconspicuous whether the contemporary theories of argument structure (Hale & Keyser, 2002, 1993; Chomsky, 1995; Grimshaw, 1990) provide a necessary account of argument structure in Kumauni.

This paper addresses this gap by investigating naturally elicited data of Kumauni language through these theoretical models.

4. Methodology:

Field methodology has been employed in this research. After three months of classroom training in Kumauni language with native language instructors, a ten-day field trip was organized in Almora as a part of our M.A. coursework. Data was collected by using questionnaire related to argument structure in Kumauni and people from all walks of life, different gender and age were interviewed face-to-face. Hindi language was incorporated to interact with the people of Kumaun as most of them were bilinguals. The systematic collection of data, followed by transcription using Bloch and Trager's modified IPA version (1942), manual glossing, and was interpreted using insights from existing literature on argument structure. The present study is primarily based on the information gathered from the residents of Almora.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion:

Kumauni exhibits a highly marked argument structure, characterized by a rich and productive system of case assignment. Noun phrases are systematically marked for grammatical roles, i.e. subject, object, etc, often through overt morphological case markers. This case marking plays a crucial role in signalling syntactic relationships within a clause, especially in contexts where word order alone may not suffice. Kumauni, like most of the Indo-Aryan languages, is a split ergative language. In perfective constructions involving transitive verbs, the subject receives an ergative case marking. In imperfective constructions, the subject is marked with the nominative case, aligning with a nominative-

accusative pattern. In these contexts, the subject of both transitive and intransitive verbs receives the same treatment.

Kumauni utilizes robust system of postpositional case marking. These case markers, realized as postpositions, appear adjacent to noun phrases (NPs) and serve to encode grammatical relations such as subject, object, recipient, instrument, and location.

The following tabular chart shows some of the common correlations between thematic roles and case marking in Kumauni language:

Thematic Relation	Case	Case Marker
Agent	Nominative, Ergative	Null, <i>ɛl</i> , <i>il</i> , <i>əl</i>
Patient, Theme	Accusative	<i>kẽ</i> , Null
Recipient, Experiencer, Benefactor	Dative	<i>kɛ</i>
Instrument	Instrumental	<i>il</i> , <i>əl</i> , <i>bəɽi</i> , <i>bɛ</i> , <i>ɖwara</i> , <i>kɛl</i> , <i>ɽʰɛ</i>
Source	Ablative	<i>bəɽi</i> , <i>bɛ</i> , <i>bə</i> , <i>bɛr</i>
Location	Locative	<i>mə</i> , <i>mɛ</i>
Accompaniment	Comitative	<i>ɖəgər</i> , <i>ɖəgərɪ</i>
Possessor	Genitive	<i>ək</i> , <i>ək</i> , <i>il</i> , <i>ik</i>

Table 1 Thematic relations vs Case Markers in Kumauni

5.1. Predicate Types in Kumauni:

Although Kumauni does have expletives in its inventory, but no zero place predicates were found in Kumauni. The verbs of cognition, e.g. *lagəŋ* (to seem), which allow two arguments usually, i.e. one experiencer and one proposition, sometimes the verb allows itself to behave like one-place predicates and to complete the utterance, it uses expletives like *ɛys* or *yəs*.

Consider the following examples for a better understanding:

1.	<i>ɛys</i>	<i>lagəŋ</i>	<i>kɪ</i>		
	this-EXPL	seem-3S-PRES IMPF	that-COMP		
		<i>mɪ</i>	<i>jəɽɽɪ</i>	<i>nɪkəl</i>	<i>səkʊ</i>
		i-1S-NOM	early	exit-N	can-1S-PRES IMPF
	It seems like I can leave early				

2.	yəs	barbar	na	hʊ	kɪ	
	this-EXPL	again-REDUP	NEG	be-3S-PRES IMPF	that-COMP	
		mi	jao	ε	səbu-dəgər	
		i-1S-NOM	go-1S-SBJV	and	all-3PL-COM	
			b ^h et	le	hε	jo
			meet-N	EMPH	happen-V1	go-V2-3S-SBJV
It doesn't always happen that I go and get to meet everyone.						

Here in 1 and 2 ϵ ys or yəs function as an expletive that is co-referential to the CP but does not hold any semantic value on its own. So, its presence fulfils the EPP, but this DP was not merged as a specifier to the vP, or as a complement to the VP. Thus, it cannot be counted as an argument. Neither does it hold any semantic value, thus it cannot receive any theta role from the verb either. It is similar to the Hindi pleonastic pronoun 'EsA' for verbs of cognition, confirming that expletives in Kumauni are formal non-thematic placeholders.

In Kumauni, the behaviour of intransitive verbs, especially in terms of case marking and syntactic alignment, exhibits split intransitivity, a phenomenon observed in many Indo-Aryan languages. Generally, the subject of an intransitive verb is an Agent and takes a nominative case marker in all imperfective aspects. This nominative subject also triggers agreement on the verb. However, a shift occurs in the perfective aspect. The same intransitive verbs often form compound verbs and their subjects are marked with the ergative case.

The following sentences represent Intransitive construction in Kumauni.

3.	sɪɽa	načnε	č ^h ɪ
	sita-3SF-NOM	dance-3SF	be-PST IMPF
	Sita was dancing		

4.	čor	b ^h ajr	go
	thief-3S-NOM	run-V1	go-V2-3S-PRES PERF
	The thief ran away		

Example 3 shows the imperfective aspect and 4 represents the perfective aspect. In both scenarios, the subject NP is marked with nominative case.

Importantly, not all intransitive predicates behave uniformly. Some intransitive verbs have subjects that are better described as undergoing rather than performing an action, i.e. they carry the thematic role of theme or patient. These are classified as unaccusative verbs. In Kumauni unaccusative verbs like $\gamma l r \equiv n \hat{\diamond}$ (to fall) do not assign an external argument in their base structure and often exhibit syntactic behaviours akin to passives, as shown in example 5.

5.	u	gar-me	ja	grrɔ
	he-3MS-NOM	river-3S-LOC	go-V1	fall-V2- 3S-PRES PERF
	He fell into the river			

In Kumauni the above example of intransitive verbs (3-5) consistently show that the verbs cannot assign more than one argument, which is its internal argument for unaccusative verbs (ex.5) and its external argument for unergative verbs (ex.3-4). These trees are illustrated below in Figure 1 and 2.

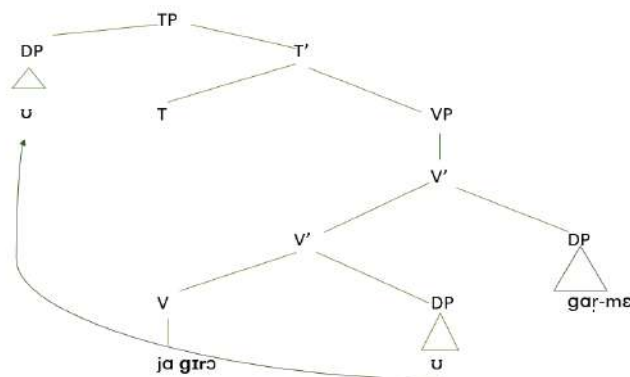


Figure 1 Illustrates unaccusative construction

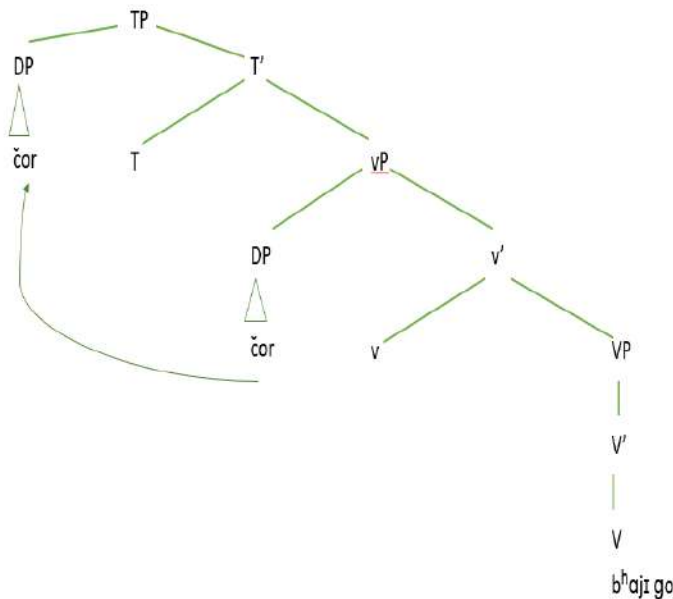


Figure 2 Illustrates unergative construction

The pattern exhibited in these data is consistent with Chomsky's vP shell hypothesis and Grimshaw's claim that argument structures are lexically specified.

In Kumauni, two place predicates display agreement and case marking that are sensitive to both aspect and animacy. These verbs show ergative alignment in the perfective aspect and nominative-accusative alignment in the imperfective. When the subject is marked ergative, the verb agrees with the direct object, specifically when the object is animate or definite.

Following data represent mono-transitive construction in Kumauni both in perfective and imperfective aspects. Example 6 and 8 show imperfective aspect where the external argument is agrees with the verb and takes nominative case, and example 7 shows perfective aspect and the subject is marked with ergative case, thus the verb agrees with its object.

Kumauni also shows differential object marking. Animate or definite direct objects receive overt accusative marking, whereas inanimate or indefinite ones are typically unmarked. This aligns with broader typological tendencies where features such as animacy and specificity influence case marking and agreement. When example 6 and 7 show inanimate objects, example 8 shows animate object as its internal argument, and it is overtly marked with accusative case whereas the inanimate objects are covertly case marked. These patterns directly place Kumauni into the NIA split-ergative system.

6.	mə	b ^h at	k ^h ā
	I-1S-NOM	rice-3S-ACC	eat-1S-PRES IMPF
	I eat rice		

7.	mən	səb	p ^h otək	dek ^h ɪ
	i-1S-ERG	all	picture-3PL-ABS	see-3PI-PST PERF
	I saw all the pictures			

8.	tʊ	mə-kē	bəhəŋe	
	you-2S-NOM	I-1s-ACC	very	
		b ^h əlɪ-kə	jaŋ	č ^h ε
		well	know	be-2S-PRES IMPF
	You know me very well			

In Kumauni when the direct object is a CP rather than a DP, it does not bear a thematic role like theme or patient. In such cases, the CP functions as a propositional argument, and the verb maintains agreement with the subject as illustrated in example 9. This distinction reflects the difference in semantic type between referential (DP) and propositional (CP) arguments (Davies & Dubinsky, 2004).

9.	ʊn ^h ɪl	sočə	kɪ	
	they-3PL-ERG	think-3PL-PST PERF	that	
		ʊ	myər	kɪtab
		they-3PL-NOM	my-1S-GEN	book-3S-ACC
			pəɪ ^h	səkənɪ
			read-V1	able/can-V2-3PL-PST IMPF
	They thought that they could read my book.			

Figure 3 represents two-place predicate construction in Kumauni supporting the notion that Kumauni exhibits a vP projection for transitive events, where T assigns nominative case and v is responsible for ergative case assignment.

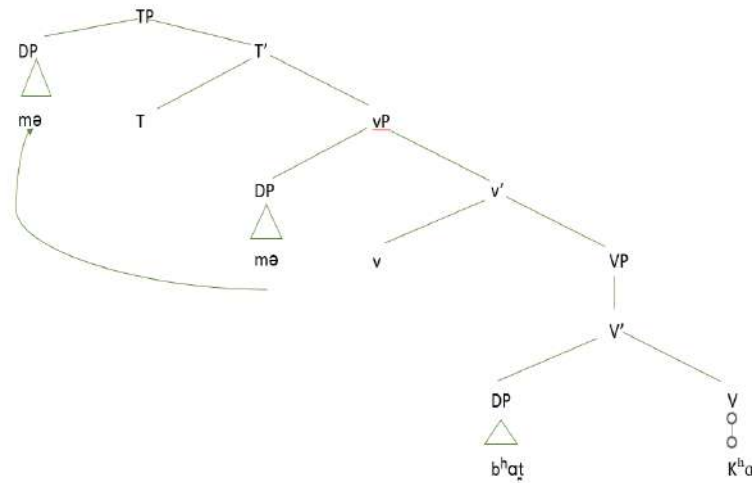


Figure 3 Transitive sentence in Kumauni

Ditransitive constructions in Kumauni exhibit the classic three-place predicate structure comprising an agent, a theme or patient, and a recipient or beneficiary. In these constructions, the external argument (agent) typically bears nominative case in imperfective aspect and ergative case in the perfective aspect, consistent with the aspectually conditioned split ergativity. Internal arguments, the Theme or Patient and the Recipient or Beneficiary take accusative or absolutive, and dative case markers respectively, depending on aspectual and lexical factors. As Kumauni shows double object construction, it can be analyzed as a variant of applicative structures, where the recipient bears structural dative and the theme is the true direct object. (Butt & King 2005; McFadden 2004).

Example 10 exhibits perfective aspect and the external argument or subject DP is marked with ergative case. Example 11 shows imperfective aspect and the structure takes nominative-accusative framework. In both sentences the recipient is marked with dative case.

10.	ram-əl	əpən	ij-kə			
	ram-3SM-ERG	own	mother-3SF-DAT			
			ber	ek	kʰəʈ	likʰə
			yesterday	one	letter-3SM-ABS	write-3SM-PST PERF
	Ram wrote a letter to his mother yesterday					

11.	ʊ	masab	giṭa-kẽ		
	that	teacher-3S-NOM	giṭa-3S-DAT		
		həmes	bʰəl	əŋk	ḍimɪ
		always	good	marks-3S-ACC	give-3S-HON-PRES IMPF
That teacher always gives good marks to Gita					

Interestingly, Kumauni also permits CP arguments in ditransitive frames, especially when the content of communication or cognition is expressed, aligning with cross-linguistic patterns where verbs like *bYɹən* (tell) license a clause as a theme argument. In such configuration, the CP occupies the position of the theme, while the recipient remains as the dative-marked goal argument of the matrix clause, as illustrated in example 12. It should be noted that the subordinate clause in this example exhibits an experiencer subject, being marked with dative case.

12.	ij-əl	mə-kẽ	kɔ	kɪ	
	mother-3FS-ERG	me-1S-DAT	tell-3S-PST PERF	that	
		mə-kẽ	roʃ	pəɾʰən	cɛn
		i-1S-DAT	everyday	study-INF	need-3S-PRES IMPF
Mother told me that I should study everyday					

Additionally, some ditransitive verbs mark their third argument with locative or ablative case, as exhibited by example 13. In these cases, the third argument functions as an oblique object and assumes thematic role such as source or location, which is typical for locational and transfer predicates in Indo-Aryan languages. These oblique arguments are crucial for distinguishing paths of motion and final goals, which further supports the syntactic separation of source and recipient roles. Such three-place constructions highlight the rich argument structure possibilities in Kumauni and the interaction between syntax, case marking, and thematic roles between ditransitive verbs.

13. təm-il $\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{aŋ}$ myər $\text{t}^{\text{h}}\text{al-i-mə}$ $\text{rək}^{\text{h}}\text{-o}$
 you-2S- food-3S- my-1S- plate-3S- keep-3S-PST
 ERG ABS GEN LOC PERF

You put the food on my plate.

Figure 4 illustrates ditransitive construction in Kumauni exhibiting that indirect objects are introduced by ApplP. It supports Hale & Keyser's claim (1993, 2002) that every event head of a verb is inherently capable of introducing a new argument.

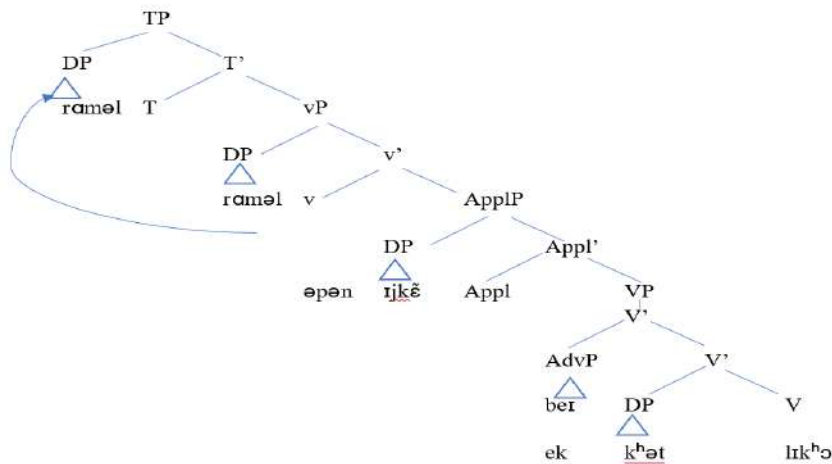


Figure 4 Double object construction in Kumauni

In Kumauni, like other Indo-Aryan languages, psychological predicates exhibit certain syntactic peculiarities in terms of argument structure and the distribution of theta roles. These predicates typically involve two core arguments, i.e. Experiencer and Stimulus. The data illustrated in example 14-18 show a variety of psychological predicates along with the assignment of Experiencer or Stimulus thematic roles to the subjects. What is noteworthy here is that these subjects are typically marked with non-nominative cases, i.e. dative (example 14 and 15), instrumental (example 16), locative (example 17), and genitive (example 18). These quirky subjects show involuntary actions committed by the doer, possession of emotional strength, mental states, etc.

14.	kripa-kē	hiṭəŋ	$\text{b}^{\text{h}}\text{əl}$	laɔ
	kripa-3FS-DAT	walk-N	good-N	feel-3S-PRES IMPF
	Kripa likes to walk			

15.	u-kɛ	kɪtab	pəɾʰən	bʰəl	nɪ	laɡũ
	she-3S-DAT	book-3S-ACC	read-INF	good-N	NEG	feel-3S-PRES IMPF
	She does not like to read books					

16.	mɪ-kəl	ɡlas	tʊt	ɡũ
	i-1S-INSTR	glass-3S-ACC	break-V1	go-V2-PRES PERF
	I broke the glass (accidentally)			

17.	u-k	paʃ	bəhote	hɪmməɽ	čʰu
	his-3MS-GEN	near-LOC	lot	courage-3S-ACC	be-3S-PRES IMPF
	He has a lot of courage				

18.	myər	ɪraq	kəbʰɪ	kʰərab	nʰɛ	čʰɪ
	my-1S-GEN	intention-3S-NOM	ever	bad	NEG	be-3S-PST IMPF
	My intentions were never bad					

5.2. Valency Changing operation in Kumauni:

In Kumauni, the shift from imperfective to perfective aspect in passive constructions, coupled with the addition of an auxiliary verb, can be theoretically supported by broader patterns of passivization in Indo-Aryan languages. This shift has been explained as a part of complex predicate formation, where the addition of light verbs (e.g. to go) adds aspectual; or modal nuance to the construction. These light verbs often carry TAM markers, while the main verb remains a non-finite participial form, supporting the idea of auxiliary stacking and grammaticalization of aspectual meaning. In the passive, the vP lacks a specifier position. So, no external argument is merged. Alternatively, the external argument is merged as an adjunct or in the non-thematic position. The internal argument (theme) is merged as a complement of V. It moves to Spec TP to satisfy the EPP and agrees with T in phi-features. The passive v is often considered as defective. It does not assign accusative

case. Therefore, the internal argument must move to get nominative case from T. Passive constructions are often associated with valency reduction, a process where the syntactic prominence of the agent is diminished or eliminated entirely. This reflects Perlmutter and Postal's Relational Grammar theory (1984), where passive is a rule that demotes the subject and promotes the object to subject position reducing the number of core arguments. These patterns are exhibited in example 19 and 20.

19.	yə	kɪɽab	səbun	ɖʷara
	this	book-3S-NOM	everyone-3S-GEN	by-INSTR
		pər ^h i	ja	rɛ
		read-N	go-V1	stay-V2-3S-PST PERF
	The book was read by all.			

20.	yɔ	b ^h aŋ	myər	bən-il
	these	utensils-3PL-NOM	my-1S-GEN	sister-3FS-GEN
		ɖʷara	ɖ ^h ɔi	gyɔ
		by-INSTR	wash-N	go-3S-PST PERF
	The plates were washed by my sister.			

Kumauni incorporates instrumental and genitive markers on agents in passive construction as a hallmark of non-canonical agent marking in Indo-Aryan languages.

The process of passivization decreases the valency of the verbs. Thus, intransitive verbs cannot be passivized in normal circumstances. But in some specific context the passivization of intransitive verb is incorporated to show incapability or non-volitionality (see example 16). In that case the verb loses its only argument and the agent becomes an instrument that carries the action forward. These constructions are better treated as instances of involuntary state expressions, where the experiencer is externalised and marked obliquely while the verb appears in a passive or stative morphology. These constructions indicate semantic Passivization rather than strict syntactic Passivization and reflect agent demotion due to the loss of volitional control.

The corresponding construction is illustrated in example Figure 5.

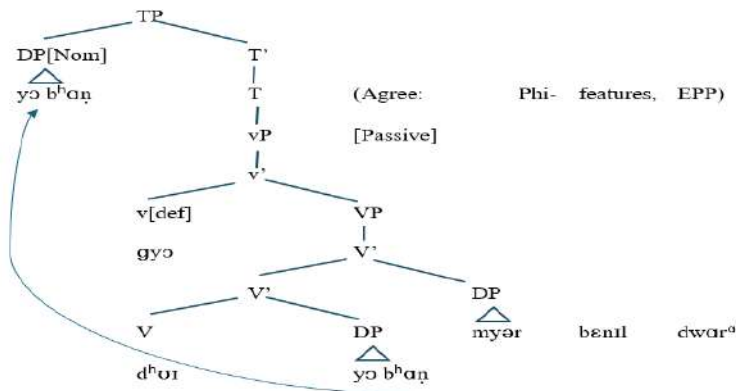


Figure 5 Passive construction in Kumauni

Causative constructions are formed by stacking vP layers one for the cause event and another for the caused event. In line with patterns observed in other Indo-Aryan languages, Kumauni employs morphological causativization, primarily using a first causative strategy. Interestingly Kumauni does not exhibit a distinct second causative morpheme, instead, it sometimes borrows the second causative marker from Hindi. Kumauni lexicalizes the v-Caus as non-recursive, which means that it saturates the causative relation once. Thus, only one morphological marker (-a) is allowed for causativization in Kumauni and applying another result into ungrammaticality. This suggests a syncretism of morphological forms and a restriction in the derivational depth of causatives in the language.

As presented in example 21 and 22, intransitive verbs in Kumauni undergo causativization by v-Caus head introducing an extra causer argument acting as an instigator holding the subject position while the original subject, although demotes to an object position, remains an agent throughout all events.

21.	ʊnʰən	myər	bʰɛ-ke	rɔla
	they-3PL-ERG	my-1S-GEN	brother-3SM-ACC	cry-C1-PST PERF
	They made my brother cry			

22.	mən	ʋpən	bən-kɛ	pač	kɪlomɪtər	čəla
	I-1S-ERG	own	sister-3S-ACC	five	kilometer	walk-C1-PRES PERF
	I made my sister walk five miles					

Causativization of transitive verbs in Kumauni are represented in example 23-27. Example 23 and 24 show first causative construction of transitive verbs whereas the example 25 exhibits second causativization. Note that in all three sentences the causative morpheme remains the same. Example 26 and 27 showcase the data collected from the younger speakers of Kumauni (aged 18-25) where the presence of morphological marker for second causative ‘w’ has been identified. It is assumed that it is a newly added morpheme in the inventory of Kumauni due to the Hindi influence.

23	myər	ija-l	mə-čʰə-bə	
	my-1S-GEN	mother-3FS-ERG	I-1S-INSTR	
		raṭ-ʊk	kʰaŋʊ	ban-a
		night-3S-GEN	food-3S-ABS	cook-C1-PRES PERF
	Mother made me cook the dinner			

24.	tʊ-l	ʊ-čʰə-bə	aɾəŋ	kam	kər-a
	you-2S-ERG	she-3S-INST	own	work-3S-ABS	do-C1-PRES PERF
	You made her do your work				

25.	tʊmʰən	myər	bən-čʰə-bə	
	you-2S-ERG	my-1S-GEN	sister-3SF-INSTR	
		bəččə-kē	kʰaŋʊ	kʰɪla
		baby-3S-DAT	food-3S-ABS	eat-C2-PRES PERF
	You made my sister feed the baby			

26.	ij-lə	bʰə-kē	kʰaŋ	kʰɪla
	mother-3FS-ERG	kid-3S-DAT	food-3S-ACC	eat-C2-PRES PERF
	Mother fed the baby			

27.	ij-əl	budikər-dʰɛ	bʰɔ-kɛ̃
	mother-3FS-ERG	maid-3FS-INSTR	kid-3S-DAT
		kʰaŋ	kʰɪl-w-əe
		food-3S-ACC	eat-C2-PRES PERF
	Mother made the maid feed the baby		

Ditransitive verbs in Kumauni also go through causativization by introducing an external causer and this results in a four-place structure: Causer > Causee > Recipient > Theme, as illustrated in example 28.

28	u-l	mə-čʰə-bɛ	priya-kɛ	čoklet	ɖɪla
	he-3SM-ERG	i-1S-INSTR	priya-3FS-DAT	chocolate-3S-ABS	give-C1-PRES PERF
	He made me give Priya a chocolate				

The alternation of argument structure is uniform throughout first and second causation for all verb types in Kumauni. During first causation (see example 21-26 and 28) the instigation from causer to agent is direct, the original performer of the action behaves like a co-participant along with the newly added causer. However, during second causation (see example 27), an intermediate argument is introduced as a tool/ instrument to carry out the instigation from the actual causer to the original agent that is no longer a co-participant.

The agent remains the logical subject throughout all events, whereas, the newly added unmarked DP becomes the grammatical subject each time when the verb's valency increases. The pattern shown in the data confirms that Kumauni employs a productive causativization and parallels the Hindi-Urdu causative system.

6. Conclusion:

Overall, this paper demonstrates that argument structure in Kumauni is tightly regulated by grammatical features such as aspect, case, agreement, and predicate type, conforming to the contemporary syntactic frameworks. Argument realization in Kumauni reveals a principled interaction between syntax and semantics, where surface variation is systematically derived from abstract structural configurations.

To summarise, Kumauni reveals a robust mapping between morphological case and thematic roles. The case markers are best analysed as non-projecting heads, functioning as features on DPs. In ditransitive and mono-transitive constructions, the argument structure

adheres to a predictable theta-grid, i.e. the specifier of vP takes the role of Agent, while Theme, Goal, and Recipient are merged within the VP. Dative case is typically assigned to experiencers and benefactor, indicating inherent case assignment via lexical selection rather than structural position. Intransitive verbs on the other hand assign the argument the theta role of Agent, usually. But in certain cases (unaccusative verb construction), the argument is originated as internal argument of the verb and takes the role of a Theme. Expletives like *əys*, *yəs* exist in Kumauni to reduce an argument for the verbs of cognition. Kumauni also shows features of productive causativization, and the causative morpheme *a* is uniform across all verb bases, showing only first causatives with no morphological distinction for second causatives. On the other hand, passivization in Kumauni functions as a valency reducing process and it is achieved by adding a light verb that carries the agreement markers. Kumauni regularly exhibits non-nominative subjects, including ergative, dative, genitive, instrumental, and locative subjects. These are associated with specific predicate classes, i.e. psychological verbs, modal constructions and stative expressions. These subjects are licensed by lexical case and often occupy the specifier of functional projections like vP or TP, depending on the interaction of mood, aspect, and modality. (Davison 2004; Bhatt 20007).

Kumauni, thus, contributes valuable empirical data to the typology of Indo-Aryan languages and supports the claim that even under rich morphological systems, argument structure is governed by universal syntactic principles.

List of Abbreviations:

1 First Person	IMPF Imperfect Aspect
2 Second Person	PERF Perfect Aspect
3 Third Person	INF Infinitive
F Female	PRES Present
M Male	PST Past
S Singular	Comp Complementizer
Pl Plural	Neg Negation
NOM Nominative Case	V1 Polar Verb in Compound Verb

ERG Accusative Case	V2 Vector Verb in Compound Verb
ABS Absolutive Case	C1 First Causative
ACC Accusative Case	C2 Second Causative
DAT Dative Case	EQV Equative Case
INSTR Instrumental Case	COM Commitative Case
GEN Genitive Case	LOC Locative Case
ABL Ablative Case	OBL Oblique Form
HON Honorific Form	

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जाड़ भाषा की ध्वनि व्यवस्था

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शोध सार

यह शोधपत्र उत्तराखंड के उत्तरकाशी जनपद में निवास करने वाले जाड़ समुदाय की भाषा की ध्वनि-व्यवस्था का विश्लेषण प्रस्तुत करता है। जाड़ भाषा तिब्बती-बर्मी भाषा परिवार की एक अल्प-संसाधन एवं संकटग्रस्त भाषा है, जिसका प्रयोग सीमित वक्ताओं द्वारा किया जाता है। अध्ययन का उद्देश्य जाड़ भाषा के स्वर तथा व्यंजन स्वनिमों की पहचान करना, उनकी ध्वन्यात्मक एवं स्वनिमिक विशेषताओं का विश्लेषण करना तथा न्यूनतम युग्मों के आधार पर उनकी अर्थ-भेदक भूमिका को स्पष्ट करना है। संकलित भाषायी आंकड़ों के विश्लेषण से यह ज्ञात होता है कि जाड़ भाषा में आठ मूल मौखिक स्वर के साथ साथ दीर्घ स्वर तथा नासिक्य स्वर भी पाए जाते हैं, जिनमें स्वनिमिक स्तर पर अर्थ में अंतर दिखाई पड़ता है। व्यंजन-प्रणाली में कुल 26 व्यंजन स्वनिमों की पहचान की गई है। इसके अतिरिक्त स्वर-गुच्छ, व्यंजन-गुच्छ, द्वित्व व्यंजन तथा शब्दांश संरचना का भी विश्लेषण किया गया है। यह अध्ययन जाड़ भाषा की ध्वन्यात्मक संरचना को व्यवस्थित रूप में प्रस्तुत करते हुए इस संकटग्रस्त भाषा के प्रलेखन एवं संरक्षण की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रयास है।

कीवर्ड

जाड़ भाषा, ध्वनि-व्यवस्था, स्वर-प्रणाली, व्यंजन-प्रणाली, न्यूनतम युग्म, संकटग्रस्त भाषा, तिब्बती-बर्मी भाषा परिवार।

1. जाड़ भाषा: परिचय

जाड़ भाषा हिमालयी क्षेत्र की एक अल्प-संसाधन (low-resource) एवं संकटग्रस्त भाषा है, जो भारत के उत्तराखंड राज्य के उत्तरकाशी में निवास करने वाले जाड़ समुदाय द्वारा बोली जाती है। इस समुदाय का उद्गम जाड़ गंगा घाटी से जुड़ा माना जाता है, जहाँ नीलांग और जादोंग जैसे ऐतिहासिक गाँव स्थित थे। प्रारंभिक काल में यह समुदाय अर्ध-घुमंतू पशुपालक जीवन-पद्धति पर आधारित था और तिब्बत की सीमा के समीप जाड़ गंगा के किनारे निवास करता था।

जाड़ भाषा को जाड़/जाद/जार (दज़ाद) नामों से भी जाना जाता है तथा इसे भोटिया (भोट अर्थात् तिब्बत से संबंधित) के रूप में भी संदर्भित किया जाता है। 'जाड़' वास्तव में एक बाह्य-प्रदत्त नाम (exonym) है, जिसका प्रयोग बाहरी समुदायों द्वारा इस जनसमूह और इनकी भाषा दोनों के लिए किया जाता है। समुदाय के सदस्य स्वयं को 'रोडबा' या 'रोडपा' कहते हैं, जबकि शासकीय अभिलेखों में उनका 'भोटिया' नाम ही प्रचलित है।

1962 के भारत-चीन युद्ध के उपरांत जाड़ समुदाय को अपने मूल निवास-स्थानों नीलांग और जादोंग घाटी से विस्थापित होना पड़ा और उन्हें उत्तरकाशी जनपद के हर्षिल क्षेत्र में पुनर्स्थापित किया गया। वर्तमान में समुदाय के लोग मुख्यतः बगोरी और डुंडा गाँवों में निवास करते हैं। उनका जीवन-चक्र ऋतु-आधारित प्रवास (seasonal migration) पर आधारित है— गर्मी के मौसम में वे बगोरी तथा शीतकाल में डुंडा में रहते हैं। आजीविका की दृष्टि से जाड़ समुदाय मुख्यतः पशुपालन, कृषि तथा पारंपरिक करघों पर उनी वस्त्र निर्माण से जुड़ा रहा है।

भाषावैज्ञानिक दृष्टि से जाड़ तिब्बती-बर्मी भाषा परिवार की सदस्य है भारत की जनगणना में इस समुदाय को पृथक श्रेणी में नहीं गिना जाता, क्योंकि उनकी कुल जनसंख्या दस हजार से कम है। बगोरी गाँव के मुखिया श्री भगवान सिंह राणा के अनुसार समुदाय में लगभग 400 परिवार तथा लगभग 2547 सदस्य हैं। भारत सरकार की संकटग्रस्त भाषाओं के संरक्षण एवं सुरक्षा योजना में तथा क्रिस्टोफर मोसले द्वारा संपादित UNESCO के प्रकाशन *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* में भी जाड़ भाषा को भारत के उत्तर क्षेत्र की संकटग्रस्त भाषाओं में सूचीबद्ध किया गया है। भारत-तिब्बत सीमांत क्षेत्र में स्थित हर्षिल घाटी की ऐतिहासिक परिस्थितियों ने यहाँ की जनजातियों, विशेषतः जाड़ (भोटिया) समुदाय, की विशिष्ट सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक पहचान के निर्माण में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है।

वर्तमान समय में जाड़ भाषा का प्रयोग मुख्यतः वृद्ध या उच्च आयु-वर्ग के वक्ताओं तक सीमित रह गया है, जबकि नई पीढ़ी का झुकाव हिंदी तथा अन्य संपर्क-भाषाओं की ओर बढ़ रहा है। परिणामस्वरूप परिवार और समुदाय स्तर पर भाषा का स्वाभाविक अधिग्रहण (natural acquisition) बाधित हो रहा है। अंतरपीढ़ी भाषा संचरण में यह व्यवधान भाषा के दीर्घकालिक अस्तित्व के लिए गंभीर चुनौती उत्पन्न करता है, क्योंकि भाषा के संरक्षण में पीढ़ी-दर-पीढ़ी हस्तांतरण की आवश्यकता होती है। यह लिपि-रहित मौखिक परंपरा पर आधारित भाषा है। सीमित संख्या में बचे वक्ताओं तथा घटते प्रयोग-क्षेत्र के कारण यह भाषा गंभीर संकट की स्थिति में पहुँच चुकी है। अतः इसके संरक्षण, प्रलेखन (documentation) और भाषाई पुनर्जीवन के प्रयास वर्तमान समय की अत्यंत आवश्यक सांस्कृतिक एवं भाषाई प्राथमिकता बन गए हैं। प्रस्तुत शोध पत्र का उद्देश्य इस लुप्तप्राय भाषा की ध्वनि-व्यवस्था का वर्णन एवं विश्लेषण करना है।

2. शोध पद्धति

SPPEL¹ (Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages) परियोजना में कार्य करते समय मेरा ध्यान जाड़ भाषा की ध्वन्यात्मक विशेषताओं की ओर विशेष रूप से आकर्षित हुआ। परन्तु भौगोलिक दूरी तथा क्षेत्रकार्य की सीमाओं के कारण प्रत्यक्ष रूप से स्थल पर जाकर डेटा-संग्रह करना संभव नहीं था। अतः भाषायी आंकड़ों के संकलन के लिए दूरभाष को ही प्रमुख माध्यम के रूप में अपनाया गया। प्रारंभिक बातचीत के दौरान जाड़ भाषा की भाषिक संरचना से संबंधित अनेक महत्वपूर्ण जानकारीयाँ प्राप्त हुईं, जिन्होंने इस भाषा के प्रति मेरी जिज्ञासा और अनुसंधानात्मक रुचि को और अधिक प्रबल किया।

डेटा लेने की इस प्रक्रिया में दो सूचकों के साथ नियमित दूरभाषीय संवाद स्थापित कर शब्दों, वाक्यों एवं जानकारीयों का संकलन ध्वनि-रिकॉर्डिंग के माध्यम से ही किया गया और इसी प्रकार प्राप्त आंकड़ों के आधार पर जाड़ भाषा की ध्वन्यात्मक संरचना का विश्लेषण किया गया।

3. जाड़ की स्वर व्यवस्था

जिन ध्वनियों का उच्चारण मुखविवर से बिना किसी अवरोध के किया जा सकता है उसे स्वर ध्वनि कहा जाता है। न्यूनतम युग्म विश्लेषण के आधार पर इस भाषा में निम्न आठ मूल स्वर प्राप्त हुए जिन सभी के दीर्घ रूप का प्रयोग भी किया जाता है।

	अग्र	मध्य	पश्च
संवृत	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
अर्ध संवृत	<i>e</i>		<i>o</i>
अर्ध विवृत	<i>ɛ</i>	<i>ə</i>	<i>ɔ</i>
विवृत	<i>a</i>		
तालिका 1 : मूल स्वर			

स्वरों के न्यूनतम युग्म एवं निकटतम (minimal pair)

स्वनिम	जाड़ भाषा के शब्द	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/a/ vs /i/ vs /u:/ vs /o/	/tɑ/	बाल	hair
	/ti/	चाकू	knife

	/tʊ:/	लइका	boy
	/tɔ/	गेहूँ	wheat
/a/ vs /u:/ vs /e/ vs /o/	/tsʰa/	नमक	salt
	/tsʰu:/	पानी	water
	/tsʰe/	कलाई	wrist
	/tsʰo/	झील	lake
/a/ vs /i/	/kʰa/	मुँह	mouth
	/kʰi/	कुत्ता	dog
/e/ vs /ɛ/	/gɔdʒe/	सिर	human head
	/gɔdʒɛ/	हँसना	laugh
	/kebo/	खुशी	happiness
	/gɛbo/	बूढ़ा	old male
/u/ vs /u:/	/dun/	सात	seven
	/tsu:n/	छोटा	little
/ə/ vs /u/	/ɲə/	सोना	to sleep
	/ɲul/	मुद्रा	money
/ə/ vs /u/ vs /a/ vs /e/	/tsə/	दक्षिण	south
	/tsu/	दस	ten
	/tsa/	लोहा	iron
	/tse/	जीभ	tongue
/o/ vs /ɔ/	/ʃok/	आना	to come
	/ʃɔk/	बुलाना	to call
/i/ vs /o/	/teri/	कुल्हाड़ी	axe

	/tero/	ऊपर	up
तालिका 2 : न्यूनतम युग्म			

3.1 स्वर गुच्छ

जाड़ भाषा में स्वर गुच्छ (vowel cluster) मिलते हैं, जिससे पता चलता है कि जाड़ भाषा में दो स्वरों का अनुक्रम स्वीकार्य है। इनमें सभी उदाहरण अधिकतर अंत की स्थितियों में ही देखने को मिलते हैं। कतिपय उदाहरण मध्य स्थिति के भी मिले हैं।

जाड़ स्वर गुच्छ	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/aɪ/	बड़ा भाई	elder brother
/aɐ/	जेठ	husband's elder brother
/gjaɐ/	लिखना	to write
/suaɐ/	टोपी	cap
/goeɖa/	पाना	to get
/goe/	आवश्यकता	need
/dʒoe/	बनाना	to built
/ɖoe/	चलना	to walk
/sei/	पृथ्वी	earth
/hei/	वह	he
/keɔ̃/	सोने का हार	kind of gold necklace
/leɔ̃/	बैल	ox
/k ^h eu/	मुँछ	moustache
/ʃu/	अपंग	amputee
/mua/	भौंकना	to bark
/neɪŋ/	जवान लड़की	young female

/ts ^h uo/	भतीजा, भांजा	brother's or sister's son
/tsəe/	काटना	to cut
/t ^h ue/	नहाना	to bathe
/tsuɛ/	मोड़ना	to fold (cloth)
/tsɪo/	चिड़िया	bird
/tsɪu/	मशरूम	mashroom
तालिका 3: स्वर गुच्छ		

3.2 स्वरों की अग्र, मध्य व पश्च स्थिति

जाड़ भाषा में 'ए' एवं 'ऐ' स्वर के अतिरिक्त सभी स्वर अपनी तीनों स्थितियों में प्रयोग किए जाते हैं। संकलित डाटा में 'ए' एवं 'ऐ' की अग्र स्थिति नहीं दृष्टिगत हुई, 'ए' हमें बहुवचन के चिन्ह के रूप में भी मिलता है।

	अग्र	हिन्दी अंग्रेजी अर्थ	मध्य	हिन्दी अंग्रेजी अर्थ	पश्च	हिन्दी अंग्रेजी अर्थ
ə	/əndʒək/	कान (ear)	/əgəl/	लकड़ी की सितकनी (wooden latch)	-	
ʌ	/aləŋ/	कान की बाली (earring)	/bʊlak/	नथ (nose-ring)	/bʊrɔŋma/	सांप (snake)
ɪ	/ɪbi/	दादी / नानी (grand mother)	/kɛrɔŋ/	चीखना (to scream)	/səl/	फर्श (floor)
i	/i/	बड़ी बहन (elder sister)	/heigɔn/	वे (they)	/dʒɔgi/	अंगुली (finger)
ʊ	/ʊl/	मौसा (mother's sister's husband)	/genmʊl/	बूढ़ी (old female)	/mʊgʊl/	कबूतर (pigeon)

u	/u/	चाचा / मौसा (uncle)	/tsu:n/	छोटा (little)	/gɪbu/	चूल्हा (stove)
e	/e/	बहु वचन प्रत्यय (plural marker)	/geri/	खुश (happy)	/gepfoe/	अंतिम (last)
ɛ	-	-	/sɛna/	खिलौना (toy)	/dɔŋdʒɛ/	बजाना (to play instrument)
o	/odʒəm/	इतना (this much)	/lok/	जानवर- भेड़- बकरी (animal- sheep-goat)	/mɛbo/	गरीब (poor)
ɔ	/ɔkle/	गला (neck)	/mɔbe/	बछिया (young cow)	/kəɔ/	कौवा (crow)
तालिका 4:स्वर की स्थिति						

4. जाड़ की व्यंजन व्यवस्था

व्यंजन के न्यूनतम एवं निकटतम युग्म

स्वनिम	जाड़ भाषा के शब्द	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/k/ vs /ts/ vs /t/ vs /tʰ/	/kɔɛ/	लूटना	to rob
	/tsɔɛ/	निचोड़ना	to squeeze
	/tɔɛ/	खोदना	to dig
	/tʰɔɛ/	तोड़ना	to pluck
/kʰ/ vs /b/	/kʰɔɛ/	लाना	to bring
	/bɔje/	बजाना	to play
/n/ vs /ŋ/ vs /ɲ/	/na/	बहू	daughter in law
	/ŋa/	पाँच	five
	/ɲa/	पूँछ	tail
/j/ vs /l/ vs /n/ vs /t/	/jaŋmɔ/	हल्का	light
	/laŋmɔ/	खूबसूरत लड़की	beautiful girl
	/naŋmɔ/	आने वाला कल	tomorrow
	/taŋmɔ/	ठंडा	cold
/ts/ vs /g/ vs /ʃ/	/tsʰɔdʒɛ/	बेचना	to sell
	/gɔdʒɛ/	हँसना	to laugh
	/ʃɔdʒɛ/	बुझाना	to extinguish

/ʃ/ vs /g/	/ʃɛl/	काँच	glass
	/gɛl/	जीत	victory
/ts/ vs /t/ vs /tʃ/	/tsaŋmo/	चालाक	clever
	/tʃaŋmo/	सच	truth
	/taŋmo/	प्राचीन	ancient
/g / vs /ʃ /	/ʃɛləmɪk/	चश्मा	spectacles
	/gɛləmɪk/	आँख की पुतली	eyeball
/d/ vs /g/ vs /l/ vs /n/ vs /s/ vs /ʃ/ vs /t/	/do/	रहना	to live
	/go/	दरवाजा	door
	/lo/	साल	year
	/no/	छोटा भाई	younger brother
	/so/	दाँत	teeth
	/ʃo/	दही	curd
	/to/	रक्षा	deffence
/tʰ/ vs /tsʰ/ vs /tʃ/	/tʰo/	बाँधना	to tie
	/tsʰo/	रंग	colour
	/tʃo/	गेहूँ	wheat
/r/ vs /w/ vs /p/	/rũ/	बकरा	male goat
	/wũ/	दूध	milk
	/pũ/	पेड़	tree
तालिका : 5			

व्यंजन- व्यंजन के न्यूनतम युग्मों के आधार पर हमने जिन जाड़ व्यंजनों को चिन्हित किया है उनकी संख्याँ 26 है।

	द्वयोष्ठ्य	दन्त्य	वत्स्य	तालव्य	मूर्धन्य	कंठ्य	काकल्य
स्पर्श	अल्प/महा	अल्प/महा		अल्प/महा	अल्प/महा	अल्प/महा	
अघोष	<i>p, pʰ</i>	<i>t, tʰ</i>			<i>t, tʰ</i>	<i>k, kʰ</i>	
सघोष	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>			<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>	
स्पर्श संघर्षी							
अघोष			<i>ts, tsʰ</i>				
सघोष							
संघर्षी			<i>dʒ, s, ʃ</i>				<i>h</i>

नासिक्य	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>		<i>ɲ</i>		<i>ŋ</i>	
पार्श्वक		<i>l</i>					
लुण्ठित			<i>r</i>				
अर्द्ध स्वर	<i>w</i>		<i>j</i>				
तालिका 6: व्यंजन							

4.1 व्यंजन गुच्छ- जाड़ भाषा में हमें अग्र एवं मध्य दोनो ही स्थितियों में व्यंजन गुच्छ मिलते हैं।

जाड़	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/dʒaɡun/	वो	those
/dwa/	पत्थर	stone
/gja/	सौ	hundred
/gjae/	लिखना	to write
/gjalɔ/	शोर	noise
/gwa/	प्रधान	headman
/kʰju/	तुम	you
/kʰwa/	दाल का पानी	pulse soup
/kʰwakh/	थैला	pouch
/kwẽ/	जलाना	to bury
/kʲaɡdʒa/	काला नमक	black salt
/lwa/	फेफड़ा	lungs
/njo/	खरीदना	to buy
/okdu/	अस्थमा	asthma
/ɔkle/	गला	neck
/paɡdʒe/	बांस की टोकरी	bamboo basket
/paɡdʒin/	गुथा हुआ आटा	dough
/pja/	चूहा	rat
/rebdʒi/	चौंसठ	sixty-four
/rolba/	सड़ना	to decay
/rɔbdʒa/	सहायता करना	to help
/səbduŋ/	भोजन	meal
/ʃəktəme/	रोज	everyday
/senmu/	नाखून	nail

/surdub/	अंगूठी	ring
/takt ^h α/	आटा	flour
/t ^h ugbα/	लड़ाई करना	to fight
/tɛgənmα/	करी पत्ता	curry leaf
/tugdʒɛ/	खटखटाना	to knock
तालिका 7: व्यंजन गुच्छ		

4.3 व्यंजन द्वित्व

इस भाषा में द्वित्व व्यंजन के भी अनेक उदाहरण मिलते हैं -

जाड़ शब्द	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/äts ^h obbua/	ताई	Father's elder brother's wife
/dʒəmm/	समय	time
/kərr/	गाय का दूध	Cow milk
/ləmm/	रास्ता	way
/mərr/	घी	ghee
/p ^h ulli/	नाक की कील	Nose pin
/rəppe/	सब	all
/tənnē/	मज़बूत	strong
/mikkū/	भौंहे	Eyebrow
तालिका 8: द्वित्व व्यंजन		

4.4 ध्वनिक्रम विन्यास

प्रत्येक भाषा में स्वर और व्यंजनों के जुड़ने के क्रम के नियम निश्चित होते हैं जिन्हें ध्वनिक्रम विन्यास कहा जाता है निम्न तालिका:9 में जाड़ की ध्वनियों के नियमों को उदाहरण सहित प्रस्तुत किया गया है-

ध्वनिक्रम विन्यास	जाड़ शब्द	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ

VV	/aɪ/, /ae/, /oɪ/	भाई, जेठ, मौसा	brother, husband's elder brother, mother's sister's husband
CV	/tɪ/ , /ʃa/	चाकू, माँस	knife, meat
CVC	/mɪn/, /hɪn/	नाम, है	name, is
VCV	/ani/, /aba/	सास, पिता	spouse's mother, father
CVV	/mɔɪ/, /hɔɪ/	भैंस, वह	buffalo, he
CCV	/ʃwa/, /kwɛ/	जौ, जलाना	barley, to bury
CVCC	/tʰenn/	खींचना	to stretch
CVCCV	/senmu/	नाखून	nail
CVCCV	/ʃikbo/	बदमाश	naughty

इन विन्यासों के आधार पर कुछ महत्वपूर्ण निष्कर्ष सामने आते हैं—

1. **स्वर से आरंभ होने वाले ध्वनिक्रम** — जैसे VV और VCV — यह दर्शाते हैं कि जाड़ भाषा में स्वर-प्रारंभिक ध्वनिक्रम स्वीकार्य हैं।
2. **सामान्य संरचना (CV, CVC)** — ये सबसे आधारभूत और प्रचलित संरचनाएँ हैं, जो भाषा की मूल ध्वन्यात्मक संरचना को सूचित करती हैं।
3. **दीर्घ स्वर एवं स्वर-गुच्छ (CVV, VV)** — यह संकेत करते हैं कि द्विस्वर अनुक्रम या स्वर-दीर्घता ध्वनिक्रम-स्तर पर मान्य है।
4. **व्यंजन-गुच्छ (CCV, CVCC, CVCCV)** — इन विन्यासों की उपस्थिति यह दर्शाती है कि जाड़ भाषा जटिल व्यंजन-संयोजनों को भी स्वीकार करती है, विशेषतः प्रारंभिक और अंतिम स्थितियों में।

अतः जाड़ भाषा की ध्वनिक्रम विन्यास सरल (CV) से लेकर अपेक्षाकृत जटिल (CVCCV) तक है।

4.5 अनुनासिकीकरण

अनुनासिक ध्वनियों के माध्यम से जाड़ शब्दों में सार्थक अंतर देखने को मिलता है। जाड़ भाषा में अ, इ, ई एवं ए ध्वनियों में अनुनासिकीकरण नहीं प्राप्त होता है। इसके अतिरिक्त सभी स्वरों में अनुनासिकीकरण मिलता है।

जाड़ शब्द	हिन्दी अर्थ	अंग्रेजी अर्थ
/pa/	गाय	cow
/pā/	पेड़	night tree

/dɔ/	है/था	is/was
/dɔ̃/	मारना	to beat
/lo/	साल	year
/lõ/	उठना	to get up (aries)
/go/	दरवाजा	door
/gõ/	रात	night
/ɲjũ/	सूरज	sun
/tʰəũ/	पतला	thin
/tsʰəũ/	भतीजी	brother's daughter
/kwɛ/	जलाना	to bury
/geõ/	मासूम	innocent
/lap tɔ/	बात करना	to talk
तालिका : 10		

5. विश्लेषण एवं निष्कर्ष

प्रस्तुत अध्ययन के आधार पर यह स्पष्ट होता है कि जाड़ भाषा में कुल आठ (8) मौलिक मौखिक स्वर-स्वनिम विद्यमान हैं, जो अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं। अर्थात् इन स्वरों में सूक्ष्म परिवर्तन से शब्दार्थ में स्पष्ट भिन्नता उत्पन्न होती है। यह तथ्य जाड़ भाषा की स्वर-प्रणाली को स्वनिमिक दृष्टि से संगठित एवं कार्यात्मक सिद्ध करता है।

इसके अतिरिक्त, जाड़ भाषा में स्वर-दीर्घता (vowel length) भी एक महत्वपूर्ण ध्वन्यात्मक एवं स्वनिमिक विशेषता है। ह्रस्व और दीर्घ स्वरों का भेद केवल ध्वन्यात्मक स्तर तक सीमित नहीं है, बल्कि अनेक प्रसंगों में ध्वनि बदलने से शब्द का अर्थ भी बदल जाता है। उपलब्ध भाषिक प्रमाणों के आधार पर जाड़ भाषा में तीन दीर्घ स्वर /u:/, /o:/, /a:/ पाए जाते हैं। नासिक्यकरण (nasalization) भी जाड़ की स्वर-प्रणाली का एक विशिष्ट अंग है। नासिक्य स्वरों का प्रयोग अर्थ-भेदक भूमिका निभाता है, जिससे यह स्पष्ट होता है कि नासिक्यकरण केवल अनुनासिक ध्वन्यात्मक परिवर्तन नहीं, बल्कि स्वनिमिक महत्व रखता है। जाड़ भाषा में चार नासिक्य स्वर /ã/, /ã:/, /õ/, /õ:/ प्रमाणित होते हैं।

संकलित भाषायी आंकड़ों के आधार पर यह देखा गया कि स्वर गुच्छों के अधिकांश उदाहरण पद-अंत (word-final position) में प्राप्त होते हैं। इससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि जाड़ भाषा की शब्द-संरचना में अंतिम स्थिति में द्विस्वर अनुक्रम की स्वीकृति अपेक्षाकृत अधिक है।

यद्यपि स्वर गुच्छों की मध्य (word-medial) स्थिति में उपस्थिति अत्यंत सीमित है, तथापि एक-दो उदाहरण ऐसे भी प्राप्त हुए हैं जो यह दर्शाते हैं कि जाड़ भाषा में मध्य स्थान पर भी द्विस्वर अनुक्रम पूर्णतः निषिद्ध नहीं है।

व्यंजन के न्यूनतम युग्मों (minimal pairs) के व्यवस्थित विश्लेषण के आधार पर जाड़ भाषा में कुल 26 (छब्बीस) स्वतंत्र व्यंजन-ध्वनियाँ चिन्हित की गई हैं। जाड़ भाषा में व्यंजन गुच्छ अग्र (word-initial) तथा मध्य (word-medial) — दोनों स्थितियों में प्राप्त होते हैं। यह तथ्य दर्शाता है कि भाषा की अक्षर-संरचना (syllable structure) अपेक्षाकृत जटिल है और प्रारंभिक तथा मध्य स्थानों पर संयुक्त व्यंजन-समूहों को स्वीकार करती है। अग्र स्थिति में व्यंजन गुच्छों की उपस्थिति यह संकेत देती है कि शब्दों की आरंभिक संरचना में भी संयुक्त व्यंजनों का उच्चारण सहज है, जबकि मध्य स्थिति में ये गुच्छ प्रायः दो शब्दांशों के संयोग अथवा एक ही शब्दांश के अंतर्गत पाए जाते हैं।

अतः निष्कर्षतः कहा जा सकता है कि जाड़ भाषा की स्वर-व्यवस्था बहु-स्तरीय संरचना से युक्त है, जिसमें मौलिक मौखिक स्वर, दीर्घता तथा नासिक्यकरण—तीनों ही स्वनिमिक स्तर पर सक्रिय एवं अर्थ-निर्धारक भूमिका निभाते हैं। यह स्वर-प्रणाली जाड़ भाषा की समग्र ध्वन्यात्मक संरचना का एक सुदृढ़ एवं कार्यात्मक अंग है। जाड़ भाषा में 8 मूल स्वर हैं, जिनमें से कुछ में दीर्घता तथा नासिक्यकरण स्वनिमिकों के रूप में कुल मिलाकर 15 स्वर-स्वनिम प्रमाणित होते हैं। जाड़ भाषा की ध्वन्यात्मक संरचना का यह अध्ययन न केवल इसके भाषिक स्वरूप को समझने में सहायक है, बल्कि इस संकटग्रस्त भाषा के प्रलेखन, संरक्षण तथा भावी भाषावैज्ञानिक अनुसंधान के लिए भी एक आधार प्रदान करता है।

आभार

शोध-पत्र को पूरा करने के लिए मैं अजय कुमार सिंह, शोध छात्र, भाषाविज्ञान विभाग, लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय एवं अंजना रमोला, जाड़ भाषाभाषी का विशेष रूप से धन्यवाद देना चाहूँगी। मैं भारतीय भाषा संस्थान, मैसूर के प्रति भी अपना आभार प्रकट करती हूँ जिन्होंने SPPEL प्रोजेक्ट के अंतर्गत भाषाविज्ञान विभाग लखनऊ के माध्यम से मुझे पूर्व में इस कार्य को करने अवसर प्रदान

किया था, साथ ही मैं अपनी मार्गदर्शिका डॉ. कविता रस्तोगी के प्रति भी बहुत आभारी हूँ जिनके संरक्षण में मुझे भाषाविज्ञान विषय को गहन रूप से जानने का अवसर मिला।

सहायक ग्रंथ सूची

सुरेश ममगाँई, मध्य हिमालय की जाड़ जनजाति का सांस्कृतिक संघर्ष.साहित्य सहकार प्रकाशन दिल्ली.

डॉ कविता रस्तोगी, समसामयिक भाषाविज्ञान, सुलभ प्रकाशन लखनऊ.

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भाषाई पहचान के रूप में घुमंतु समुदाय कलंदर की गुप्त पारसी भाषा

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शोध सार

यह शोध-पत्र घुमंतु कलंदर समुदाय द्वारा प्रयुक्त 'पारसी' नामक गुप्त सांकेतिक भाषा का समाज भाषा वैज्ञानिक विश्लेषण प्रस्तुत करता है। पारसी भाषा को एक स्वतंत्र भाषा न मानकर एक सांकेतिक रूपांतरण प्रणाली के रूप में देखा गया है, जिसका उद्देश्य सामुदायिक गोपनीयता, सामाजिक नियंत्रण और सांस्कृतिक निरंतरता को बनाए रखना है। औपनिवेशिक काल में Criminal Tribes Act¹ के अंतर्गत अपराधी जाति घोषित किए जाने की ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमि में ऐसी गुप्त भाषाओं के विकास की संभावना पर भी विचार किया गया है। शोध में ध्वन्यात्मक, रूपात्मक और अर्थगत स्तरों पर पारसी भाषा की विशेषताओं जैसे- प्रारंभिक ध्वनि-प्रतिस्थापन, कृत्रिम प्रत्यय प्रणाली, पूर्ण प्रतिस्थापन, अर्थ-परिवर्तन तथा सांकेतिक प्रयोग का विश्लेषण किया गया है। मध्यप्रदेश के क्षेत्रीय सर्वेक्षण तथा मध्य प्रदेश जनजातीय संग्रहालय की 'घुमंतु भाषा शब्दकोश परियोजना' से प्राप्त सामग्री के आधार पर यह अध्ययन पारसी भाषा के संरक्षण एवं प्रलेखीकरण की आवश्यकता को रेखांकित करता है।

बीज शब्द : पारसी भाषा, कलंदर समुदाय, घुमंतु समाज, गुप्त भाषा, भाषाई पहचान, समाजभाषाविज्ञान, प्रलेखीकरण

1. प्रस्तावना

'पारसी' भाषा घुमंतु एवं अर्ध-घुमंतु समुदायों द्वारा प्रयुक्त एक गुप्त सांकेतिक संप्रेषण-प्रणाली है। यह भाषा इन समुदायों की विशिष्ट सामाजिक एवं सांस्कृतिक पहचान के संरक्षण में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाती है। वस्तुतः यह एक प्रकार की गुप्त बोली (argot) या क्रिप्टोलेक्ट है, जिसका प्रयोग समुदाय के सदस्य मुख्यतः अपने आंतरिक संप्रेषण के लिए करते हैं। इस प्रकार की भाषा का उद्देश्य यह होता है कि संवाद का वास्तविक आशय बाहरी व्यक्तियों के लिए सहज रूप से बोधगम्य न हो सके। इस कारण पारसी भाषा न केवल संप्रेषण का माध्यम है, बल्कि समुदाय की सामूहिक पहचान और आंतरिक एकता को भी सुदृढ़ करने का कार्य करती है।

मध्य प्रदेश के सभी घुमंतु समुदाय अपनी भाषा को पारसी नाम से अभिहित करते हैं, जैसे- बंजारा समुदाय- गौरमाटी या पारसी, बेड़िया समुदाय - पारसी, कुचबंंधिया समुदाय - गिहारा पारसी, पारधी समुदाय - पारधी पारसी, नट समुदाय - नटी या बदनिया पारसी, बांछड़ा समुदाय - भांतू या पारसी, कालबेलिया समुदाय- नाथ और गोरिया पारसी का प्रयोग किया जाता है। यहाँ यह तथ्य विशेष रूप से उल्लेखनीय है कि सभी समुदाय दूसरे घुमंतू समुदायों द्वारा प्रयुक्त पारसी भाषा रूप के माध्यम से बोलने वाले के समुदाय की न केवल पहचान कर लेते हैं, बल्कि उसकी भाषा को भी सहजता से समझ लेते हैं।

सभी पारसी भाषा रूपों का व्याकरण स्थानीय प्रचलित भाषा (हिंदी या क्षेत्रीय बोली) पर आधारित है, किंतु शब्दावली, ध्वनि एवं संरचना में योजनाबद्ध परिवर्तन दृष्टिगत होते हैं। विद्वानों का मत है कि औपनिवेशिक काल में सामाजिक नियंत्रण और निगरानी की परिस्थितियों में इन भाषाओं का विकास सुरक्षा-उपाय के रूप में हुआ।

2. अध्ययन के उद्देश्य

प्रस्तुत शोध पत्र का उद्देश्य निम्नलिखित चार बिंदुओं का परीक्षण करना है -

- कलंदर समुदाय की पारसी भाषा की संरचनात्मक विशेषताओं का विश्लेषण करना।
- पारसी भाषा के सामाजिक एवं सांस्कृतिक कार्यों की पहचान करना।
- भाषा-संपर्क के प्रभावों (अरबी, फ़ारसी, उर्दू, हिंदी, अंग्रेज़ी) का परीक्षण करना।
- पारसी भाषा के संरक्षण एवं प्रलेखीकरण की आवश्यकता को रेखांकित करना।

3. शोध प्रणाली

यह अध्ययन क्षेत्रीय सर्वेक्षण पद्धति पर आधारित है। मध्यप्रदेश और पंजाब के दो कलंदर समूहों के पाँच सूचकों (40 साल से 60 साल की आयु के मध्य) से मौखिक साक्षात्कार के माध्यम से शब्द-संग्रह और वाक्य-संग्रह कर अध्ययन हेतु सामग्री संकलित की गई। यादृच्छिक चयन पद्धति के आधार पर स्त्री एवं पुरुष सूचकों का चयन किया गया। साथ ही 'घुमंतू भाषा शब्दकोश परियोजना' के अंतर्गत संकलित डिजिटल शब्द-सामग्री (लिखित एवं ऑडियो) का विश्लेषण किया गया। इस अध्ययन में वर्णनात्मक एवं विश्लेषणात्मक पद्धति अपनाई गई है।

4. सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक संदर्भ

कलंदर समुदाय ऐतिहासिक रूप से भालू और बंदर का खेल दिखाने तथा जादू-करतब प्रस्तुत करने के लिए प्रसिद्ध रहा है। वर्तमान सामाजिक-आर्थिक परिवर्तनों के कारण उनकी आजीविका में विविधता आई है। स्वतंत्रता के उपरांत अपराधी जाति का 'टैग' तो उन पर से हट गया, परंतु भालू का खेल दिखाने पर प्रतिबंध लगने के कारण ज्यादातर कलंदरों ने घुम्मकड़ जीवन छोड़कर स्थायी घर बना लिये हैं। वर्तमान समय में सामाजिक-आर्थिक परिवर्तनों के कारण कलंदर समुदाय ने अपनी आजीविका के साधनों में

विविधता अपनाई है। अब वे विभिन्न स्थानों पर घूमते हुए डेरा लगाकर जड़ी-बूटियाँ, उपरतों की बिक्री तथा अन्य वैकल्पिक व्यवसायों से भी अपनी आजीविका अर्जित कर रहे हैं। समुदाय स्वयं को 'बारह वाले' समूह का अंग मानता है तथा जाति-पंचायत व्यवस्था में पारसी शब्दावली का व्यापक प्रयोग करता है। विवाह परंपरा में धर्मांतरण के पश्चात निकाह प्रथा अपनाई गई, किंतु हल्दी, गठजोड़, माँग भराई आदि पारंपरिक शब्द अब भी उनके बीच प्रचलित हैं।

5. भाषिक विश्लेषण

5.1. ध्वन्यात्मक विशेषताएँ

प्रारंभिक ध्वनि प्रतिस्थापन- पारसी भाषा का प्रयोग करते समय कलंदर समुदाय का वक्ता शब्द की आरम्भिक ध्वनि अथवा अक्षर परिवर्तित कर देता है, जैसे –

हिंदी शब्द	कलंदर शब्द
मुर्गी	चुर्गी
बंदर	जूंदर
कबूतर	नबूतर
कूड़ा	घूड़ा
मंदिर	झंदिर
किताब	जिताब
कागज	झागज
मिठाई	सिठाई
सब्जी	नब्जी
ऊपर	खुप्पर
बोतल	सोत्तल

उपरोक्त सभी में शब्द की पहली ध्वनि बदल गई किन्तु शेष शब्दांश यथावत हैं जबकि अंतिम दो शब्दों में पहली ध्वनि बदलने के साथ- साथ व्यंजन द्वित्वीकरण की प्रक्रिया दृष्टिगत होती है।

यह प्रक्रिया भाषा को गोपनीय बनाए रखने का साधन है।

5.2. रूपात्मक विशेषताएँ

एकत्रित सामग्री के विश्लेषण से स्पष्ट होता है कि इस भाषा रूप में मूल शब्दों के साथ / -मा/, /-एसर /, /-ची / और / -न्दरा/ प्रत्यय जोड़कर नए रूप निर्मित किए जाते हैं, जैसे-

हिंदी शब्द

ऊँचा

नीचा

थोड़ा

बाल

कान

गाल

दांत

घड़ी

लोहा

मुंह

कलंदर शब्द

खुचमा

निचमा

थुडमा

बलेसर

कनेसर

गलेसर

दतेसर

घड़ची

लोहान्दरा

मुहाँन्दरा

इसी प्रकार क्रियाओं के निर्माण में भी विशेष प्रकार का प्रत्यय का प्रयोग दृष्टिगोचर होता है। संकलित उदाहरणों से यह ज्ञात होता है कि क्रियात्मक रूपों में /-ईप/ प्रत्यय के संयोग से नए रूप निर्मित किए जाते हैं। इस प्रक्रिया के उदाहरण निम्नलिखित हैं—

हिन्दी क्रिया

जानना

सोचना

झुकना

पूछना

कलंदर क्रिया

जनीपना

सुचीपना

झुकीपना

पुछीपना

5.3 अर्थगत विशेषताएँ

(क) पूर्ण प्रतिस्थापन

इसभाषा की एक विशेषता पूर्ण प्रतिस्थापन की प्रवृत्ति है, जिसके अंतर्गत सामान्य सामाजिक जीवन में प्रचलित शब्दों के स्थान पर विशिष्ट पारसी शब्दों का प्रयोग किया जाता है, जैसे-

हिंदी शब्द

कलंदर शब्द

मांद

डांग

पेट	सिकम
छोटा	निक्का
भेड़	गाडर
सांप	मिसियड़ा, बेलिया
परिवार	मोहार
पैसे	हरसे
बूढ़ा	खुल्डा
चुगली	गीवत
रुपया	गबर

(ख) अर्थ परिवर्तन

भाषा की गोपनीयता बनाए रखने के लिए कई बार किसी शब्द को उसके मूल अर्थ से भिन्न, सांकेतिक अथवा विस्तारित अर्थ में प्रयुक्त किया जाता है। शब्द का रूप समान रहते हुए भी उसका आशय संदर्भानुसार परिवर्तित दिखाई पड़ता है, जैसे -

‘नूकल’ → पुलिस/कुत्ता (पुलिस के संदर्भ में इसका उपयोग अपशब्द या कभी कभी पुलिस के आ जाने पर चेतावनी देने के तौर पर ही किया जाता है।)

‘नारी’ → जूता

(ग) रंग आधारित संकेत

भाषा और संस्कृति के अंतर्संबंध में रंगों का विशेष महत्व रहा है। अनेक समुदायों में रंग केवल दृश्य अनुभव तक सीमित न रहकर संकेतात्मक अर्थों को भी व्यक्त करते हैं। कलंदर समुदाय की पारसी भाषा में भी रंगों का प्रयोग प्रत्यक्ष अर्थ के अतिरिक्त सांकेतिक रूप में किया जाता है, उदाहरणार्थ-

हिंदी	कलंदर
खून बहना	सुरखा बहीपना

यहाँ सुरखा शब्द का संबंध ‘सुर्ख’ (लाल रंग) से है और चूँकि रक्त का रंग लाल होता है, इसलिए पारसी भाषा में ‘सुरखा’ का प्रयोग रक्त या खून के संकेतार्थ किया गया है।

(घ) सांकेतिक पद

कलंदर समुदाय की पारसी भाषा में अनेक ऐसे शब्द और पद प्रचलित हैं, जिनका अर्थ सामान्य भाषा से भिन्न तथा समुदाय-विशेष की सामाजिक समझ पर निर्भर करता है। इन शब्दों का प्रयोग प्रत्यक्ष अर्थ के स्थान पर सांकेतिक रूप में मिलता है, जिससे भाषा की गोपनीयता बनी रहती है और सामुदायिक संप्रेषण बाह्य समाज से सुरक्षित रहता है। विशेषतः सामाजिक व्यवहार, न्याय व्यवस्था तथा नैतिक मानदंडों से जुड़े प्रसंगों में ऐसे शब्दों का व्यापक प्रयोग देखने को मिलता है, उदाहरणार्थ-

गन्दी लकड़ी — स्त्री-पुरुष के बीच अवैध संबंध को सूचित करने वाला सांकेतिक पद।

कूड़ा न्याओ — पंचों द्वारा दिए गए न्याय को वादी या प्रतिवादी द्वारा पक्षपातपूर्ण मानना।

थाना तलासी — संपत्ति का लेखा-जोखा या औपचारिक जाँच।

5.4 भाषा-संपर्क का प्रभाव

कलंदर पारसी में अरबी-फ़ारसी मूल के शब्दों का प्रभाव स्पष्ट है वर्तमान में इनकी भाषा में रिलेक्सिफिकेशन (Relaxification)² की प्रक्रिया भी मिलती है परिणामतः अपनी भाषा में शब्द होने के बावजूद उर्दू भाषा के शब्दों का अधिकाधिक प्रयोग करना, जैसे- आग के लिए अगेसरी शब्द पारसी में होने के बावजूद उर्दू शब्द आतस एवं भालू के लिए झब्बर शब्द होने के बावजूद उर्दू या फ़ारसी शब्द खिरस का प्रयोग करना। इनके प्रयोग में उर्दू ध्वनियों (फ़, ज़, ख़) के उच्चारण में सरलीकरण भी देखने को मिलता है, जैसे-

फ़ाख़्ता > फाक्ता

ज़ेर-ज़बर > जेर जबर

ख़ाला > खाला

नाद फ़रियाद > नाद फरियाद रूप में उच्चारण किया जाना।

आधुनिक हिंदी एवं अंग्रेज़ी के अनेक शब्द (बैंक, बजट, बोनस, स्टील आदि) भी सहजता से भाषा में समाहित हो रहे हैं।

5.5. गैर-मौखिक संप्रेषण

हाव-भाव, संकेत एवं नेत्र-इशारों का प्रयोग भी पारसी संप्रेषण प्रणाली का महत्वपूर्ण अंग है, जो गुप्तता को और सुदृढ़ करता है।

6. प्रलेखीकरण एवं संरक्षण

मध्य प्रदेश जनजातीय संग्रहालय द्वारा तैयार डिजिटल शब्दकोश में पारसी शब्दों को ऑडियो सहित संरक्षित किया गया है। यह प्रयास भाषा के ध्वन्यात्मक और सांस्कृतिक पक्ष के संरक्षण में सहायक है।

7. निष्कर्ष

प्रस्तुत अध्ययन से स्पष्ट होता है कि कलंदर समुदाय की 'पारसी' भाषा एक स्वतंत्र व्याकरणिक भाषा न होकर स्थानीय भाषिक संरचना पर आधारित एक सुविचारित सांकेतिक रूपांतरण प्रणाली है। इसकी मूल शक्ति इसके सामाजिक प्रयोजन में निहित है। यह भाषा समुदाय की आंतरिक एकता, पारस्परिक विश्वास और सामुदायिक पहचान को सुदृढ़ करती है।

ऐतिहासिक दृष्टि से देखा जाए तो औपनिवेशिक काल में Criminal Tribes Act 1871 के अंतर्गत घुमंतु समुदायों को संदेह की दृष्टि से देखे जाने और प्रशासनिक निगरानी के वातावरण ने ऐसी गुप्त भाषाओं की आवश्यकता को और अधिक प्रबल किया। परिणामस्वरूप पारसी भाषा केवल संप्रेषण का माध्यम नहीं रही, बल्कि सुरक्षा, प्रतिरोध और अस्तित्व-रक्षा का उपकरण भी बनी।

भाषिक स्तर पर पारसी भाषा में ध्वन्यात्मक प्रतिस्थापन, कृत्रिम प्रत्यय-प्रयोग, पूर्ण शब्द-प्रतिस्थापन, अर्थ-परिवर्तन, रंग-आधारित संकेत तथा सांकेतिक पदों का प्रयोग यह दर्शाता है कि यह प्रणाली अत्यंत संगठित और योजनाबद्ध है। यह गुप्तता को बनाए रखते हुए समुदाय के भीतर अर्थ व्यवस्था सम्बन्धी-साझेदारी का निर्माण करती है। विशेषतः जाति-पंचायत, न्याय-व्यवस्था, विवाह-संस्कार और व्यवसाय से संबंधित शब्दावली में पारसी का सघन प्रयोग यह प्रमाणित करता है कि यह भाषा सामाजिक संरचना के केंद्रीय तंत्र से जुड़ी हुई है।

भाषा-संपर्क के प्रभाव भी इस अध्ययन में स्पष्ट रूप से परिलक्षित होते हैं। अरबी, फ़ारसी और उर्दू मूल के शब्दों का प्रवेश तथा आधुनिक हिंदी और अंग्रेज़ी शब्दों का समावेश यह दर्शाता है कि पारसी एक गतिशील प्रणाली है, जो बदलते सामाजिक परिवेश के साथ स्वयं को अनुकूलित करती रही है। तथापि, स्थायी निवास, वैकल्पिक आजीविका, शिक्षा के प्रसार तथा नगरीय समाज के साथ बढ़ते संपर्क के कारण पारसी भाषा का प्रयोग वर्तमान में सीमित होता जा रहा है। नई पीढ़ी में इसकी सक्रियता घट रही है, जिससे यह भाषा विलुप्तप्राय स्थिति की ओर अग्रसर प्रतीत होती है।

इस संदर्भ में मध्य प्रदेश के जनजातीय लोककला एवं बोली विकास अकादमी मध्यप्रदेश द्वारा किया गया डिजिटल प्रलेखीकरण प्रयास महत्वपूर्ण है। ध्वन्यात्मक (ऑडियो) और लिखित रूप में शब्दों का संरक्षण न केवल भाषिक धरोहर को सुरक्षित करता है, बल्कि भविष्य के शोधार्थियों के लिए प्रामाणिक सामग्री भी उपलब्ध कराता है।

अतः यह कहा जा सकता है कि कलंदर समुदाय की पारसी भाषा केवल एक गुप्त संप्रेषण प्रणाली नहीं, बल्कि उनकी सांस्कृतिक स्मृति, सामाजिक संगठन और ऐतिहासिक अनुभवों की जीवंत अभिव्यक्ति है। इसके संरक्षण के लिए व्यवस्थित प्रलेखीकरण, तुलनात्मक अध्ययन, और समुदाय-आधारित भाषिक जागरूकता कार्यक्रमों की आवश्यकता है, ताकि यह विशिष्ट भाषाई पहचान आने वाली पीढ़ियों तक सुरक्षित रह सके।

- 1- Criminal Tribes Act 1871 '*The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was a colonial-era law in British India that branded over 200 entire communities as "hereditary criminals" based on caste and occupation.*'
- 2- '*Relexification*' refers to the linguistic process whereby a language substitutes most or all of its vocabulary with words taken from another language, while the underlying grammatical structure of the original language remains largely unchanged

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डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे से संवाद

साक्षात्कारकर्ता – डॉ. विष्णु कुमार सिंह



परिचय- डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे प्रतिष्ठित शोधकर्ता, लेखक और लोक संस्कृति के विशेषज्ञ हैं। उन्होंने लगभग तीन दशक से अधिक समय तक मध्यप्रदेश की आदिवासी लोक-परम्पराओं, मौखिक साहित्य और अनछुई संस्कृतियों का दस्तावेजीकरण और सहेजने में अपना जीवन समर्पित किया है।

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे का जन्म 21 मार्च 1967 को मध्यप्रदेश के हरदा जिले में हुआ था। आपने हिंदी साहित्य में एम. ए और पीएचडी की। छात्र जीवन से ही आपका झुकाव क्षेत्रीय शोध, लेखन और कविता लेखन की ओर रहा। डॉ. पारे लम्बे समय तक शासकीय हमीदिया कला एवं

वाणिज्य महाविद्यालय, भोपाल में हिंदी के प्रोफेसर के रूप में अपनी सेवाएं दीं।

लोक और जनजातीय संस्कृति आपका गहरा अनुभव है। सम्प्रति आप लोक कला एवं बोली विकास अकादमी, भोपाल के निदेशक पद पर कार्यरत हैं। निदेशक पद पर रहते हुए आपने जनजातीय कलाकारों को मंच देने और उनके साहित्य को प्रकाशित करवाने में बड़ी भूमिका निभाई। डॉ. पारे ने मध्य प्रदेश की कोरकू, भील, भारिया और गोंड जैसी जनजातियों के मध्य रहकर उनकी देव परम्पराओं और लोक गाथाओं को पुस्तकों के रूप दिया। उनके द्वारा लिखित और सम्पादित प्रमुख ग्रन्थ हैं: **जनजातीय संस्कृति ग्रन्थ**: कोरकू- जीवन राग, कोरो आना- कोरकू जनजाति की कथाएँ, कोरकू देवलोक, गोंड देवलोक, भील देवलोक, भारिया देवलोक और गाथा गायक- हरबोले। **क्षेत्रीय आख्यान**: निमाणी गाथा रायसल, बुंदेलखंड के भित्तिचित्र और काठी: निमाणी आख्यान। **धार्मिक और पौराणिक ग्रन्थ**: श्रीराम: महात्म्य और महिमा, आदि शक्ति: महात्म्य और महिमा, भगवान शिव: महात्म्य और महिमा, त्रिवेणी के लोकदेव, श्री गणेश महात्म्य और महिमा, श्री विष्णु: महात्म्य और महिमा, श्री हनुमान: महात्म्य और महिमा **कुछ अन्य पुस्तकें**: वाद्य- लोकभावना के सनातनी संगी, हरदा : मध्यप्रदेश में स्वतंत्रता संग्राम **प्रतिनिधि कविताएँ**: आत्मा की गुल्लक, बच्चे, दरख्त, गाय और हर बार नए साल की तरह

पुरस्कार और सम्मान: साहित्य और संस्कृति में डॉ. पारे के निरंतर और अतुलनीय योगदान के लिए नानाजी देशमुख पुरस्कार से सम्मानित किया गया। आपकी कृति 'निमाणी गाथा रायसल' के लिए मध्य प्रदेश साहित्य अकादमी द्वारा लोक साहित्य के प्रतिष्ठित 'ईसुरी सम्मान' से सम्मानित किया गया है।

प्रश्न: लोक कला एवं बोली विकास अकादमी द्वारा विमुक्त, घुमंतू एवं अर्ध-घुमंतू समुदायों की भाषाओं के संरक्षण हेतु किए जा रहे प्रयासों की वैचारिक पृष्ठभूमि क्या रही है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: जनजातीय बोली विकास अकादमी लगभग चार दशकों से कार्यरत है। आरंभिक काल में इसका ध्यान जनजातीय एवं लोक भाषाओं के सांस्कृतिक अध्ययन, प्रलेखन और ध्वन्यांकन पर केंद्रित रहा। जब मैंने कार्यभार ग्रहण किया, तब मध्यप्रदेश की सात प्रमुख जनजातियों और पाँच जनपदों पर निरन्तरता में काम हो रहा था। किंतु राज्य की 51 विमुक्त, घुमंतू और अर्ध-घुमंतू जनजातियों पर बहुत कम कार्य हुआ था।

वसुदेवा हरबोला समुदायों पर अध्ययन करते हुए मुझे लगा कि इनकी भाषाओं और सांस्कृतिक परंपराओं पर भी गंभीर कार्य होना चाहिए। इन समुदायों को अतीत में 'एक्स-क्रिमिनल ट्राइब' कहा गया, किंतु इनके भीतर समृद्ध कला, शिल्प और भाषिक संपदा विद्यमान है। घुमंतू समुदायों की सबसे बड़ी पहचान उनकी भाषा है — वे जहाँ भी चले जाएँ, स्थानीयता तो अपना लेते हैं, पर आपसी संवाद अपनी मूल भाषा में ही करते हैं।

प्रश्न: अकादमी और *SEL संस्था* के सहयोग से "टॉकिंग डिक्शनरी" की संकल्पना कैसे विकसित हुई?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: लोक और जनजातीय भाषाएँ तेजी से अपनी पहचान खो रही हैं। इस समस्या पर हमने मांडू में "घुमंतू समुदायों की भाषिक सम्पदा" विषय पर संगोष्ठी आयोजित की थी। इसमें पद्मश्री अन्विता अब्बी जी और पद्मश्री गिरीश प्रभुणे जैसे विद्वान शामिल हुए। वहीं से यह विचार आया कि संकटग्रस्त भाषाओं के संरक्षण हेतु नई तकनीकी दिशा अपनाई जाए।

अन्विता जी ने हमें प्रो. कविता रस्तोगी (SEL संस्था) को जोड़ने का सुझाव दिया। उनसे चर्चा कर हमने दो वर्ष पूर्व यह परियोजना शुरू की। प्रारंभ में पाँच भाषाएँ— पारधी, बंजारा, गाडुलिया लोहार, कुचबंदिया और बेड़िया— चयनित की गईं। शब्द-संग्रह का कार्य स्थानीय अध्येताओं के माध्यम से किया गया, जिसे IPA प्रणाली एवं ऑडियो रिकॉर्डिंग द्वारा संरक्षित किया गया और अब वह ऑनलाइन रूप में उपलब्ध है। इससे भाषाओं का संरक्षण एक व्यवहार्य और आधुनिक स्वरूप में संभव हुआ है।

प्रश्न: मौखिक परंपरा आधारित भाषाओं व लोककथाओं के दस्तावेजीकरण में तकनीक की क्या भूमिका है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: तकनीक की भूमिका अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है। हमारा समाज मूलतः वाचिक परंपरा पर आधारित रहा है। जब शिक्षा प्रणाली लिखित माध्यम में बदली, तो मौखिकता का प्रवाह बाधित हुआ। पहले शब्दकोश केवल शब्द और अर्थ तक सीमित थे, किंतु ध्वन्यांकन और रिकॉर्डिंग ने उन्हें जीवंत बना दिया। मुझे लगता है

कि किसी भाषा के बहुत से शब्द केवल ध्वनि नहीं, बल्कि भंगिमा और आंगिक चेष्टा से भी अर्थपूर्ण होते हैं। इसलिए संरक्षण का अगला चरण यह होना चाहिए कि कथाएँ, गीत और उच्चारण आडियो-वीडियो स्वरूप में भी संरक्षित हों, ताकि भाषा अपनी भाव-संपन्नता के साथ जीवित रहे।

प्रश्न: वैश्वीकरण और आधुनिकता के दबाव में लोक भाषाओं के समक्ष कौन-सी चुनौतियाँ हैं?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: सबसे बड़ी चुनौती मानसिक है — विश्वविद्यालयी शिक्षा ने लोगों में यह भावना भर दी है कि भारतीय, आंचलिक और सामुदायिक भाषाएँ गौण हैं। इस कारण हमारी भाषाएँ तेजी से लुप्त हो रही हैं। दूसरा भाषाएँ क्रेता और विक्रेता या प्रदाता और उपभोक्ता दोनों के रोजगार से भी जुड़ी है। पारंपरिक जीवन में परिवर्तन ने इन भाषाओं में प्रचलित रोजगार को सीमित या समेट दिया है। किन्तु सौभाग्य से अब सरकार और समाज में यह चेतना बढ़ी है कि हर भाषा, चाहे दस लोग बोलते हों या एक, अपने अस्तित्व में बहुमूल्य है।

यदि हम किसी भाषा को खो देते हैं, तो मानो अपने शरीर का कोई अंग खो देते हैं। हमारी परिपूर्णता बहुभाषिकता में ही है।

प्रश्न: आपके कार्यों में से कोई ऐसा अनुभव जो आपके लिए विशेष स्मरणीय रहा हो?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: मुझे कोरकू भाषा और संस्कृति पर काम करने का अवसर मिला, जो यूनेस्को द्वारा संकटग्रस्त भाषाओं में सूचीबद्ध है। कोरकू समाज से मेरा संपर्क बचपन से रहा है। 1990 से मैंने इसका गहन अध्ययन शुरू किया। प्रारंभ में कठिनाइयाँ रहीं—पहाड़ी रास्ते, संचार और संसाधनों का अभाव—पर धीरे-धीरे सामग्री का विशाल भंडार प्राप्त हुआ।

मैंने लगभग एक हजार गीत और दो सौ कथाएँ रिकॉर्ड कीं। उनमें *ढोला-कुंवर* जैसी गाथाएँ स्थानीय रूप में 'कोरकूकरण' के साथ मिलीं। इन गाथाओं में राजस्थान, डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: प्रदेश तक की गूँज है। इस कार्य ने मुझे दिखाया कि लोक संस्कृति कितनी दूर तक एक-दूसरे से जुड़ी हुई है।

प्रश्न: आपके लेखन में लोक जीवन की सोंधी सुगंध झलकती है। क्या आप किसी विशेष शोध पद्धति का अनुसरण करते हैं?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: शुरुआत में कोई पद्धति ज्ञात नहीं थी। क्षेत्र में जाकर, व्यवहारिक अनुभव से मैंने स्वयं राह बनाई। कोरकू, गोंड, भारिया, भील *जनजाति देवलोक* जैसी कृतियाँ इसी दृष्टि से जन्मीं। प्रत्येक गीत, कथा और अनुष्ठान किसी देवता या शक्ति से जुड़ा है—देवता, गोत्र, वनस्पति, अन्न—सबके उद्भव में लोक आस्था बुनी हुई है। यही आस्था मेरे लेखन की प्रेरणा है।

प्रश्न: कोई विशेष अनुभव जो आपने पहले साझा न किया हो?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: ऐसे अनेक अनुभव हैं। एक बार ताप्ती नदी की ओर यात्रा में 'गंगाराम सरकारी' नामक व्यक्ति मिला। रास्ते के पथर हटाता, मदद करता और बिना औपचारिकता के सहयोग करता रहा। शहरों में जहाँ उत्तर देने में भी लोग हिचकते हैं, वहाँ ऐसी संवेदना प्रेरक है।

जनजातीय समाज में यह पारस्परिकता और सहयोगभाव अत्यधिक प्रबल है। इसी में 'सिडोली' जैसा अनुष्ठान है—अभी भी गूढ़ और कम ज्ञात—जिस पर मेरा दीर्घकालिक अध्ययन जारी है। हमारी पश्चिमी अध्ययन पद्धतियाँ अक्सर इन्हीं गहरी परंपराओं को सतही रूप में देखती हैं, इसलिए इन समाजों की दृष्टि से समझना आवश्यक है।

प्रश्न: आपकी कृतियों में लोक आस्था और शास्त्रीय परंपरा का अद्भुत संगम है। आप इसे किस दृष्टि से देखते हैं?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: मूलतः भारतीय समाज एकात्म समाज है—अन्न, धरती, जल, वनस्पति और शक्ति के प्रति समस्त भारतीयों में एक समान श्रद्धा का भाव है। नाम अलग हैं, पर भाव एक है।

तीन प्रमुख देवस्वरूप—ब्रह्मा, विष्णु, महेश—और शक्ति की अवधारणा से लोक ने भी अपने देवता निर्मित किए। लोक और शास्त्र में कोई विभाजन नहीं, दोनों एक ही व्यापक परंपरा के अंग हैं।

प्रश्न: बुंदेलखंड क्षेत्र के भित्तिचित्रों में किस प्रकार का लोक जीवन झलकता है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: ये चित्र अनुष्ठानिक परंपरा से जुड़े हैं। हमारे लोक चित्र मनोरंजन के लिए नहीं, बल्कि पूजन व अनुष्ठान के अंग होते हैं। प्राचीन हवेलियों व महलों में इनकी शृंखला मिलती है। भूमि अलंकरण, देह अलंकरण और भित्ति चित्र—तीनों ही इस लोक सौंदर्यबोध के प्रमाण हैं।

प्रश्न: जनजातीय कलाकारों को मुख्यधारा से जोड़ने में संग्रहालयों की क्या भूमिका रही है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: यह मुख्य धारा कौन सी है ? सभी धाराएँ पूर्वतः और अंततः एक ही हैं। अकादमी का प्रमुख उद्देश्य ही यही रहा है—जनजातीय कलाकारों को जोड़ना और उन्हें मंच देना। आज अनेक प्रसिद्ध कलाकार इन्हीं प्रयासों के परिणाम हैं। इन्हीं के माध्यम से हमें प्रमाणिक सामग्री प्राप्त होती है, जो प्रकाशित या प्रदर्शित होती है।

प्रश्न: लोक साहित्य के संपादन में मौलिकता बनाए रखना कितना चुनौतीपूर्ण है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: लोक सदैव पुनर्नवा है—निरंतर नूतन करता रहता है। इसीलिए लोक अध्ययन केवल संस्थानों में बैठकर नहीं हो सकता; उसे लोक में जाकर, लोक के भीतर रहकर समझना होगा।

काँपी-पेस्ट या पुस्तकीय अनुसरण से सामग्री निष्प्राण हो जाती है। क्षेत्रीय साक्षात्कार, प्रत्यक्ष अनुभव और लोक कलाकारों से संवाद ही प्रमाणिक मार्ग है। विदेशी अध्येताओं के लेखन को हमने बहुत मान लिया, पर अब समय है अपने अनुभव से लोक को समझने का।

प्रश्न: आप प्रायः माँ नर्मदा से जुड़ी स्मृतियाँ साझा करते हैं। क्या यह व्यक्तिगत लगाव है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: मैं जाति से ही नार्मदेय हूँ, नर्मदा के तट पर पला-बढ़ा। बाँध बनने से पहले की नर्मदा की छवि अब केवल स्मृति में है। घने जंगल, घाट, पशु-पक्षी—सब जलाशयों में समा गए।

वो अनुभव आज भी भीतर जिए जाते हैं—शेर की दहाड़, बैलों का गंध सूँघ लेना, घाटों की नीरवता। नर्मदा केवल नदी नहीं, अनुभव की धारा है। यह घाट से अड़घाट पर अधिक सुंदर है। इसके सन्नाटों में अनहद का संगीत है। कोरोना काल में इसके जल का शुद्ध होना इस बात का प्रमाण था कि प्रकृति स्वयं पुनर्जीवित हो सकती है।

प्रश्न: भाषाई क्षेत्र में कार्य करने वालों के लिए आपका संदेश?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: मैं स्वयं भी प्रो. रस्तोगी और SEL की टीम से सीख रहा हूँ। मेरा मानना है कि जो कार्य करें, पूरी ईमानदारी से करें। यदि शब्द-संग्रह या अभिलेखन का कार्य किया जा रहा है, तो उसे जल्दीबाज़ी में नहीं, विधिवत और सावधानी से करें। ईमानदार प्रयास ही भविष्य में स्थायी रूप से उपयोगी सिद्ध होगा।

प्रश्न: आपके अनुसार लोक समाज की भाषिक संपदा कितनी व्यापक है?

डॉ. धर्मेन्द्र पारे: हमारा लोक समाज भाषिक दृष्टि से अत्यंत संपन्न है। एक बॉटनी या जूलॉजी प्रोफेसर जितना नहीं जानता, उससे अधिक व्यावहारिक ज्ञान लोक समाज को है—भले ही उसके नाम वैज्ञानिक न हों। हम प्रयोगशाला की निष्पत्तियों पर विश्वास करते हैं, पर लोक अनुभव उससे कहीं आगे है। पुरानी पीढ़ियाँ अनुभव से पहचानती थीं—भोजन का ताप, अचार की तैयारी, पुष्प की गंध—ये सभी वैज्ञानिक संवेदनाएँ हैं।

आज शोध अनेक बार बाध्यता बन गया है—पदोन्नति या डिग्री के लिए—जबकि वास्तविक शोध तो आनंद और जुनून है। जो इसमें जीते हैं, वही सच्चे अर्थों में लोक के रचनाकार हैं।



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