

Linguistic Human Rights and the Tribes in India

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ABSTRACT

In a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country like India, making priorities about the use of language in education, administration, media and other domains of activities is not free from adverse effects. The choice of one language over others becomes threat to the existence of many. The constitution of India has made specific provisions to safeguard the cultural and linguistic rights of the tribes and the minorities. However, in practice, tribal and minority languages have not been given due recognition to be used as a medium of instruction at even the primary level of education. Apart from the government apathy towards tribal languages, globalization has further aggravated the threat to the existence of numerous indigenous languages. It becomes necessary to conserve the tribal languages as they not only contribute to the linguistic diversity of the country but also contain the traditional knowledge system that enabled the tribal to survive over centuries. This paper discusses the linguistic discrimination and the infringement on the linguistic human rights of the tribal communities by denying them the rights to use their mother tongues in education and other domains. It also recommends the need of the preservation of the linguistic human rights of the tribes which alone can ensure the conservation and growth of the tribal languages.

Keywords: Linguistic rights, tribes, dominant languages, tribal languages, conservation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Professor David Crystal (2005) expresses his concern that 90 percent of the 6000 or so languages in existence in the world today may face extinction in the coming years if sincere efforts to save and support them are not made in time. About half of the existing languages have already joined the endangered list. According to UNESCO, 96 percent of world's languages are spoken by just 4 percent of people. Daniel Nettle in his study of vanishing tongues says that 11.5 percent of world's languages have fewer than 150 speakers; a further 30 percent have fewer than 1000