



## Anthropological Study of Multiculturalism and Linguistic Diversity in India

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### **Abstract:**

*Linguistic anthropology is the interdisciplinary study of how language influences social life. It is a branch of anthropology that originated from the endeavour to document endangered languages, and has grown over the past 100 years to encompass almost any aspect of language structure and use. Linguistic anthropology explores how language shapes communication, forms social identity and group membership, organizes large-scale cultural beliefs and ideologies, and develops a common cultural representation of natural and social worlds "India is one of the most diverse and multicultural societies in the world today. With over 400 spoken languages and over a 100 different communities of people based on language, religion and caste multiculturalism is woven in the fabric of India." Cultures are complex and dynamic realities. They evolve constantly. They are highly dependent on the technologies of communication upon which rests the passing over of inheritance from individual to individual and generation to generation.*

**Key Words:** Linguistic Anthropology, Multiculturalism, Diversity

### **Introduction**

*"India is one of the most diverse and multicultural societies in the world today. With over 400 spoken languages and over a 100 different communities of people based on language, religion and caste multiculturalism is woven in the fabric of India."*

The roots of India's multiculturalism extend back over three thousand years to the first great invasions of South Asia by Indo-Aryan tribes whose priestly Brahman bards chanted mantras to their gods. Those Vedic Aryans, the easternmost wing of an Indo-European dispersion originating in the Caucasus, poured over the Khyber, Bolan, and other passes of the Hindu Kush mountains that now divide Afghanistan from Pakistan. Thanks to their multi-horsed chariots, well-wrought iron, and halberd axes, the rajahs and their tough Aryan tribes conquered the far more sophisticated pre-Aryan urbanites, whose civilization had flourished for almost a thousand years in the Indus Valley. The pre-Aryan peoples were probably proto-Dravidian-speaking ancestors of southern India's modern Tamil-speaking Dravidas and may in turn have migrated to India from East Africa. From the archaeological remains of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, and many other Indus Valley digs, we know how civilized they were, with modern sewage systems, hypocaust baths, steatite seals, burnt bricks, and glyptic art. They appear to have worshipped a phallic yogic fertility deity (the

"Great God" of modern Hinduism, Shiva) and the Mother Goddess, whose fecundity and "power" (shakti) are required to animate every male Hindu deity.

Indian history's first multicultural synthesis was thus a blend of Aryan and pre-Aryan practices, institutions, and deities, which - given intermarriage and Aryan expansion across the eastern Gangetic plain and to the south - resulted in the emergence of that complex faith called Hinduism, with its pantheon of gods and goddesses, caste, outcaste, and class systems, and sacred Vedic, epic, and mythological literature. That great cultural synthesis was designed to be flexible enough through its caste system to incorporate the greatest range of diverse peoples under the protection of Hinduism's white umbrella, but various pre-Aryan princes or priests who refused to accept their conquerors' syncretism broke away and started their own faiths. Buddhism and Jainism were the greatest of those heterodox rejections of Brahmanic dogma, but before the end of the classical age of Guptan imperial unification, both doctrines were reclaimed by Hinduism. The Buddha was worshipped as an avatara ("earthly emanation") of the Hindu solar god Vishnu, and Jainism was considered but a "sect" of Hinduism.

In 326 B.C. Alexander the Great, with his dream of universal conquest, crossed the Indus with a mighty Macedonian army that conquered each of the petty kingdoms of Punjab. The Hellenic tide ebbed quickly, but inspired the first indigenous emperor, Chandragupta Maurya, to unify all of northern India in the wake of Alexander's sudden withdrawal. Hellenistic influences continued to be reflected in Gandhara's later Buddhist art and the Bactrian Greek coins found all over the region, but otherwise Alexander's impact on Indic civilization proved slight. The third Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, converted to Buddhism and left a noble legacy in his dream of nonviolent imperial rule and administration through laws and love - but only after his terribly bloody conquest of the kingdom of Kalinga (modern Orissa). This Mauryan unity lasted 140 years until India was again invaded from the northwest, first by Greco-Bactrians, then by Scythians, Pahlavas, and Central Asian Kushanas, each of whom added fresh genes and weaponry to Indic civilization. None of them brought enduring change, however, because India's ocean of cultures, though always alluring to barbarians who heard tell of it, usually managed to seduce and conquer its conquerors with its wealth, warmth, and ancient wisdom.

### **Languages in India:**

The **Languages of India** belong to several language families, the major ones being the Indo-Aryan languages spoken by 74% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 23% of Indians. Other languages spoken in India belong to the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and a few minor language families and isolates. India has no official national language. The official language of the Union Government of Republic of India is Standard Hindi, while English is the secondary official language. The constitution of India states that "The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script." a position supported by a High Court ruling.) However, languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution are sometimes referred to, without legal standing, as the national languages of India. Individual mother tongues in India number several hundred; the 1961 census recognized 1,652. According to Census of India of 2001, 30 languages are spoken by more than a million native speakers, 122 by more than 10,000. More than three millennia of language contact has led to significant mutual influence among the four language families in India and South Asia. Two contact languages have played an important role in the history of India.



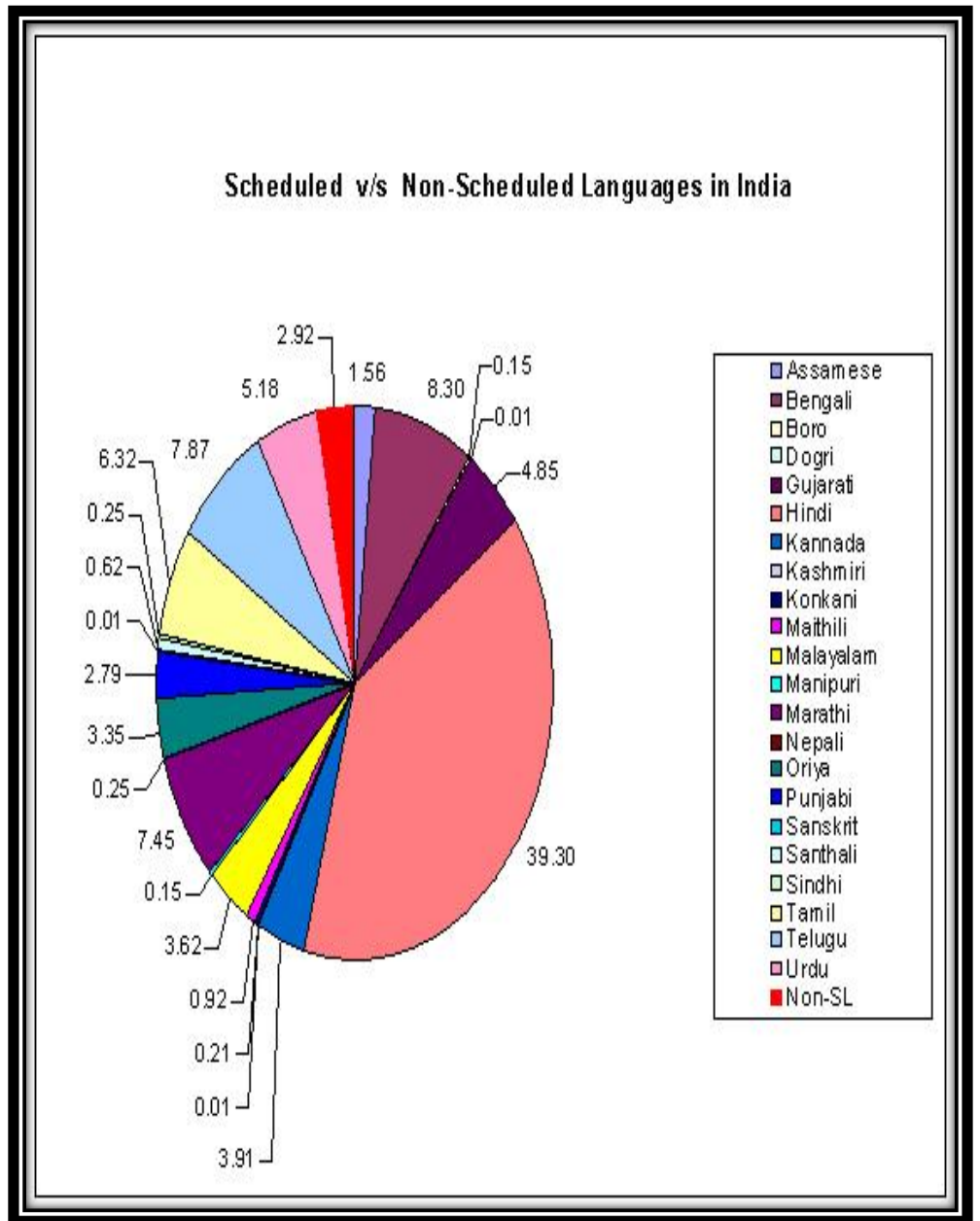
There are different language families identified in India. Andamanese, Austroasiatic, Dravidian, Indo Aryan and Tibeto Burman are the identified language families in India. Of which, Andamanese is yet to find an administrative recognition as a language family. In coming pages we will discuss in detail on each language family and the respective speaking communities. Also a review of all linguistic diversity studies of India will be discussed systematically.

### Linguistic Diversity and Population Groups in Ancient India

Why the linguistic diversity is more in India than China (7 languages and hundreds of dialects) though area size India covers only one third of China. The common assumption is that the high degree of large diversity found in India is due to the existence of diverse population groups. It is always addressed by many disciplines that how such pattern has

emerged in India. Scholars have maintained without sufficient proof that number of races and groups, which migrated to India in ancient days. Tracing the prehistory of South Asia is not an easy task. Yet, it is significant to outline in brief, for the diachronic understanding of the linguistic diversity of India. It has been concerned to many scholars since long and a respectable amount of literature is available to us but the enquiry continues to unfold a lot. The four language families of India (Indo Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto Burman) are understood as the surviving representatives of an erstwhile tradition of language families homed at South Asia. Besides, the presences of isolated remnants like Buruhaski (North Pakistan), Kusunda (Central Nepal), Nahali (Central India), Nilgiri languages (Toda, Kota, Kurumbaetc), Vedda (Srilanka) and Negroid languages of Andaman Islands (Andamanese family) recall the linguistic diversity of ancient time. The linguistic pre history of India reveals that both Asia and Europe had early inhabitation and some groups from them migrated to India as if this land of the continent was barren to accommodate as many outsiders. So no language is originally, family wise Indian, rather they belongs to outside by origin. At this stage, it may sound odd while it was the projected and accepted reality. When we see the colonial studies on linguistic history of India, it had been projected the view that linguistically India has been dominated by the Aryan and the Dravidian stock. Hoernele and Grierson, on the basis of linguistic theories suggested two bands of migration and therefore the language difference. The first band settled in SaptaSindhava region and the second skirting around the Indus, perhaps settled in Banas valley. From there, they moved to the northern slopes of Vindhya and to Bihar and also into the Doab (V.I.Subramaniam, 1995). Grierson and later Emeneau argued that Mohanjodaro or Harappa civilization do not have any Indian touch. It was partially closer to the West Asia and the later developed Indus civilization. In brief, the ancient days number of groups migrated from different regions to India and at one end the route of migration is yet to be marked unambiguously, and on the other end there were traces of linguistic evidences, which shows the presence of various substratum. The interesting aspect is that, Dravidian presence found in Punjab and Sindh earlier is questioned in the light of the prefixed forms that are counted now as proto Munda. Even if it is not proto Munda then also it is non-Dravidian one and that is the value of Witzel's observation. The early linguistic picture of South Asia during Vedic and Indus period is as complex as or even more so that its modern counterpart. Witzel has tried to establish Indo Irania substratum from central Asia and Iran and the North West and Vindhya region of central and south Indian and Himalayan and Gangetic area and Tibeto Burman substrates and Para Munda substrates of Western India area. His study underlines the fact that there were number of languages existed in different parts of South Asia, particularly in India both in pre and post Vedic periods.

How many languages do we have in India? The answer depends on how one counts it. the information that we have is from the Census of India held in 1991 This census recorded more than 1500 distinct languages which people mentioned as their mother tongues. These languages were grouped together under some major languages. For example languages like Bhojpuri, Magahdi, Bundelkhandi, Chhattisgarhi, rajsthani, bhill and many other were grouped together under 'Hindi'. Even after this grouping, the census found 114 major languages. Of these 22 languages are now included in the Eighth schedule of the Indian constitution and are there for called 'non-Scheduled Languages'. In term of languages India most diverse country in the world.



**Table: Ordered by number of native speakers**

Rank	Language	2001 census (total population 1,028,610,328 )		1991 census (total population 838,583,988)		Encarta 2007 estimate <sup>1</sup> (worldwide speakers)
		Speakers	Percentage	Speakers	Percentage	
1	Hindi	422,048,642	41.03%	329,518,087	39.29%	366 M
2	Bengali	83,369,769	8.11%	69,595,738	8.30%	207 M
3	Telugu	74,002,856	7.19%	66,017,615	7.87%	69.7 M
4	Marathi	71,936,894	6.99%	62,481,681	7.45%	68.0 M
5	Tamil	60,793,814	5.91%	53,006,368	6.32%	66.0 M
6	Urdu	51,536,111	5.01%	43,406,932	5.18%	60.3 M
7	Gujarati	46,091,617	4.48%	40,673,814	4.85%	46.1 M
8	Kannada	37,924,011	3.69%	32,753,676	3.91%	35.3 M
9	Malayalam	33,066,392	3.21%	30,377,176	3.62%	35.7 M
10	Oriya	33,017,446	3.21%	28,061,313	3.35%	32.3 M
11	Punjabi	29,102,477	2.83%	23,378,744	2.79%	57.1 M
12	Assamese	13,168,484	1.28%	13,079,696	1.56%	15.4 M
13	Maithili	12,179,122	1.18%	7,766,921	0.926%	24.2 M
14	Bhili/Bhilodi	9,582,957	0.93%			
15	Santali	6,469,600	0.63%	5,216,325	0.622%	
16	Kashmiri	5,527,698	0.54%			

17	Nepali	2,871,749	0.28%	2,076,645	0.248%	16.1 M
18	Gondi	2,713,790	0.26%			
19	Sindhi	2,535,485	0.25%	2,122,848	0.253%	19.7 M
20	Konkani	2,489,015	0.24%	1,760,607	0.210%	
21	Dogri	2,282,589	0.22%			
22	Khandeshi	2,075,258	0.21%			
23	Kurukh	1,751,489	0.17%			
24	Tulu	1,722,768	0.17%			
25	Meitei/Manipuri	1,466,705*	0.14%	1,270,216	0.151%	
26	Bodo	1,350,478	0.13%	1,221,881	0.146%	
27	Khasi	1,128,575	0.11%			
28	Mundari	1,061,352	0.103%			
29	Ho	1,042,724	0.101%			

### Language policy:

Indian federation is the language policy. Our constitution did not give the status of national language to any one language; Hindi was identified as the official language. But Hindi is the mother tongue was only 40% of Indian. Therefore, there were many safeguard to protect to other language. Beside Hindi, there are some other languages recognised as scheduled languages by the constitution. For example a candidate in an examination conducted for the central government position may opt to take the examination in any of these languages. Much of the government work takes place in the official language in the concerned State.

### Linguistic diversity in tribal groups:

Linguistic diversity commonly prevails in a multilingual society. It helps to identify the size of linguistic tribal groups, there regional distribution and there social cultural conditions (Dasgupta, 1970). The tribal people of India, as a result of interaction with other linguistic groups may reflect various levels of linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity may vary from individual to society and also among society. For example the mundas of Ranchi town, the bhils of Banswara town and the korkus of punasa Udaipur, Ranchi and Pangra village are different language in different domains. They speaks there traditional dialect at

home and the regional language or Hindi outside their home. The people of the above area use more than 50 percent words of subsidiary language. Thus these may be classified as the area of high diversity. On the other hand, mundas of Litingdih, the bhils of Wanarapara, Umedgarhi, Nai abadi, Regania and the Santhal of Dumka town may be classified under the medium category of linguistic diversity. In these areas the share of this tribe using world of subsidiary languages varies from 25 to 50 percent. A low degree of linguistic diversity has been noticed among the korkus of kalamkala.

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