

Khortha or Khotta: An Endangered Language of India and the Urgency to Retain its Pure Variety

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Abstract

Based on a descriptive analytical approach, this paper seeks to scrutinize the various dangers and challenges that the language of India faces. Thus there is a need, the authors suggest, to restore the purity an variety of Indian language.

Keywords: Indian language, urgency, pure variety.

Introduction

The state of Jharkhand is situated on Santhal Parganas and Chhota Nagpur Plateau. Most of Jharkhand comes under the Chota Nagpur Plateau. Jharkhand is encircled by the Indian states of West Bengal (East), Uttar Pradesh (West), Chhattisgarh (West), Bihar (North) and Odisha (South).

- **Population:** The current population of the state is 32.96 million (males: 16.93 million; females: 16.03 million). The state comprises 24 districts and 32,620 villages. Merely 8,484 villages have connectivity. Out of this number, 28% of the people consist of tribes and 12% of the population is from scheduled caste. Due to increased Urbanization and encroachment of the Industries¹ these regions have been affected adversely.

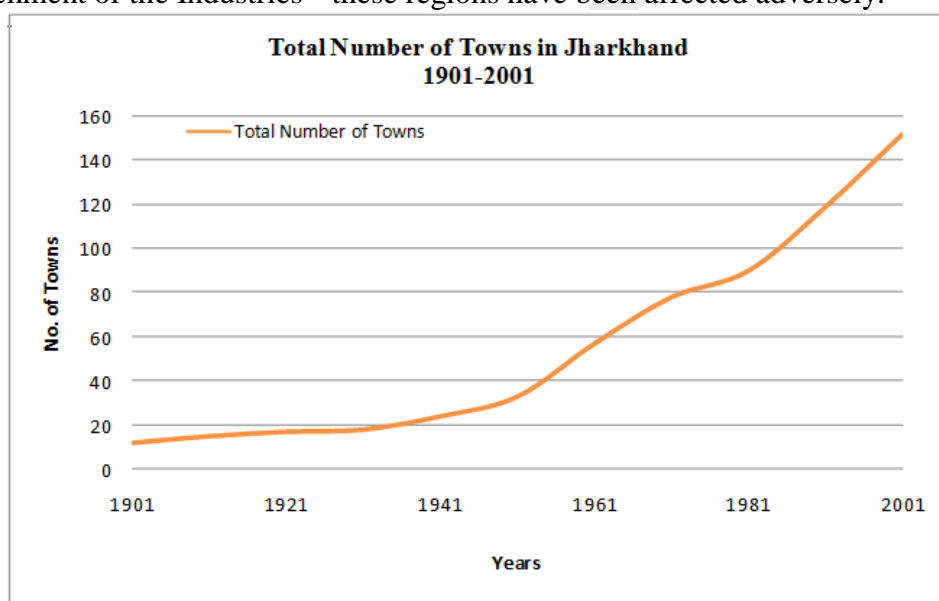


Figure 1: Total Number of Towns in Jharkhand, 1901-2001 marking Urbanization

(Source: Urban Continuum in Jharkhand by Niteen Kr, IJRANSS, Vol I Issue Jan, 2015)

- **Religion:** Around 68.5% people follow Hinduism, 13.8% follow Islam, 13% people follow Animistic Sarna, and 4.1% follow Christianity. The remaining population follows Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.
- **Communities:** The state has many tribal communities like Asur, Binjhia, Gond, Ho, Kharia, Kharwar, Banjara, Bathundi, Mal Paharia, Chik Baraik, Korba, Birhor, Mahli, Khond, Sauriya Paharia, Kisan, Korwa, Mal Paharia, Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Sauria

¹ The urbanization level in Jharkhand has risen to 1.81 % between 2001-11; moving from 22.24% in 2001 to 24.05% in 2011. The total number of towns in 2001 was 119 which rose to 152 in 2011 and even though the urbanization levels in the region falls short below the national average, the state has made a significant progress by adding a net urban population of 1.9 million. See Niteen Kr. (2015).

Paharia, Savar, Sabar, Parahiya, Birajia, Hill Kharia, etc.² Some of the major communities are:

- a. **Asur:** It ranks 21st among all the tribal groups of the state. It is one of the most ancient ethnic group in the state of Jharkhand.
- b. **Baiga:** People belonging to this tribe are less civilized. They inhabit in the Garwa district of Jharkhand and constitute a Kolerian ethnic community.
- c. **Chero:** This tribe inhabits in Ranchi, Latehar, Palamu, Rohtas and such places of Jharkhand. They are said to be the martial arts group and descendents of Khstriyas.
- d. **Kaharia:** The tribe is centered on hills or the nearby areas of the places in Jharkhand and depends largely on the resources available from the forests of the territory.
- e. **Kharwar:** The tribe is found in Latehar, Hazaribagh and such areas of Jharkhand. They are groups of traditional people who use Khair grasses for various purposes and hence got their name.
- f. **Munda:** They are found in Jharkhand and Odisha and are more famous for their conspicuous dialect and unique life style. They belong to Austro-Asiatic family of language and lingo restricted to them is called Mundari.

I. The languages of Jharkhand

The state of Jharkhand is one of the linguistically most diverse regions of the subcontinent and is home to languages from three families: Indo-Aryan (Indo-European), Munda (Austro-Asiatic) and Dravidian.³

Santali, Mundari and Ho are the three major North Munda languages. Kharia is the only South Munda language spoken in Jharkhand and Sadri is the representative of IA, due to its special status as the traditional *lingua franca* in central and western Jharkhand. Thus the major languages of Jharkhand are:

- a. South Munda: Kharia
- b. North Munda: Mundari, Santali and Ho
- c. Indo-Aryan: Sadri

² The tribes of Jharkhand consist of 32 tribes inhabiting the Jharkhand state in India. The tribes in Jharkhand were originally classified on the basis of their cultural types by the Indian anthropologist, Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi who classified the tribes thus:

Hunter-gatherer type: Birhor, Korwa, Hill Kharia

Shifting Agriculture: Sauria Paharia

Simple artisans: Mahli, Lohra, Karmali, Chik Baraik

Settled agriculturists: Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Bhumij, etc., See, *The Neglected Tribes of Jharkhand* (PK Singh).

³ See, S. Gajrani. *History, Culture and Religion of Eastern India* (2004) and Shankar C. Bhatt. *Language and Literature* (2006).

II. Multilingualism in Jharkhand

The level of bi- and multilingualism is relatively high in Jharkhand, at least in southwestern Jharkhand. In this region most speakers of Munda languages are fluent in their native language as well as Sadri and Hindi. Speakers of Sadri, on the other hand, are generally fluent in Hindi as well but seldom have active knowledge of a Munda language, although this is not entirely unknown. Finally, speakers of Santhali, which is spoken further to the east, are often more familiar with Bengali than with Hindi or Sadri, and Bengali has had an enormous impact on Santhali, comparable to that of Sadri on the Munda languages of western Jharkhand. Thus, although individual levels of multilingualism certainly vary greatly, there is a relatively high level of multilingualism in Jharkhand, so that convergences between many languages of this region are to be expected.

III. Tribal languages in Jharkhand

According to “Concise Encyclopedia” by Kulwant Raj Gupta (2000) there are 32 scheduled tribes in Jharkhand which comprise 26.2% of the state population. Most tribal groups in the state have their own language. Besides the tribes there are many ethnic groups such as Kurmis.⁴ Other than Jharkhand, the Kurmis are also found in West Bengal and Odisha and speak a language called Kurmali, which is widely spoken in the region. Out of the 32 scheduled tribes in Jharkhand eight are classified under primitive tribal groups.⁵

a. The Primitive Tribal Groups in Jharkhand

They comprise the hunter-gatherer and shifting cultivator groups. These primitive tribal groups in Jharkhand constitute 3.42 percent of total tribal population in the state. These tribes are genuinely “primitive”, dependent as they are on hunting, food collecting, fishing, shifting cultivation, collection of minor forest produce etc. For ages they have been living in, rather living on, the forests.

Name of Tribe	Population (1991)		Literacy (1981)	
	Total Population	Percent of Total Tribal Population	Literacy Percent	Percent of total tribal literacy
Asur	9623	0.14%	10.37%	0.08
Binjhia	13090	0.19%	14.52%	0.15
Birhor	8159	0.12%	5.74%	0.03
Birjia	5191	0.07%	10.50%	0.04
Korwa	23748	0.35%	6.14%	0.14

⁴ Kurmis: are ethnic groups and Hindu agricultural caste. They constitute around 10-12% population of Jharkhand. They are said to be derived from Indian Tribal language or may be from the Sanskrit word Krishi Karmi.

⁵ See, *The Neglected Tribes of Jharkhand*. PK Singh (2006).

Mal Paharia	86790	1.31%	7.38%	0.61
Parhaiya	30421	0.45%	15.30%	0.37
Sauria Paharia	48761	0.73%	6.87%	0.28
Savar	4264	0.06%	9.55%	0.03
Total	2,30,047	3.42%	86.37%	1.73
Average per tribe	25,561	0.38%		

Figure 2: Primitive tribal Group in Jharkhand (PK Singh 2006)

The language or dialects of these groups are the most vulnerable and would perish if the effort to save them is not made in time.

Almost all tribes have their own language, and often it is the language that differentiates one tribe from the other. Despite the impact of other cultures over the years, the tribal languages of Jharkhand have survived. According to Kulwant Raj Gupta (2000) tribal languages in Jharkhand belong to two language families- Austro- Asiatic and Dravidian. Kurukh and Malto belong to the Dravidian family and the rest to the Austro-Asiatic family. Languages such as Nagpuri, Khortha and Panch Paragna have become lingua franca to facilitate communication between tribal groups as well as between tribals and non-tribals. Khortha or Khotta is spoken by the tribals as well as non-tribals of Hazaribagh and Giridih districts in Jharkhand. It is related to Magahi. In *Language and Literature* Shankarlal C. Bhatt (2006) has stated that Khortha is not a pure form, rather it a mixed form of language. In day-to-day affairs people use this form but in official communication they make use of Hindi. While the official language of Jharkhand is Hindi many tribal languages are spoken in different parts of the state. Scholars believe that the tribal dialects are similar to what was spoken in the ancient Harappan era.⁶ They are trying to decipher the rock paintings in Hazaribagh, Koderma and Giridih districts, which they believe will prove the similarity.

b. Distribution of Khortha in Jharkhand

	Persons	Males	Females
Khortha/Khotta: Total	974,761	506,940	467,821
Urban	851,406	440,418	410,988
Rural	123,355	66, 522	56,833

⁶ The tribes that went north settled around the Mediterranean Sea near present day Turkey and Israel (Mithen, 2003, page20). They split into two around 12,000 to 10,000 BC, one going West and eventually reaching Europe and America while another group travelling through north and central parts of West Asia, created a major cultural development in Mesopotamia starting around 11,000 BC. They then moved through Mehrgarh around 8,000 to 5,000 BC on to Afghanistan and then entered the Indian subcontinent through northern Indus valley around 3,000 BC (Roper, 2004; see also Mithen 2003, page 407).

(Source: *Language & Literature*, Land and People of Indian States & Union Territories, Vol.II. Jharkhand; 2006 Shankarlal C. Bhatt and Gopal K. Bhargave)

IV. Present Study

Amidst all the tribal languages the present study is centrally focused on Khortha language being spoken in and around Dhanbad, a state of Jharkhand that has a landed history of growth, urbanization and migration of people. Hindi is the major language of the place. However, several other languages such as Kurmali, Santhali, Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Bengali are also widely spoken presenting a picture of severe language contact. Khortha is being spoken by a majority of inhabitants in Dhanbad. Though the language is greatly influenced by the other languages being spoken in the state, still there are some groups residing in the outskirts of Dhanbad, where one can find the untouched, pure variety of Khortha.

The language has seen a variety of changes in itself.⁷ The reasons can be many which also include Language in Contact, Language Convergence, literacy rate and the high rate of migration of the people from one place to another.

The study aims to show Language Contact, Code Mixing and Code Switching phenomenon which is prevalent in the speakers of Khortha. The language is being mixed with Hindi, Maithali and Bengali. The data has been collected from the respondents residing in the communities located in and around Dhanbad namely, Chaudhary Bandh, Sadhobaad, Kharni, Babudih, Manjhaladih, Saambalpur. The respondents were interviewed individually and in groups. The sentences of various categories and the word list were used as the tool for the data collection. The responses were noted and taped for future analysis.

The data presented below has been collected from the random samples of around 150 respondents, which were brought down to the selected samples based on the following variables:

- Gender
- Age
- Education or rate of Literacy
- Area (Rural or Urban)

Gender: Gender can be considered as an important factor in the language change, hence to highlight the difference the data was collected from the female and male members of the speech community. A special attention was made that all the selected female respondents were illiterate and housewives. Around 25 females and male members were interviewed. The collected data collected is presented below in Table Nos. 1 & 2:

Sentences	Males	Females
<i>Jis ladke ne kaanch toda usko bulao</i> (Call that boy who has broken the glass)	/je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:d^lkau/ /se/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ /bula:/	/ je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:rh3u/ /sei/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ /daik/
<i>Kaanch toot gayi</i> (The glass has been broken)	/ka:nch/ /tu:t/ /gel3i/	/ka:nchta:/ /tu:it/ /gel3i/
<i>Bachha ye khana nahi kahyega</i>	/i:/ /kha:na:/ /gid3rta:/	/i:/ /kha:yek/ /gid3rta:/

⁷ See, *Language and Literature*, Shankar C. Bhatt (2006).

<i>(The boy will not eat this food)</i>	/n3hi:/ /khaeto/	/n3ye/ /khaeto:/
<i>Kal main chor se bahut maar khaya</i> <i>(Yesterday I was beaten brutally by the thief)</i>	/ka:il/ /hum/ /chor/ /se/ /b3hUt/ /ma:r/ /kha:ye/	/ka:ilh/ /h3me//chor/ /se/ /b3di://ma:r/ /khaelho:/
<i>Ye topi safed rang ki hai</i> <i>(This cap is white in colour)</i>	/i:/ /topi:/ /s3fed/ /hel3i	/i:/ /topi:/ /sa:da:/ /h3l3i

Table 1: Response Sheet of Males and Females marking Gender Differences

Words	Males	Females
Masoom(Innocent)	/ma:su:m/	/ch3ua:/
Dulha (groom)	/dUlha:/	/bo:r/
<i>Jala diya (have got burnt)</i>	/j3laI/ /del3i/	/j3ra:I / /del3i/
Sabji "(cooked vegetables)	/s3bji/	/ti:m3n/

Table 2: Response Sheet of males and Females marking Gender Differences

From the above data it can be observed that the female respondents being less exposed to outer world make use of the words and expressions which are pure in form. The responses that they gave were more close to the original form of Khortha. In contrast the male members used words that are influenced from Hindi: /s3bji:/ for cooked vegetables as compared to /ti:m3n/ used by female respondents. The reason for the distinction in the language of female respondents could be the lack of exposure and very little or no interaction with the people of other speech communities.

Age: Age can also be considered as a significant factor in the change of the language. During the study a remarkable difference was noticed in language spoken by the youngsters and the elder generation. The probable reason for change in language mainly is that for their studies the young generation moves out and comes in contact with the people of other speech communities. Also they are more prone to the technical advancements in the forms of smart phones and other gazettes which ultimately affect their speech. It can also be said that the pure variety of the language is getting lost because it is just the people of the older age who have retained the original and pure variety of the language. After interacting with the youngsters falling between 16-25 years of age a considerable change in their language can be observed. They make use of Hindi and English language more as compared to the original Khortha. A brief analysis of the speech being spoken by a boy of 21 years and an old person of 65 years of age (represents the variable age in their speech community) is presented below in Table No. 3:

Words	Old	Young
<i>Jhanda(flag)</i>	/jhaanda/	./jh^nda/
<i>Barish (rain)</i>	/b^rsa	/pa.ni
<i>Rasta (path)</i>	/d3h3r/	rasta:/
<i>Ghar (house)</i>	/kh^nd	/ru:m/
Turant (immediately)	/ekh3ni:/	/tUr3te/
<i>Mitaana / saaf karna (to clean)</i>	/mita:e/	/sa:f/
<i>Kapda(cloth)</i>	/ pi:dh3na:/	/k^p3da:/

<i>Chehra (face)</i>	/tho:ʃna/	/sʃkʃl/
<i>Ungali(fingers)</i>	/a:ngUr/	/Ungri:/
<i>Chabhi(keys)</i>	/ka:ʃi:/	/cha:bhi:/
<i>Sach(truth)</i>	/nʃʃto/	/s^cche/
<i>Gilas(glass)</i>	/gʃʃa:/	/gila:s/-
<i>Lamba(tall)</i>	/da:nga:/	/l^mba:/
<i>Chipchipa (sticky)</i>	/la:ʃa:-	/ch^tʃk/
<i>Ek jaisa(same to same)</i>	/ohʃte/	/eke r^kʃm

Table 3: Response Sheet of Old and Young respondents

Thus the presented data reveals that the speech of the boy is more close to Hindi language. The young boys and girls have much contact with the people outside their communities as compared to the elder generation and being more exposed socially and technically affects the language in some way or the other. The speech of the boy (representing the young generation of the speech community) can be considered as a perfect example of Language Change and Code Mixing showing a mix of Hindi- Khortha- Hindi. On the other hand the speech of the older person (representing the age group of the community) is more close to the pure variety because of the age and the occupation and less exposure to the other languages. We can say that the pure form of Khortha is losing its grip in the younger generation.

Education: Education plays a significant role in Language Change. Though many villages have got their own schools, but for higher education the students have to move out of their villages. Because of increased awareness about the importance of education parents send their children to Dhanbad for higher education. Resultantly the children (between 11years-18years) are being exposed to other languages like Hindi and English displaying Code Mixing and Code Switching phenomena. The distinction in the speech can be observed from the examples presented in Table 4:

<i>Words/ Sentences</i>	<i>Educated</i>	<i>Semi-educated/ no education</i>
<i>Sari(traditional wear for females in India)</i>	/sa:ri/	/ʃUgga:/
<i>Dhul (dust)</i>	/dhu:l/ dust	/dhu:ra:/
<i>Dhoop</i>	/dhu:p/	/rʃuda:/
<i>Kanghi(comb)</i>	/kʃngʃi:/	/kʃkʃba:/
<i>Anda(egg)</i>	/ʃnda:/	/di:m/
<i>Bael(ox)</i>	/bael/	/bʃrʃd/
<i>Wah baithe baithe thak gaya(he is tired of sitting)</i>	/u:/ /bʃi:ʃle/- /bʃi:ʃle/ /thʃk/ /gele/	/u:/ /bʃisʃle/ /bʃisʃle// /thai:k/ /gelʃi/-
<i>Wah kabhi na kabhi jarur aayega(He will definitely come back some day)</i>	/u:/ /kʃkhʃno/ /nʃ/ /kʃkhʃno/ /zʃru:r/ /aeto/	/u:/ /kʃkhʃno/ /nae/ /kʃkhʃno/ /ghu:r/ /ke/ /aeto/

Table 4: Response sheet of literates and illiterates

The above data clearly shows the influence of Hindi on the speech of the children. We can observe Code Mixing of Khortha- Hindi where the illiterate villagers speak Khortha in pure form but the children use mix varieties which is close to Hindi like: /z3ru:r/ return),/bael/ ox), /k3nghi:/ (comb ,/ b3chha:/(small kid).

Area (Rural and Urban): The other thing which is a matter of consideration is the difference in the language of the urban and the rural areas. The rural areas are the one which are the carrier of the pure variety of the language. There is no doubt that the language is transmitted from one generation to the other but in the younger generation Khortha language is losing its identity.

V. Status of Tribal Languages in Jharkhand

The Ranchi University set up a department of tribal and regional languages in 1981 for postgraduate course and research. Initially seven languages: Mundari, Santhali, Kurukh, Ho, Kharia, Kurmali and Nagpuri were taught in this department. Later on, two more languages, Khortha and Panch Pargana, which were basically lingua franca of the Jharkhand region, were included. The Bihar government also published textbooks for elementary level in tribal and regional languages in 1986, but these books were never distributed in schools.

In Jharkhand, bilingualism prevails between intra-tribal and inter-tribal communities. Hence different languages are being used for the communication purpose. Danger signs of languages attrition are visible in the loss of basic vocabulary, borrowings of Indo-Aryan lexicons and morphological processes as well as in the change of word order. Interestingly, despite the fact that these tribal languages of Jharkhand seem to be linguistically converged, they do serve as the identity markers of their respective speech communities. Jharkhand government is taking many effective measures to safeguard⁸ these tribal languages but only a few tribal languages are getting facilities from the state government and others are not.⁹ The language policy of the state is responsible for this predicament. Speakers of some languages claim that their language is spoken in a larger area in comparison to others and thus more attention should be given to that language. Every group claims that its language is superior and that is why it should get a higher status, and more facilities.

According to a study of UNESCO, in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand, about 44 languages or dialects are withering away. In Jharkhand, Odisha and Bengal, about 42 languages are endangered (Pankaj 2010).

The people and the Government should realize that cultural and linguistic diversity does not threaten national integrity but adds to the beauty of the nation. However, the tussle between the major and minor languages will remain and the latter will have to struggle hard to survive. For documentation and revitalization of the languages of the indigenous, nomadic and

⁸ Various endangered and marginalized languages have been identified and academicians, linguist and others have started working to document these languages and preserve their vocabularies. Tribal languages have also been introduced in Schools and Universities and textbooks are also getting published. See *Nurturing Linguistic Diversity in Jharkhand*, PK Singh(2011)

⁹ In 2011 Jharkhand Government officially gave the status of second state official language to nine tribal and regional languages: Sathali, Oraon, Mundari, Ho, Kurukh, Sadri, Khortha, Panch Pargana and Kurmali. In a recent advancement, to give due recognition to the tribal languages in Jharkhand, the government officials are made compulsory to learn any of the four tribal languages including: Santhali, Mundari, Ho and Kurukh. See *the official website of Jharkhand government: www.jharkhand.gov.in/about*

marginalised people, Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Baroda has undertaken People's Linguistic Survey of India, a nationwide survey. In Jharkhand, 18 endangered and marginalised languages have been identified. However, some of these languages such as Asuri, Birhori, Korwa, Sabari, Malto, Angika, etc, including Santhali, are being taught in universities. This is a good initiative, and has given hope that at least these endangered languages will be documented and their vocabularies will be preserved.

VI. Conclusion

Khortha has been termed as an Enigmatic language mainly because of its varied varieties and features, which distinguishes it from other tribal languages. The features include Ergativity, language contact leading to pidgins and creoles, Code Switching, Code Mixing and Relexification. These features are been observed in the languages being spoken in a multilingual society. Khortha because of the above features is more vulnerable to change and more prone to lose its identity. Also through the presented study it can be well observed that due to various factors, the inhabitants, young generation and people working outside community have easily allowed the mixing of other languages like Hindi, English, Maithili Magahi and Bengali with Khortha. Allowing these languages has put Khortha on the verge of extinction. Timely intervention and preventive measures can safeguard this language from getting extinct and history.

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