

## Endangered Art Forms and Languages of Asia

By

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### Abstract

Language is not only a key component of communication, but it is also a key aspect of identity. With the advent of globalization, the 21st century has witnessed many changes like sociocultural and economic changes.

However, it has greatly impacted the loss of languages. Many languages especially, that of tribal people, are waning and disappearing. Languages help to connect older and younger generations and keep old cultures and traditions alive. But today, due to the absence of intergenerational transfer of languages, speech is bearing the brunt of extinction. Today, the younger the person, the poorer proficiency in his/her mother tongue!

Art on the other hand is a beautiful way to express our imagination and feelings. Asian countries have witnessed a rich traditional heritage of tribal Art and Culture. Ancient Asian folk art and tribal art are still alive in many parts of our continent. Over the passage of time, many art forms have been lost to time and therefore it is very important to keep the surviving art forms alive and promote them.

### Keywords

Extinction, Diversity, Intergenerational, Heritage, Culture, Endangered, Tsunami

## Introduction

The burning question today is, why should we care about the extinction of languages and art forms?

A language contains history and a mirror of art and culture of any country. It is found in the oral traditions of a community's history and in its oral literature. The study of the oral literature and the language structure can tell a lot about the historical background of the community. Language diversity is a reflection of human diversity, and this can be regarded as important as ecological diversity. So, loss of language diversity diminishes opportunities to study the full potential of human language.

I happened to lay my hands on a book, 'Ebbing Echoes.' Though non-fictional in nature the book presented an insightful perspective about endangered languages and art forms.

In this article, I would like to present an overview of endangered languages as presented by various writers.

## Central Asia

Talking about Central Asia, Neeti Parti explained that many languages are either on the verge of extinction or have become extinct.

What keeps them alive interestingly is our folktales. There is an interesting story about Prince and the Swan...and the happy ending.

UNESCO has given five focal areas for sustaining the endangered languages.

Vandana Bhasin gave an in-depth insight to various art forms... from Nomadic folk art; art of Uzbekistan, miniature painting, and Turkmenistan Folk art. And how the silk route found its way to Asian countries.

## West Asia

Nisha Tandon's article spotlighted the reason for languages being endangered ie...migration ...dominance of national standard languages... impact of education and...media in the standard language ...negative attitude to ancestral language... became the reason for languages coming on the verge of being extinct.

Linguists agree that the past 2 centuries have been catastrophic.

Mahua Sen's article caught my attention among various endangered languages such as the Kus Dili...whistle languages, also called the bird language of Turkey. That dates back 500 years ago. The bird language is the series of blowing whistles that can be heard for more than a kilometer or so. It was passed down generations from grandparents to parents to children so on and so forth.

Sonal Singh mentioned a very interesting topic on traditional glass blowing which is on the brink of extinction in Lebanon and Iran.

Golab Pash-a traditional container for sprinkling rose water.

Ashk Daan-traditional container for women to collect tears for loved ones and other various jars and food containers this art is also on the brink of extinction.

GGRIL-green glass recycling initiative Lebanon is trying hard for the survival of glass blowing art forms.

## South Asia

Dr. Bishakha gave a graphic representation of Tak Kadai: Tai language family.

She talks about the linguistic distribution of tai population in India which is scattered in parts of Assam but Tai Khamti is mainly concentrated in Arunachal Pradesh.

The history of the inhabitants of Tai Khamti in Northeast India goes back to the 13 century. I would like to mention here that the pinnacle of Tai Population in Northeast Asia –CHONG KHAM...in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh.in Namsai dist. of Arunachal Pradesh

Sreemati Sen gives us a glimpse of the Tsunami that struck Andamans in 2004.

It was thought that the tribes in the Andamans were doomed forever. However to the utter astonishments, the tribes had been left unharmed. The tribes with their traditional knowledge of the direction of the wind, the level of the water and the colors of the sky had been forewarned and had fled into higher grounds deep into the forest.

But the mainlanders faced the wrath of nature.

The grand trunk road connecting north and South Andaman passes through a Jarawa belt which brought the mainlanders into contact with these indigenous people...I have personally also met these tribes...mostly known as Jarawas. The contact has spelled disaster as this has made them vulnerable to abuse, alcoholism, and rampant exploitation in the hands of police and the non-Jarawas.

If we trace the history, it was the first contact with the mainland people that spread doom for them. With them, their language is also dying.

Dr. Aparna Pradhan talks about the colorful world of tribes. She mainly discusses the Bhil art and the Gond art.

Bhil art is one of the most primitive art forms in India. Their distinctive dots make the paintings come alive.

Gond Art has its roots in their folktales.

Bhil and Gond, both tribal art forms are indigenous art that need to be preserved for the cultural heritage of these tribes.

Preethi Warriar transports us to the Maldives. When we hear the Maldives the images that form in our minds are that of white sand water luxury resorts, water sports corals, Marine flora, and fauna. It is very rich in its art forms too.

Calligraphy is an ancient art form that is used on beautifully decorated text especially those of religious significance.

Boat production is a craft built in the Maldives and its construction follows systematic guidelines transmitted down generations.

Today for more convenience and speed, the shapes, construction techniques, and materials have changed through the times and most of the Dhoni's are equipped with diesel engines and built with imported wood.

Thundu Kunaa (the art of mat making), Liyelaa Jehun (lacquer work) wooden lacquer work is the most distinctive of Maldivian handicrafts.

Coir Rope making is regarded as one of the country's traditional unique art forms that has been passed down through generations.

Another interesting aspect. Always projected as merely a honeymoon destination the Maldives in fact is a hub of talented artists and craftsmen.

### **South East Asia**

Sheela S. Iyer talks about fading footprints of indigenous languages the author believes that globalization has made its way into the lives of people and that the 21st century in a way has been a disaster. Amidst many changes, the loss of languages has faced a major dent.

Many tribal languages are on the verge of the brink of being wiped away.

Arem, Chrau, spoken mainly in Vietnam is endangered.

In the Philippines, Remontado, Kapampangan, Inagta Alabat ...All these languages are getting lost.

Mousumi Baruah conceded, Southeast Asia is home to more than 350 ethnic communities living on the mountain areas slopes, verdant forest, pristine hills, on the valley of the Mekong river untouched by modernity and have their own unique fascinating art and cultures.

Once known to be self-sufficient communities today their crafts are on the verge of extinction.

### **East Asia**

Neha Gupta stated, Asia can rightly be called the continent that offers the most linguistic diversity. Being the largest continent, it is home to nearly 2300 languages and about one-third of the languages spoken in the world. Surprisingly there are only about 10 languages that are commonly spoken throughout Asia.

The rest of the languages are mostly on the verge of extinction.

Manoj Krishnan referred to the art and culture of Japan. He talks about the Ainu people of Japan mastering the wooden craft, weaving embroidery and lacquerware.

He shares information about Satsumaa Kiriko which is known for the style of cut glass-of delicate cut and vibrant colors.

Korea is also rich in art and culture, especially in embellishing women's accessories with their aesthetic designs.

In all this China has been the cradle of many amazing art forms and has enchanted the world.

What caught my interest was a Chinese Phoenix painting that symbolized two birds male and female. but when it is with the dragon the birds Feng Huang are represented as female and the dragon as male.

Chinese phoenix paintings mean the power sent from the heavens to the Empress. If the painting is in the house, loyalty and honesty were in the people that live there.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, Languages play a significant role in shaping human beings, identities and helping them to express their thoughts more eloquently. Languages are ways of interpreting the world, and no two languages are the same. Losing a language is akin to losing a cosmology- a set of myths, rituals, and culture. There is a dire need to save endangered languages-a legacy to be passed onto future generations.

### **Reference**

Ebbing Echoes: An Anthology of articles on lesser-known languages & art forms of Indigenous Communities of Asia.

### **About the Author**

An Educator, Voice modulator, Author & Poet, Radio-Artist, Creative Artist for Crafts and Dramatics, Ms. Kiren Babal has a rich experience of 40 years; with a flair for writing both in English and Hindi.

To her credit, she has many children's books, poetry books, and anthologies both in English and Hindi. Her focus always remained on keeping her hobbies alive.

