

Role of English Language to Preserve Tribal Heritage

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The amazing varieties of tribes and folks of India reverberate cultural harmony, musical symphony echoing traditional simplicity to promote elements of humanism. The myriad art and cultural forms generated by tribes of West Odisha urge for a thread of continuity to be woven into a synchronized society for higher aesthetic social order and integrity. Keeping in view the statement of UNESCO World Report that ‘disappearance of traditional modes of life as a result of a scarcity of resources and spread of modern life styles is a matter of concern’, this article urges upon the need to preserve tribal heritage and life style voicing their enlivening traditional practises and rhythmic dance forms. An attempt has also been made to use English language as a means to preserve tribal culture, art-forms, sentiments and sensibilities to strengthen social solidarity. The article expands the contours of language education to become a seat of cross-cultural learning where Lord Jagannath, the diety of true Odia spirit and spirituality is revealed to have Sabara or tribal origin (reference to Skanda Purana) which is manifested in various ritual practices and culinary practices in Jagannath temple. Knowledge on Lord Jagannath as the symbol of human intellect and reason, God of Brahminism, Buddhism, Humanism, God of cultural integrity, transcending the boundaries of time and space shall definitely be an endeavour to fulfil the vision of Tagore’s India as ‘the cultural pilgrimage of world humanity’.

Key Words- cultural integrity, cultural enrichment, transcultural communication, tribal heritage, enlivening traditional practices, enrichening literature, mutual tolerance, cultural pilgrimage

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, recognises ‘that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment.

Moreover, there is nothing so interesting to define India than the colours of its varied and rich heritage and culture. With festivals and fun to religions and relics, arts and crafts to fashion and food, the Indian canvas is as varied as the land itself. Let’s celebrate our rich mosaic of cultural heritage singing the saga of enlivening tribal culture echoing tribal sensibilities and traditional simplicity. In the context of ‘preservation of Tribal Culture and Tradition’ Dr.Vinay Kumar says “This bewildering variety in race, language, habitat and economy is fully reflected in their culture, which like a mosaic evokes the admiration of social scientists to study the dynamics of their society.”...“ Each human community has developed its own ways of life to satisfy human needs through the process of interacting with specific environment and the universe throughout the centuries. These processes provide living communities with a sense of continuity with its previous generation and are important to cultural identity, as well as to safeguarding of cultural diversity and creativity of humanity.”

Thus it becomes the duty of every citizen to make survival of tribal culture and tradition paramount. Education is a mission with a vision. Let us accomplish this mission by accommodating tribal culture with its hopes and aspirations in the process of language learning. Language is the means in which culture is transmitted. English language can be a means to preserve tribal culture, art-forms, sentiments and sensibilities to strengthen social solidarity.

Speaking on Curriculum content, methods and materials that allow for local adaptation, Shweta Bagai and Neera Nundy say that “Building community cultural wealth to provide a solid foundation that leverages

these assets and develops stronger individual potential can transcend the barrier experienced by tribals in mainstream society.

So attempts should be made in the teaching methodology

to allow tribal adaptation

to preserve rich and fast diminishing cultural heritage of tribes

to use bias free language

exposure to wide spectrum of tribal culture available in local literature

to provide resources on indigenous studies in school/college libraries

to create a sense of belongingness for cultural integration

providing scope for learning tribal culture through literature and translation studies

acquaint the students with a variety of customs, dresses, music, cuisine, sports, tradition of tribes

use illustrative photos, documentaries and videos to have cultural insight into tribal culture

access technology in classes for multiculturalism

explore the cultural wealth of tribes of West Odisha

democratize educational process for exploring the potentials embedded in tribal heritage

Language teaching should expand its contours to become a seat of cross-cultural learning where Lord Jagannath, the deity of true Odia spirit and spirituality is revealed to have Sabara or tribal origin. Knowledge on Lord Jagannath as the symbol of human intellect and reason, God of Brahminism, Buddhism, Humanism, God of cultural integrity, transcending the boundaries of time and space shall definitely be an endeavour for cross cultural unity and cultural integrity. Dealing Lord Jagannath with a new dimension to tribal connection shall definitely contribute to the hidden potentials of tribes and throw light on their thread of continuity to preserve Jagannath legacy resulting in binding dissimilarities into a synergistic whole. Students should be made acquainted with unfinished wood carvings of Lord Jagannath suggesting the primitive or tribal mindset of the designer or the craftsmen.

Among some other tribal connections which are argued by Ashish Sarangi to exist and quite easily traceable are:

1. The continuing ritual practices by the owning lineage/clan of the Daita and Sabara priests comparable to all those in different lineage/clan groups of many Tribal communities of Odisha.
2. Culinary practices and cuisine in Jagannatha temple correlated with those of the Tribal traditions of simply boiling cereals, pulses and vegetables in earthen pots without frying in oil.
3. The traditions of drawings, paintings, engravings in the temple wall and the wall-deity comparable to ritual art, paintings and drawings of the tribal dwellings.
4. The continued practice of a special priesthood bestowed upon the Daitas, Sabaras and a lot more, who are the descendants of the tribal worshipper, believed to be the inheritors or relatives of Lord Jagannatha and doing services intimately with the deity like giving them bath, dressing them up daily, cooking food for them and moving them when ordained.

5. The Nabakalebara ritual and the Tribal practices of the ritual of renewal.
6. The cultural performances and traditions, including dances, songs and movements, associated with Jagannatha are pretty old and exotic and can be compared with that of tribal world.

Thus attempts should be made in the language classes for students to discover a whole new tribal world through exposure and connectivity to technology, accessibility to tribal sensibilities through literature.

West Odisha, comprising the districts of Bargarh, Bolangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundargarh and Aathamallik sub-division of Angul, with its picturesque landscape, pristine waterfalls, virgin forests, seems to be giving an inviting call to every passerby. The tribes of this region with rich traditions, cultural heritage, enlivening dance forms, harmonizing natural music should not only be treated as an asset to be preserved but a resource to be promoted, its potential benefits to be harvested. The language curriculum should be broad enough to accommodate the traditions and festivals of tribes of the western region of Odisha giving enough scope to explore the cultural wealth of the area.

It is hoped that such innovations in the process of language teaching shall accommodate tribal art forms, practices, festivals, rituals even local riddles and humour for cultural assimilation, promotion and be an endeavour to fulfil the vision of Tagore's India as 'the cultural pilgrimage of world humanity.'

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