

LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION IN INDIAN TRADITIONS

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Abstract:

Language is an important medium for conserving and transmitting knowledge, culture, traditions, and values from one generation to another. In India, language transmission has played an important role in promoting the continuity of different traditions, literary heritage, devotional practices, philosophies, and different social practices. Indian traditions have depended on both oral and written systems for the preservation of different languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, Kannada, Bengali, and many regional dialects. Traditional methods like the guru-shishya system, storytelling, folk songs, devotional chanting, and communal interaction ensure the preservation of linguistic heritage. In India, language transmission is not only limited to only communication, but it also acts as a carrier of ethics, historical memory, values, and traditional knowledge. In this conceptual paper, we explain the concept of language transmission, the traditional methods of language transmission, present challenges, and some measures to strengthen linguistic continuity in our modern society. Promoting and preserving language transmission is essential for national unity and sustainable development.

Key Words: Language transmission, Indian traditions, oral traditions, linguistic heritage, indigenous knowledge, mother tongue, and national unity.

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Introduction:

Language is far more than a communication tool; it is a main source of communities' culture, values and past history. Language transmission includes all formal and informal ways, like oral, written, and ritual methods, through which a language or linguistic knowledge is preserved and passed from one generation to the next generation. In India, language has always been closely connected with religion, literature, philosophy, daily life, and education.

India is a multilingual country and has hundreds of languages and dialects. India is one of the richest regions for languages on earth. Each Indian language has its own unique stories, customs, rituals, folk wisdom, songs, and history. According to the people's linguistic survey of India, India is home to more than 780 languages. The diversity in language shows centuries of continuous cultural growth, migration, and interaction between communities. Ancient Indian civilization had different ways of passing language through oral learning, reciting, memorizing, storytelling, and, after that, manuscripts and written texts.

The Vedas were preserved for more than thousands of years mainly through an oral tradition known as Guru-Shishya Parampara. Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad Gita, were shared in

many different Indian regional languages. For helping people to understand moral values and cultural values. Folk songs, tales, bhajans, kirtans, and proverbs preserve regional languages and traditions.

Thus, language transmission in Indian tradition has played an important role in maintaining cultural continuity and fostering social harmony.

This conceptual paper mainly focuses on traditional methods of language transmission and current societal challenges.

Objectives:

- To understand the concept of language transmission and its significance.
- To explain the traditional methods of language transmission in India.
- To identify present challenges in language continuity.
- To suggest practical measures for strengthening language transmission.

Concept of Language Transmission:

Language transmission is the culturally transmitted process of passing language from one generation to the next generation through learning and social interaction, rather than biological inheritance. It is a process through which languages pass from one generation to another through speaking, reading, writing, listening, and social interaction. The language transmission process starts within our family, where children first learn their mother tongue from their parents, grandparents, and other elders. It is not only limited to learning vocabulary and grammar, but it also involves passing on cultural and moral values, traditions, our customs, songs, and folktales. In Indian traditions, language transmission was considered sacred because language carried spiritual knowledge, moral teaching, and social knowledge. Great importance was given to preserving correct pronunciation through oral traditions and meaning and literary forms through manuscripts and inscriptions.

Simple language transmission means the following:

- Learning language from parents, older generations, and society
- Historically, transmission depended on spoken word, storytelling, and songs to preserve history before writing was common.
- Protecting culture through words and expressions
- Maintaining identity and legacy

Thus, language transmission not only preserves language but also a civilization.

Traditional Methods of Language Transmission in India:

1. Oral traditions - Folklore, Vedas, epics, Storytelling

In the history of language transmission in India, the oral tradition occupies the most central position in it. Knowledge was shared through speaking, listening, memorization, and recitation. For more than 1000 years, knowledge, history, and literature were preserved not in manuscripts and inscriptions but in the living memory of communities. This method develop strong memory skills and ensured

Folklore: It is the body of expressive culture shared by a particular group of people or culture that includes oral traditions such as tales, proverbs, poems, jokes, and other oral traditions. Folklore is not something one

can typically gain from formal school or study in the fine arts. Instead, these traditions are passed along informally from one person to another either through verbal instruction or demonstration.

Vedas: The Vedas are one of the world's oldest and best examples of oral language transmission in India. While many old texts changed over time, the Vedas were kept carefully more than 3,000 years. Vedic text is classified into **smriti and shruti**. **Smriti** means "what is remembered," and **shruti** means "what is heard." Vedic mantras and shlokas had been orally transmitted since the 2nd millennium BCE using memory techniques

Epics: The great Sanskrit epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, were first written in Sanskrit but later popularized in many regional languages. They played an important role in spreading language and bringing cultural unity. Over time, poets like Tulsidas in Hindi, Kamban in Tamil, and Sant Eknath Maharaj in Marathi adapted into different regional languages. This shows how oral tradition helped to preserve stories and allowed languages to grow and developed in different communities

Storytelling: Storytelling in India is an ancient, rich tradition that acts as an important system for transmitting values, culture, history, and knowledge across generations. Storytelling has always been an important medium of language learning in Indian traditions. It was commonly practiced at home, temples, village gatherings, and schools. It started in oral tradition and has grown from Vedic chants and ancient epics into different folk arts and modern digital media. e.g., Panchatantra, Jataka tales, and Hitopadesh taught life lessons and language through stories.

- 2. The Gurukul System (guru-shishya parampara):** The Gurukul system is one of the oldest and most important educational systems in ancient and medieval India. It was a traditional teacher-student system of education. In this system, students (**Shishya**) live with their Guru (teacher) over a long period. In most gurukuls, Sanskrit was the main language of teaching. Language, grammar, literature, philosophy, ethics, and practical knowledge were taught directly through personal interaction. The system was important in preserving the difficult grammatical structures, such as those found in Panini's **Ashtadhyayi**. The famous scholar Panini wrote the book **Ashtadhyayi** around the 4th century BCE. It is one of the greatest books on grammar ever written. Students in Gurukul studied and memorized this grammar book, which helped them develop strong knowledge of the Sanskrit language. The Gurukul system played an important role in preserving classical languages such as Sanskrit and regional learning traditions. Regional Gurukul-like institutions existed across India for the transmission of regional languages. The Tol system in Bengal, the Madrasa system in South India, and the Madrasa system for Arabic and Persian education.
- 3. Religious and cultural practices:** Religion had played a very important role in language transmission in India. Religious places such as temples, Gurudwaras, monasteries, and mosques became centers of language continuity or transmission. Hindu religious text, in Sanskrit, was maintained for centuries through the rituals, prayers, and ceremonies that needed correct knowledge of language. The chanting of mantras, the repetition of sutras, and the performance of Vedic yajnas followed strict pronunciation rules, so religious practices also worked as a way of learning language.

The bhakti movement, which developed between the 7th and 17th centuries, produced a big amount of devotional poetry in regional languages like Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, and Kannada. Saints and poets like Kabir, Mirabai, and Tukaram wrote their poems in the language spoken by common people rather than the language used by elites or scholars. By doing this, saints and poets made literature easy for ordinary people to understand and helped make local language communities stronger and more recognized. Like Sanskrit shlokas in Hindu temples, Gurbani in gurdwaras, and Buddhist chants in monasteries.

Cultural activities such as dance and music also help in spreading and preserving languages. Classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathakali and folk theater traditions like Tamasha, Yakshagana, and Jatra required performance to learn the vocabulary and the style of specific languages.

Because of these traditions, many languages continued to survive and grow.

Examples of language transmission in Indian traditions:

1. Sanskrit through Vedic chanting:

As Sanskrit was one of the oldest and most respected languages of India, it was preserved for centuries through the oral traditions of Vedic chanting. Vedic chanting is an old oral tradition of reciting Sanskrit sacred texts, focusing on pronunciation, rhythm, and tone. This meditative practice, part of adhyanam, uses phonetic perfection. This helps to preserve Sanskrit in its pure and original form and ensures that sacred knowledge was transmitted correctly from one generation to another. Vedic chanting is more than speaking; it is an experience where words become song, and sound helps to connect the mind and body. Even today, Vedic chanting remains an important tradition in many parts of India.

2. Tamil through Sangam literature: Tamil is one of the oldest living languages in the world. It was preserved through Sangam literature. Sangam literature is a collection of ancient Tamil poems written by scholars and poets. Sangam literature consists of 2381 poems in Tamil composed by 473 poets. The bardic poetry in the Sangam Era is largely about love and war, with the exception of the shorter poems such as Paripaatal, which is more religious and praises Vishnu and Murugan. The Sangam literature also has Buddhist and Jainist epics.

Sangam literature played a major role in protecting Tamil grammar and vocabulary, and it also shows the rich culture of ancient Tamil society.

Present challenges to language transmission:

In the modern world many regional languages are facing serious challenges. Oral traditions once helped to maintain cultural continuity; now many regional languages face several challenges. Such social changes, globalization, and changing lifestyles have reduced the regular use of regional languages. As a result, the process of passing language from one generation to another has become weaker.

1. Dominance of global languages:

Global languages like English have become important for education, employment, and business. Because of this, many families and institutes give more importance to this language. Nowadays we see learning global

languages is more beneficial, and more dependence on them reduces use of traditional languages in younger generations.

2. Reduced use of mother tongue at home:

Family is the first place where we learn a language. But in many parents speak a mix of languages or use only dominant languages with their children for academics. So when children do not regularly hear their mother tongue at home; they don't develop the vocabulary and gradually lose fluency and emotional connection with it.

3. Migration:

People move from place to place for education and jobs, bringing people into multilingual cities where common language is used for communication. so families stop using their traditional language so as to adapt socially. Then it leads to language shifts.

4. Limited reading habits in regional languages:

Nowadays many children and young people read more in global languages than in regional languages. Due to less availability and popularity of books, magazines, and online content in native languages, people read them less, and that's why they are losing interest in their own literary languages.

5. Decline of storytelling traditions:

Storytelling by elders was once an important way of teaching language, values, and culture. Today, due to nuclear families, digital entertainment, and busy lifestyles, the storytelling tradition has been reduced to a large extent.

Practical measures to strengthen language transmission:

To preserve linguistic heritage and continue transmission of traditional languages from one generation to another, practical efforts are needed to be taken by families, schools, and society.

1. Use of mother tongue at home:

Parents and family members must speak in their mother tongue with children during daily conversation. and during family gathering Daily listening to their mother tongue helps children to learn vocabulary pronunciation and emotional bonding. By doing this, the younger generation mainly remains connected with their linguistic roots.

2. Regional literature in schools:

Schools should include regional poems, stories, and songs in the curriculum. Teaching in local literature helps students to appreciate their language and history. It also builds reading and writing skills in regional languages.

3. Cultural programs

Schools and communities should organize programs such as drama, speech competitions, debates, folk dance, and folk song performances in local languages. These provide students an opportunity to use their languages publicly. It also makes learning languages enjoyable and increases pride about language.

4. Digital preservation:

Modern-day technology can be used to protect languages. Audiobooks, mobile apps, e-books, podcasts, and digital collections can help to document and prompt our regional languages. Many social media platforms, like YouTube and Instagram, and video content in regional languages can attract younger generations.

Educational implications:

Incorporating language transmission in education can help in

1. It protects linguistic diversity.
2. Teaching in the mother tongue improves learning outcomes in early childhood.
3. It fosters respect for Indian traditions and culture.
4. It strengthens students' communication skills.
5. It builds national harmony through multilingual awareness.

Conclusion:

Preserving Indian languages through traditional methods like the Guru–Shishya system, oral storytelling, and local literature is not just about culture but an important need for building a developed India (Viksit Bharat). As shown in this paper, moving from traditional ways of sharing knowledge to modern digital communication requires a strong effort to keep regional languages alive. By including this ancient knowledge in today's education and home life, we do more than just protect languages—we also protect our independence of thinking for a sustainable, self-dependent, and inclusive future. In the end, as India moves toward 2047, becoming a developed country will depend on how well we balance modern technology with our rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

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