

A Study on Influence of Sanskrit on Tribal Cultures In India

Dr. Jhumu Saha

Asst. Professor, Department of History, Malda Women's College,
Malda, West Bengal, 732101

Abstract: Hinduism is deeply rooted in Vedas and Vedic Culture, which are the first Indian document which provided not only the well mediated knowledge for human race but also the aims and objectives of human life. Since three and four thousand years ago various people of diverse origin such as Austric Nishadas (Kols, & Mundas), Dravidas or Dravidian, the Aryans or Kiratas or Mongoloid began to live together in a well demarcated geographical area. In this context apart from racial fusion a mixture of races; especially: marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race happened. The result is welding together diverse people into one. Sanskrit as the vehicle of Hindu culture with greater accuracy be described as Spoken Aryan as it evolved roughly between 500 B.C and A.D. 500. It included not only the classical Sanskrit but also it evolved from the Vedic Sanskrit under the impact of Dravidian and Kol speeches in addition Prakrit or Vernacular dialects. The tribal religion was greatly influenced under the Sanskritization. The concept 'Sanskritization in India' was discussed in the light of both Dharma and Sculpture. Thus the ritualistic, Philosophical and visual aspect of Dharma was ultimately influenced by Sanskrit. The Non Aryan tribals took their own time and method to accept this dharma. Kolarians, the all Austric tribes of central India, pays their highest regard to Dharmis. On the other hand the Dravidian believes their mother goddesses are protector of Dharma. The tribal religion in every aspect influenced the Hinduism in every step. Thus the main essence of this paper is to narrate relevance of Sanskrit on indigenous tribal culture and its special influence on Dravidian Culture.

Keywords: Vedas, Language, Culture

Date of Submission: 07-08-2026

Date of Acceptance: 20-08-2026

I. Introduction:

Sanskrit language and its relationship to Indian languages. These are: 1. Sanskrit is the mother of all Indian languages and 2. Indian languages are divided into two large families known as Dravidian and Indo-Aryan families. Local languages can be superimposed by a ruling language. In case of India they have all been 'foreign'. First it was Sanskrit, then Persian and now English. Is there something special about Indian people or the Indian climate that they are ruled by foreigners or at least by foreign languages? Such a colonial idea has been around for quite some time and was eloquently expressed in the book, 'The Continent of Circe' by Nirad Chaudhuri. In fact India twice had an Indian language as a ruling/national language. First it was Pali. It remained from the time of Ashok to 9th century or so - more than 1000 years! Secondly today officially Hindi is India's national language although in fact English has taken over. Why did Hindi fail? Among others, one of the reasons was that its proponents subscribed to the Sanskrit origin theory and filled it with Sanskrit words and used Sanskrit grammar to teach it! However, Hindi in its various popular forms remains the link language in India. Another way of looking at it is that India is a federal entity and it is artificial (imperial) to have one common language. In fact these imperial periods have been of relatively short durations but their linguistic impact is of much longer duration. And during all these 'imperial periods' some provinces were always in a state of revolt, not excepting the present Indian state. The only difference is that in the past the revolting forces were mainly local kings or Kshatras (though there were exceptions), whereas today a large number of people are involved in these revolts against the centre. The rest depends on the political course that India will take in coming decades. If the centralised Indian state remains, English will dominate. If it breaks into federal units, modern Indian languages will take over with appropriate absorption of Sanskrit, Persian and English language words as well as words from each other. There may even be a move to de-Sanskritise the languages and to discover very good local words of lower caste/working class origin. This has happened before. In Kannada the great poet D R Bendre discovered and used many original Kannada words in his poems. Similar things have happened in many Indian languages.

1. A Brief Description of Sanskrit and its influence on other languages : Sanskrit is the classical language of India. Today there is no speech community of Sanskrit, that is, nobody uses Sanskrit as the main language of normal daily use (except a couple of Brahmin villages in Shimoga district, Karnataka). But it is not a dead language either. It is taught in schools though practically no one learns it. However, many upper caste Indians would know a few phrases/couplets of Sanskrit. In the vocabulary of standard modern Indian languages, there are a large number of words derived from Sanskrit. It is the language of rituals for the upper castes. There are probably a few hundred people who know Sanskrit well, most of who are Brahmins. There are also a large number of Brahmin priests who know enough Sanskrit to perform rituals. The level of their knowledge varies a lot from priest to priest. Sanskrit also has been the language of Shastra, of knowledge of the Indian tradition. Even in the 20th century the musicologist Bhatkhande wrote his book in Sanskrit. Over the last two thousand years, there have been books in Sanskrit on politics, philosophy, religion, theology, ethics, mathematics, astrology, medicine and a host of other fields of knowledge. Panini's grammar, Patanjali's Yogashastra, Chanakya's Arthashastra, Manu's Dharmashastra, Aryabhatta and Varahamihir in mathematics and astronomy are just some of the known books. Today many of them are translated into English and into some Indian languages and are used mainly by scholars. However, in the mainstream of Indian life, knowledge and industry, Sanskrit has practically no role. English and modern Indian languages rule.

2. Historical analysis of diffusion of Sanskrit Language: Historically Sanskrit was the language of the people in North-West India, west of the river Ravi. The areas covered then are today's Afghanistan, Baluchistan and western parts of Kashmir, and Punjab. The area probably extended upto Iran whose language and culture had close affinity to the Vedic Sanskrit. The important centre was in Pakhtunistan (the land of Pathans) or the North West Frontier province of Pakistan and was known as Gandhar whose main town Takshashila (today's Taxila in Pakistan) was famous as a seat of learning roughly between 5th century BC and 5th century AD. The Sanskrit that people know today got the present classical form between the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD when it received patronage from the Hindu kings. During this period Kautilya's Arthashastra, Manusmriti or Dharmashastra and an elaborate and perfect grammar was created. The other important language of the era was Pali, with its centres in Patliputra (Patna) and Nalanda under the patronage of Buddhist kings. Sanskrit and Pali coexisted and competed to be known as the language of the state during the 1000 years between the 5th century BC and the 5th century AD. With the arrival of the Muslim rulers, both the languages gradually ceased to be the language of the state. Persian replaced these languages although no Persian ever ruled over India! Pali more or less vanished from India, although it remained in use in Sri Lanka. And as everyone knows, English replaced Persian and today in spite of many efforts by the supporters of modern Indian languages, English remains the language of power and knowledge.

3. Influence of Sanskrit on Indo-Aryan and Dravidian tribal Culture: The two large families popularly known as the Dravid of the South and Indo-Aryan in the North make up the majority of Indian population. There are tribal languages in the Jharkhand area and in the North East which have relatively small speech communities, from a few thousands to a few lakhs. Here only the Dravid and Indo-Aryan families will be discussed because they are the ones that are influenced by Sanskrit. Comparative linguistics gave birth to the Indo-European hypothesis which says that Latin, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit belong to one group and that Sanskrit was the original language of the group. It also thus claimed as one root for one family the Aryans. Thus the Aryan myth got created and Indian languages were called Indo-Aryan languages. The Dravidian languages with the most speakers are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. There are also small groups of Dravidian speaking scheduled tribes, who live beyond the mainstream communities, such as the Kurukh and Gond tribes. Though some argue that the Dravidian languages may have been brought to India by migrations in the fourth or third millennium BCE or even earlier, the Dravidian languages cannot easily be connected to any other language, and they could well be indigenous to India.

3.1 Chakma Language: Ethnically, the Chakmas are Tibeto Burman, and are thus closely related to tribes in the foothills of the Himalayas. Their ancestors came from the Magadha Kingdom (now Bihar, India) to settle in Arakan and most of them later moved to Bangladesh. The Chakma and Daingnet people now speak what may be considered divergent dialects of Bengali. However, this is due to language shift from a Tibeto-Burman language; that medieval language may have been related to Sak or Chairel. It is an Indo-European language spoken by the Chakma and Daingnet people.

It is better known, closest relative are Bengali, Assamese, Chittagonian and Rohingya of Arakan, Bishnupuriya, Manipuri of Manipur, Tanchangya, and Sylheti. It is spoken by nearly 3.1 310,000 people in southeast Bangladesh near Chittagong City, and another 300,000 in India in Mizoram, Assam, and Tripura. It is written using the Chakma script, which is also called **Ajhā pāth**, sometimes romanized **Ojhopath**. Literacy in Chakma script is low. It is officially recognized by neither the Bangladesh government nor the Indian government, the only two countries where native Chakma people live. Although there were no Chakma language

radio or television stations as of 2011, the language has a presence in social media and on YouTube. The Hill Education Chakma Script website provides tutorials, videos, e-books, and Chakma language forums. In 2012, the Government of Tripura announced it would "introduce Chakma language in Chakma script in primary schools of Tripura. Imparting of education up to elementary stage in mother tongue is a national policy. To begin with Chakma language subjects in its own scripts will be introduced in 58 primary schools in Chakma concentrated areas." "In preparation for the January 2014 education season, the national curriculum and textbook board has already started printing books in six languages ... Chakma, Kokborok (Tripura community), Marma, Santal, Sadri (Orao community) and Achik."

3.2. Kui (also Kandh, Khondi, Khond, Khondo, Kanda, Kodu (Kōdu), Kodulu, Kuinga (Kūinga), Kuy is a South-Central-Dravidian language spoken by the Khonds. It is mostly spoken in Orissa, and written in the Oriya script. With 641,662 registered native speakers, it figures at rank 29 in the 1991 Indian census. Kui language also called as Kalinga language during the historical period. Distinct but closely related are the Gondi, Konda and Kuvi languages.

3.3 Gondi (Gōndi): It is a South Central Dravidian language, spoken by about two million Gond people, chiefly in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and in various adjoining areas of neighbouring states. Gonds tribe are generally found in Gond forests of the central India. Chhindwara District of Madhya Pradesh, Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, parts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Orissa are some of the other places of inhabitation by these warrior and royal Indian tribes. Gondi language is the prime language spoken by Gond tribes of India. Beside this, these Indian tribes also have a good command on Telgu, Hindi, Marathi, Parsi and many other Dravidian languages. Gonds tribes of India have a typical Indian dress culture. Male members in the Gonds tribe wear Dhoti (long piece of cotton cloth wrapped around the waist passing through the legs). Females wear soft cotton saris along with the Choli or blouse. Two millets known as Kodo or Kutki are the staple food of Gonds tribes of India. Most of the Gonds are the meat consumers, though they prefer Rice during the festivals. These tribes of India are highly religious minded. These Indian tribes worship Janani or the mother of creator. Gonds tribe also worship Pharsa Pen, inform of nail or a piece of iron chain. Mariai- the Goddess of plague and other diseases, and Bhimsen – the Hindu God are also worshiped by Gonds tribes in India. One unique feature of their beliefs is the existence of spirits. Gonds tribe believe that every or most places in the World are inhabited by a spirit. Sacrifices are also made to appease a number of deities. Gonds tribe believe that deities control everything in the World. These tribes of India also worship the God of household, God of fields etc. Keslapur Jathra and Madai are the two major festivals celebrated by the Gonds tribe of India. At Kelaspur Jathra they worship, the snake deity called Nagoba, whose temple is found in the Keslapur village of Indervelly mandal of Adilabad district. The most famous attraction at the festival is the Gusadi dance performed by wearing head gears decorated with the peacock feathers, along with cotton cloth around their waist. Smearing ash all over the body is a must see at this distinctive festivals of Gonds tribe of India. The other festival celebrated is Madai. During this festivals Gonds meet their relatives settled in other parts of India. Sacrifice of goat beneath the sacred village tree to appease the tribal Goddess is also done. In the night they enjoy the party atmosphere with liquor and dance and tribal music. Dusshera is another festival celebrated with utmost pleasure by the Gonds tribe of India. Although it is the language of the Gond people, only about half of them still speak it. Gondi has a rich folk literature, examples of which are marriage songs and narrations. Gondi has a two-gender system, substantives being either masculine or nonmasculine. Gondi departed from the parent Proto-Dravidian language by developing initial voiced stops (*g, j, d, d, b*) and aspirated stops (*dhh, gh, jh, dh, bh*).

References :

- [1]. Bajpai, Kishoridas: Hindi Shabdanushasan, Varanasi v.s. 2013, Nagari Pracharini Sabha
- [2]. Bora, Rajmal: Bharat ki Bhashayen: Aitihasik Evam Bhugolik Vivechan, 1995, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan.
- [3]. Caldwell, Rt. Rev. Robert. : A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages, Reprinted 1961, University of Madras.
- [4]. Chaudhuri, Nirad C: The Continent of Circe, 1965, New Delhi, Jaico Books
- [5]. Dharmavir: Hindi ki Atma, 1987, New Delhi, Samata Prakashan.
- [6]. Eco, Umberto. The Search for a Perfect Language, 1997, London, Fontana Press.
- [7]. Sharma, Kashiram: Dravid Parivar ki Bhasha: Hindi, 1968, Roorkee.
- [8]. Talwar, Vir Bharat, Rassakashi, 2002, New Delhi, Saransh Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.