

Overcoming the Language Barrier for Tribal Children: MLE in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, India

*Ajit K. Mohanty, Mahendra Kumar Mishra,
N. Upender Reddy, Ramesh Gumidyala*

Languages are said to make us human; but they also dehumanise when they become instruments of power for some and shame and guilt for others. For some, language is a road to upward mobility and for others it is a barrier to even the marginal life of choice and dignity. For millions of people, whose languages are rendered powerless in a society where only one or few languages are dominant, exclusion of mother tongues from social domains of significance has serious consequences for basic survival and well being. Educational failure of linguistic minorities all over the world is primarily related to the mismatch between the home language and the language of formal instruction. This issue has been severally discussed in the literature on minority education (see, for example, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins 1988 and various chapters in this volume). State policies in respect of languages in education often recognise but ignore in practice the problem of exclusion of languages. In the post-colonial world—Africa (Heugh 2009, this volume), India (Jhingran 2009, this volume), Pakistan (Rahman 1998), Nepal (Amrit Yonjan-Tamang, Hough and Nurmela 2009, this volume), Sri Lanka (Kandiah 2001)—as in other parts of the more developed world, policy proclamations appear to support the rights of minor and minority language communities for preservation, use and development of their languages and, in many cases, there are explicit statutory provisions for education in mother tongues. But, as several contributions to this volume show, there are contradictions between policy provisions and actual ground level practices. Forced submersion of minority children in dominant or majority language classrooms with subtractive effects on their mother tongues continues to be the most pressing educational issue in multilingual settings. Two reactions to minority languages are often implicit in state educational practices. Diversity is considered a nuisance and multilingualism a socioeconomic burden, privileging the practices of preference for homogenisation and standardisation. Further, minority

languages are considered inadequate, impoverished and under developed and, hence, unfit for educational and scientific use. These reactions lead to stigmatisation and invisibilisation of less powerful and marginalised languages, pushing many into the inferior status of dialects. Languages without a script, for example, are often stigmatised as dialects, ignoring the fact that writing systems developed much after the languages and are not essential properties of language. As Agnihotri (2009, this volume) points out, one script can be used to write all languages and any language can be written in many scripts. Hegemonic position of dominant languages, imposition of their norms on the languages of minority and disadvantaged groups and common biases in assessment of verbal skills of bilingual/multilingual children have led to propagation of the myth of linguistic deficit (Mohanty 2000: 106):

What is often forgotten in the parochial vision of linguisticism is that language varieties are simply different symbol systems with their own logical bases and, therefore, the languages of the minority mother tongue speakers, of the poor and the disadvantaged are not deficient; they are only different.

No language is inherently deficient or illogical; the association between some languages and their so called deficiency is social in origin, resulting from unequal treatment of languages. The sociocultural conditions of language use and the inequalities between languages propagate a misconception of some languages as ‘substandard’ languages which entail inherent disadvantages for their users. The real disadvantage of the languages of the disadvantaged is related to social attitudes and the conditions under which these languages get located lower down the hierarchy of social power. Unfortunately, in most societies, schools represent such social attitudes and become instruments for perpetuation of inequalities among languages. Disadvantages accrue to speakers of some languages not because their languages are substandard or deficient, but, because social biases against these languages and their exclusion from significant social domains, from schools for example, form an essential part of the very definition of disadvantage (Mohanty 2000, 2008b).

Languages are deprived of their legitimate place, marginalised, kept out of the domains of power, privileges and resources and, in the process, impoverished. The consequences of prolonged deprivation lead to further disadvantage to the languages and their speakers in a vicious circle. This chapter shows how this vicious circle of disadvantage and the language barrier in schools for tribal children in India are linked to poor educational performance, capability deprivation and poverty of the tribal communities. MLE programmes in two states of India—Andhra Pradesh and Orissa—are discussed as positive examples of multilingual education for tribal children demonstrating a possible way out of the vicious circle of disadvantage.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF LANGUAGE DISADVANTAGE

Kept out of the major domains of power and resources such as official, legal and formal use, education, trade and commerce, languages become vulnerable to shift pressure from the dominant languages and their survival is threatened. This process

is associated with loss of linguistic diversity and death or ‘murder’ of languages. Some times, however, minority languages under such pressure seem to survive in multilingual societies like India by a passive withdrawal into domains of lesser power and visibility following what has been called ‘anti-predatory strategies’ (Mohanty 2006). Although rapid language shift does not occur, these languages are marginalised with considerable domain shrinkage; languages are barely maintained in the domains of home and close in-group communication with clear signs of declining intergenerational transmission. As the languages are pushed out of significant domains they become impoverished with limited functions restricting their scope for development. For example, many tribal languages in India are pushed out of a number of public domains of economic significance for the communities. One of the domains which show rapid loss for tribal languages is the weekly village market. During the early 1980s the Kond women of Phulbani, Orissa who brought their household produces for sale in the village markets spoke their Kui language and used traditional notions of weights and measures for all commercial transactions. They had the better of the bargain with customers who were generally non-tribals with limited or no knowledge of Kui. Within over two decades, Kui has been pushed out of the village markets and the Kond women of their bargaining power. Panda (2004, 2007) observed extensive use of Saora language and Saora number system in market transactions in Gajapati district of Orissa. Use of the indigenous language and traditional knowledge systems which empowered the people of the Saora tribe in this important economic domain is also on the decline. As Panda (2004, 2007) shows, languages are cultural tools for encoding and transmission of indigenous knowledge systems such as mathematical and scientific knowledge among the tribes (see also Hough, Magar and Yonjan-Tamang 2009, this volume). Thus, when languages are kept out of some domains of use, the indigenous knowledge systems are endangered and languages weakened. Most of the indigenous languages in the world today are systematically impoverished due to large scale social neglect. Exclusion of languages from education, as we will show in case of tribal language communities in India, has direct negative consequences for educational performance, socioeconomic well being and sense of identity and empowerment of the speakers of minority and indigenous languages, severely restricting the chances of their development and survival. Social and educational neglect strip languages of their vitality and contribute to their weakness which is used to justify further neglect in a vicious circle of language disadvantage (see Figure 17.1).

The so called poverty of minority languages and disadvantages often associated with them are not inherent to the languages. Language disadvantage and inequalities across languages are socially constructed and transmitted (Mohanty, Panda and Mishra 1999) through institutionalised discrimination of some languages in political, economic, social and educational domains reinforcing their stigmatisation as weak languages. Unfortunately, attribution of insufficiency and weakness leads to justification of further social exclusion and, more importantly, educational neglect perpetuating

inequality. Exclusion of languages from formal education does contribute to loss of diversity due to what has been characterised as ‘linguistic genocide in education’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) and, more immediately, to educational failure, capability deprivation and poverty for the indigenous communities. This is particularly evident in case of the tribal peoples in India whose languages are disadvantaged due to layers of discrimination and exclusion in the system of formal education.

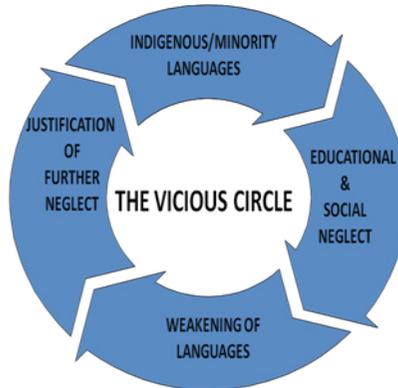


Figure 17.1. The Vicious Circle of Language Disadvantage

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA: EDUCATION AND THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

With a population of 84.3 million, the Scheduled Tribes¹ (STs) constitute 8.2% of the population of India. The 623 tribal communities speak 218 languages out of which 159 are exclusive to them (Singh 2002). Most of the tribal languages do not have a script² and are written in the script of either the dominant regional language or another major language; but some tribal languages, such as Santali,³ have developed their own writing system. The *Sixth All India Educational Survey* of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 1999) shows that, out of 41 languages used in schools⁴ (grades 1–10) as languages of teaching or the medium of instruction (MoI) and as school subjects, only 13 are tribal languages, all but one (Nicobaree) from the North-Eastern States which have a much higher concentration of tribal population compared to the rest of India. Further, only three to four of these 13 tribal languages are used regularly as MoI (Jhingran 2005) whereas the others are taught as school subjects or used as MoI in occasional special programmes. Less than 1% of the tribal children have any real opportunity for education in the medium of their mother tongues. Exclusion of tribal languages in school education is problematic since a very large number of classrooms throughout the country have a sizable proportion of tribal children (see Jhingran 2009, this volume).

It is also quite striking that the tribal mother tongues are denied a place in formal school education in practice, despite constitutional and other policy related provisions which mandate education in mother tongues particularly for the linguistic

minorities (see Jhingran 2009, this volume, Mohanty 2006, 2008b for more elaborate discussion of languages-in-education policy in India). In view of the poor educational performance among the tribal communities in India, various programmes of special intervention have been floated from time to time. But surprisingly, even if mother tongue education has traditionally been emphasised in India and use of mother tongues is widely viewed as crucial for better educational performance, the actual school practices continue to ignore the constitutional and statutory commitments in respect of minority mother tongues. When children's mother tongues are left out of classrooms, the disadvantages that accrue to them and the resultant damage to their chances of success in schools and in life are irreversible (see Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas 2005, Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas 2008). Jhingran (2009, this volume) shows the problems of non-comprehension (also see Mohanty, 2009, this volume), poor classroom achievement and severe learning difficulties of tribal children in primary schools in India taught in a language which is different from their mother tongue. Jhingran discusses the findings of his study in four states in India to show poor classroom achievement of tribal children in primary schools in which their mother tongues are ignored. The problems in tribal children's early education lead to large scale push out and cumulative failure through out all levels of education which, in effect, push the tribal population to the lowest level of educational attainment in India. Some indicators of non-attainment of the tribal population will be briefly discussed drawing comparisons between the two most disadvantaged populations in India, namely, the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Scheduled Castes (SC).

Literacy, school enrolment, push out rate and educational achievement of the STs

The crude literacy rate (the percentage of literates in the total population) for STs is 38.41% compared to 54.51% for the total population and 45.20% for SCs. Effective literacy rate (percentage of literates among the population aged 7 years and above) is 47.10% for STs and 54.69% for SCs and 68.81% for the rest of the population. Thus, the ST population shows a literacy gap of 21.71% compared to 14.12% for the SCs. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) or the percentage of children enrolled in schools in the age group of 6 to 11 years (grades 1–5) is 98.67 for STs, 95.61 and 95.39, respectively, for SCs and the total population. The enrolment ratio is relatively high in the early grades due to special government programmes to universalise education up to 14 years of age for STs in recent years. However, in the grades 6–8 (11 to 14 years) the GER is 48.19% for STs and 56.28% and 60.99%, respectively, for SCs and the total population. When the grades/age groups are combined to cover grades 1–8 (6 to 14 years), the corresponding GER for the STs, SCs and the total population are 80.50%, 81.06% and 82.51%, respectively. The percentage of students joining grade 1 and then leaving school by grade 5 is 51.57% for STs, 41.47% for SCs and 34.90% for the total population. By grade 10, the push out rates are 80.29%, 71.92% and 62.60%, respectively, for STs, SCs and the total population.

These figures, taken from *Selected Educational Statistics, 2002–2003* (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2004), show that tribal children face major barriers to their enrolment and retention in schools.

An assessment of learning achievement of students at the end of grade 5, by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) with a national sample of 88,271 children (Singh, Jain, Gautam, and Kumar 2004), shows that the ST students scored significantly lower than the ‘other’ students (i.e., excluding SCs and STs) in tests of learning achievement in Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Language, Reading Comprehension, and Grammar and Usage. The tribal students performed somewhat better than their Scheduled Caste counterparts (except in Mathematics), but their performance was significantly below that of the other students. The performance of tribal students in high school examinations is also found to be poorer compared to SCs and the rest of the population. The percentage of ST students who pass the high school examinations in different states in India is about 40 on the average, less than the other groups. With 80 out of 100 children pushed out before high school examination, this means that, of the 20 in 100 who appear the examination, only about 8 pass. Mohanty’s (2008b) analysis of the results of state wide common annual high school examinations in Orissa (where STs constitute over 22.13% of the state population) for the period 2003 to 2005 shows that ST students have a higher failure rate and low levels of achievement (percentage of marks in the examination) compared to SC and other students. The results of 2006 and 2007 examinations also show the same trend. Lower levels of school achievement of tribal students effectively reduce their chances of joining institutions of higher education in which ST representation is quite low.

Beginning from primary schools, the proportion of ST students declines with higher levels of education—from 9.67% in primary (grades 1–5) to 5.37% in (grades 9–12) (Mohanty 2008b). The representation of ST students in higher and technical education is even lower. The percentage of ST students in higher and technical education in India during the years 2000–2001 and 2001–2002 varied from 2.97% to 4.64% (Planning Commission 2004), far below their 8.2% share of the national population.

The language barrier and education of tribal children

The language barrier that the tribal children face on their school entry is a major factor in their poor educational performance and consequent socioeconomic deprivation. The language barrier also comes with a content barrier since the daily life experiences and culture of tribal children are hardly present in textbooks and other curricular material in the dominant language schools. As pointed out earlier, school practices in respect of tribal children in India have often been predicated on the assumption that there are weaknesses and disadvantages inherent to tribal languages and that maintenance of these languages is a cognitive and socioeconomic burden. Contrary to these beliefs, our studies among the Kondhs in Orissa over a period of nearly

two decades show that the Kui-Oriya bilingual Kondos (who had maintained their indigenous language) performed better than the Oriya monolingual Kondos (who had lost their language although they still identified with it, calling themselves Kui people) in a host of tasks assessing their cognitive, intellectual, metalinguistic and metacognitive skills and educational achievement (Mohanty 1994, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; see also Skutnabb-Kangas 1995 for a review of Mohanty 1994). The Kond studies also showed that maintenance of Kui and community level bi/multilingualism promoted social integration in contact situations. Thus maintenance of the indigenous language is a social and psychological resource and not a burden for the language community. Rather, the problem lies in its denial and exclusion.

The exclusion of tribal mother tongues from education limits tribal children's chances of adequate classroom learning and success in academics and, consequently, limits their freedom and ability to influence the direction of their lives. A number of Indian studies show that tribal children (Saikia and Mohanty 2004, Sema 2008) as well as other groups of children (Nayak 2007) perform significantly better in MT medium classrooms compared to their matched counterparts in classrooms in which the MoI is another dominant language. As several contributions to this volume show, educational benefits of the use of mother tongue in regular classroom settings have been clearly demonstrated in a number of studies all over the world. Any barrier to the continued use of children's home language in schools is debilitating and imposition of another dominant language as the MoI has long term adverse effects not only on their mother tongue but also on their capabilities, entitlements and freedom of choice.

EDUCATION, CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY IN THE TRIBAL POPULATION

Amartya Sen conceptualises poverty as 'capability deprivation' and 'unfreedom' (1982, 1985; Dreze and Sen 2002). Capability, according to Dreze and Sen (2002: 35–36), refers to 'the ultimate combinations of functionings from which a person can choose' and freedom to 'the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead.' Sen relates social discrimination to lack of opportunities and freedom, capability deprivation and poverty. According to Sen, education is a major capability input and illiteracy a lack of freedom restricting economic opportunities. School education directly enhances opportunities through easier access to jobs and income and, equally importantly, it adds to social and cultural freedom and empowers persons for adequate participation in exercise of political rights. Dreze and Sen (2002) speak of the substantial problems of 'voicelessness' of the disadvantaged groups in India, particularly the scheduled tribes, arising out of the large-scale illiteracy and lack of education both of which impede economic development. They attribute non-attendance and school push out to lack of interest (of parents as well as children) and to a host of 'discouragement effects' due to alienating curricula, inactive classrooms, indifferent teachers, and social discrimination in the classroom.

Linguistic and cultural discrimination, arising out of prevalent inequalities, is central to the relationship between illiteracy and educational failure, lack of freedom, capability deprivation and poverty. While education is the enabling factor for economic development, mother tongue is the enabling factor for access to quality education. Mismatch between home and school languages and neglect of mother tongues force the tribal children in India into subtractive language learning in a form of submersion education in the dominant language and leads to poor educational achievement reinforcing inequality and leading to capability deprivation. Educational failure, at least partly due to the systematic exclusion of mother tongues, is clearly reflected in the economic under-development, and general poverty of the tribals in India,⁵ which evidently is a complex multidimensional phenomenon.

The system of education in India, which is officially named as human resource development, neglects the most powerful resource that a tribal child comes to school with—her mother tongue—and in the process fails to enable her for a life of choice; rather, it fails to develop the human resources and leads to cumulative disadvantages. Exclusion of mother tongues in education limits access to resources and perpetuates inequality by depriving language communities of linguistic human rights, democratic participation, identity, self-efficacy, and pride. In case of the tribals in India, linguistic discrimination forms the core of their capability deprivation through educational and social neglect which contribute to their poverty in a vicious circle. As has been pointed out, their languages are weakened by marginalisation and exclusion from education and other instrumentally significant domains and then stigmatised as weak and inadequate justifying further exclusion. It is necessary to realise that mother tongue in education is not a problem; it is the solution.

FROM MOTHER TONGUE TO MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

The system of school and higher education in India has not responded to the prospects and challenges of its multilingual ethos (Mohanty 2008b). Maintenance of mother tongues, multilingualism and linguistic diversity are cognitive, educational and social resources for the tribal people as well as the society at large. As Mohanty (2006: 281) writes:

(T)he core of Indian multilingualism is in complementary relationship between languages and in the need to bridge the gap between the minor, minority, and tribal languages, and the languages of wider communication, including the regional and state level languages - Hindi and English. Multilingual education holds a central position in planning for a resourceful multilingualism that does not marginalize and deprive the minor, minority, and tribal language groups.

The existing systems of public and private education in India fail to appreciate the role and consequences of mother tongue for quality education (Mohanty 1989, 1994, 2006, 2008a); they do not support the weaker languages nor do they promote high levels of multilingual proficiency. Some Government of India agencies such as the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) made substantial efforts for

development of tribal and other weaker languages. Pattanayak (1981), who was the founder Director of CIIL, pleaded for mother tongue education in India and initiated experimental programmes in several states for introduction of tribal languages in early school education (see Mohanty, 1989). These programmes, however, could not be developed further and they were gradually dropped. The recent National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (NCERT 2005) sets MT-based multilingualism as a goal of school education in India but, in the absence of specific formulations on the methodology of multilingual education (MLE), it remains an unrealised framework for promotion of multilingualism through education and for preservation of the multilingual character and diversity of the society (see Jhingran 2009, this volume for discussion). It is necessary to have a comprehensive languages-in-education policy in India for empowerment of tribal and minority languages and promotion of multilingualism for all (Mohanty 2006). MLE in India needs to be developed as a process of education that starts with development of MT proficiency forming the basis for development of proficiency in all other languages with functional significance for specific groups including the tribal peoples. As several contributions to this volume show, the theoretical foundations of such a process are well developed and supported. Jhingran (2009, this volume) has discussed some of the initiatives to deal with the problems of mismatch between the home language and school language in India through various forms of MLE most of which are weak transitional programmes for soft assimilation. In recent years, more structured experimental programmes of MLE for tribal children in India have started with government initiatives in some of the states with substantial tribal population and are planned in few others. The following section gives a brief description of the programs in two states—Andhra Pradesh and Orissa—which pioneered the current MLE programmes in India.

MLE FOR TRIBAL CHILDREN IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND ORISSA CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the year 2003, the Government of India under its *Sarva Siksha Axiyan* (SSA, Education for All) programme approached states with substantial tribal population to introduce mother tongue based MLE for tribal children. The same year the government of Andhra Pradesh⁶ decided to start an experimental pilot project of MLE in eight tribal languages⁷ in 1000 schools. Initial preparations involved development of curriculum, textbooks and teaching learning materials and teacher training. The programme started for grade 1 children in the selected schools in 2004. With the first batch of children moving up to grade 5 in 2008, the Andhra Pradesh programme now covers all children from grades 1–5 in the selected schools. Orissa⁸ was the second state in India to launch the programme with 10 tribal languages⁹ in the year 2006. The Orissa MLE program started with grade 1 children of 195 selected schools in the year 2007. These children have moved to grade 2 in 2008 and the MLE programme in Orissa has added 300 more schools taking the total number of schools under the programme to 495.

The structure, nature and evaluation of the MLE programmes

The MLE programmes in the two states are planned to strengthen children's mother tongue through its use as the language of teaching for few years in the school and then gradually develop competence in the dominant state language, Telugu in Andhra Pradesh and Oriya in Orissa. However, as pointed out earlier, MLE in India must develop high level multilingual competence among children in at least 3 to 4 languages—mother tongue (for tribal and linguistic minority children), state majority language (like Telugu or Oriya), English and Hindi. Thus, the MLE programmes seek to develop competence in English and Hindi besides the mother tongue and the state majority language. The programmes envisage the children in the (experimental) MLE schools to join the mainstream majority language medium schools at the end of the primary grades (grades 1–5). In other words, in grade 6, the MLE children in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are expected to join schools in which Telugu or Oriya are the languages of teaching (MoI) for all school subjects except for the language subjects. However, the manner in which teaching of languages is scheduled in the MLE programmes of the two states does show some differences. In both the state programmes, the tribal mother tongue is the only MoI or the language of teaching for all school subjects¹⁰ for the first three years. L2¹¹ (Telugu/Oriya) oral skills are sought to be developed from grade 2 onwards with introduction of teaching of L2 reading and writing from grade 3. Oral English (as L3) is also a part of the grade 3 curriculum in Orissa and grade 4 in Andhra Pradesh. The tribal language (MT) as well as Telugu (L2) are used as MoI with 50% time sharing for teaching of all school subjects (except the languages) in grade 4 in Andhra Pradesh MLE programme and bilingual textbooks are used for the school subjects. The grade 4 programme in Orissa MLE is planned to use Oriya (L2) as the sole language of teaching (MoI) for all school subjects and continue with the MT as a language subject. Reading and writing skills in English (L3) constitute a part of the grade 4 curriculum in Orissa MLE. Thus, Orissa MLE programme plans for a change from the use of MT as MoI to Oriya as MoI from grade 4 with MT and L3 (English) retained as school subjects. The same structure continues into grade 5. In Andhra Pradesh MLE, on the other hand, there is a gradual switch over from MT as MoI to Telugu as MoI. Following equal time sharing in grade 4, MT and Telugu (L2) are used as languages of teaching (MoI) for all school subjects (other than languages) for 25% and 75% of the school time, respectively. Teaching of reading and writing in L3 (English) is introduced in grade 4 in Andhra Pradesh and it continues as a school subject beyond grade 5. The children from the MLE programmes in both the states are expected to become a part of the regular school programme from grade 6 onwards with the state language (Telugu or Oriya) as the language of teaching (MoI). In both the states Hindi is introduced from grade 6 as a fourth language (third language for the majority language children) while English also continues as a language subject; there is no plan to use MT (either as MoI or a school subject) after grade 5. However, the use of tribal MTs in MLE schools has led to growing

indications of involvement and appreciation of parents and communities. Further, the MLE programmes have generated some printed texts—curricular as well as extra-curricular—in tribal languages and the children in these programmes are showing better educational attainment. Such positive developments are expected to have ripple effects creating demands for continuation of the tribal MTs in the school programmes beyond grade 5.

The tribal mother tongues are written in the script of the state language—Telugu in Andhra Pradesh and Oriya in Orissa—with some modifications wherever necessary to accommodate to the phonological features of the target language. The MLE programmes make special efforts to incorporate cultural and daily life experiences of children and the indigenous knowledge systems, games, songs and stories from the tribal communities into the curriculum, textbooks, pictures and illustrations, teaching learning materials and children’s learning activities all of which are developed and worked out and vetted in groups which include teachers, community leaders, writers and artists from the target language community along with experts. The national and state curricula are closely followed in listing the grade specific competencies sought to be developed through the MLE programmes. The competencies in different curricular areas such as mathematics and language are integrated with different cultural themes by a theme web approach in which the different themes and competencies are mapped so that a specific set of skills can be developed through several culture specific classroom activities and learning processes. For example, the number skills are sought to be developed through songs, games and other culture specific themes. The sequencing of the text materials, stories, songs, and other teaching learning activities is decided by a village calendar approach which notes seasonal and periodic community activities, festivals, and special events in different months of a year which form a part of the children’s cultural experiences around which the curriculum materials are developed. Children are encouraged to participate in the classroom and in different activities. Some activities are also undertaken in the community settings with involvement of community members in children’s learning process. The teachers in the MLE programmes are drawn from the target language communities and, in some cases, the eligibility criteria are relaxed to recruit teachers from the community if teachers with the required training and qualifications are not available. Manuals for teachers have been developed in the programme and all MLE teachers are given specific training on MLE. The programmes are monitored by the state MLE Project cells as well as by the community. Language development activities such as development of dictionaries in different tribal languages and special community programmes are also undertaken as a part of the state MLE programmes. The impacts of MLE in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa have been periodically evaluated internally and also by external agencies.

The Andhra Pradesh MLE programme has been evaluated in two major studies as well as through internal feedback from teachers and communities and also by the project monitoring group. One comparative evaluation of classroom achievement

of MLE children and those in Telugu medium schools was undertaken in 2005 by the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute and another external evaluation study in coordination with SSA in 2007.¹² Both the studies show that classroom achievement in the school subjects was significantly better in the MLE programmes for all the eight tribal languages compared to the Telugu medium schools. The MT based MLE improved the basic competencies of literacy and numeracy among all children, increased their school attendance and participation and resulted in greater parental satisfaction and community involvement. The Orissa MLE program has been evaluated¹³ on the basis of the regular classroom assessment of grade 1 children in the experimental MLE schools as well as in the Oriya medium schools in 2008 at the end of the school year. Feedback from the teachers and community also forms a part of the evaluation. The evaluation shows better classroom achievement of children in the MLE schools in all of the ten tribal languages at the end of grade 1 compared to their Oriya medium counterparts. The MLE schools also reported better attendance and participation of children, greater teacher satisfaction, positive parental feedback and community involvement.

MLE PROGRAMMES FOR TRIBAL CHILDREN IN INDIA: SOME REFLECTIONS

The MLE programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa clearly provide a better quality of education than the traditional programmes of submersion education in a second language. However, systematic formative evaluation of the state programmes seems to be necessary to make them more effective in dealing with the language and content barriers that tribal children face in the mainstream schools. Planning of MT based MLE programmes for these children faces a formidable task of developing multilingual competence in at least four languages. While learning of the state majority language as also Hindi is supported by greater degree of exposure to these languages through their presence in several social and public domains such as market place use, intergroup communication and popular media, the same cannot be said for English in rural areas. However, there is a national trend favouring early introduction of English in the school curricula which has effectively pushed Hindi down in the order in which languages are taught in the schools. The problem of variations in the degree of exposure of the tribal children to the state majority language, Hindi and English gets even more complicated in case of classrooms which are much more diverse in terms of their multilingual composition. The current experimental MLE programmes in the two states have minimised this problem of multilingual variation within the classrooms by focusing on homogeneous groups of children from a single tribal language community. Even then, the manner in which use of the different languages in the MLE schools is distributed in the school curriculum varies between the states. The issues in respect of scheduling of languages and the timing of exit from the mother tongues need to be sorted out after careful analysis of the current programmes and their outcomes for development of multilingual

competence. In any case, in diverse multilingual contexts (see Agnihotri 2009 and Jhingran 2009, both this volume), the MLE pedagogy faces the difficult challenges of dealing with multilinguality, classroom linguistic diversity and societal preferences for different languages.

The current experimental MLE projects in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are quite limited in their scope and coverage both in terms of number of tribal languages taken up for MLE and the number of schools in the program. In the absence of a clear policy in these states and in India in respect of MT based MLE for all tribal and linguistic minority children and with limited resources for expansion of the programmes, how and when would MT based MLE become regular programmes of minority education in these states and throughout the country remain doubtful. The programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa have provided a good beginning and a lot of expectation; they have demonstrated the potentials of MLE in enabling and empowering the tribal communities to escape the vicious cycle of language disadvantage in India. One hopes that these initiatives will usher in an MLE movement in India for quality education and a just society.

Notes

- ¹ See Endnote 1 in Chapter 1 for clarification of this term.
- ² Twenty-five scripts are used for writing Indian languages. Eleven major scripts are used to write the main scheduled languages and thirteen minor scripts are used for writing some minor and tribal languages. Besides, the Roman scrip has been adopted by some languages in recent years.
- ³ The Santals have developed a script of their own – *Ol Chiki* - invented by Guru Gomke (the ‘Great Teacher’) Pandit Raghunath Murmu. This script has become the rallying point for the identity of Santali tribals. There are other tribal communities where sporadic and uncoordinated efforts are made to evolve language specific writing systems.
- ⁴ As Jhingran (2009, this volume) reports, 26 languages are used as media of instruction (MoI) in the primary grades (grades 1–5).
- ⁵ See Mohanty (2008b) for a discussion of various indicators of poverty among the tribal people in India which place them at the bottom in comparison even to other disadvantaged groups and the relationship of poverty with exclusion of the tribal mother tongues.
- ⁶ There are 35 tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh. These tribal peoples constitute 6.59% of the state population and have a literacy rate of 37.04% whereas the same for the state is 61.11%.
- ⁷ The tribal languages covered in the MLE programme in Andhra Pradesh are: Gondi, Koya, Kalami, Kuvi, Savara, Konda, Adivasi Oriya, and Banjara.
- ⁸ There are 62 tribal communities in Orissa. These tribal peoples constitute 22.13% of the state population and have a literacy rate of 37.37% whereas the same for the state is 63.61%.
- ⁹ The 10 languages in Orissa MLE programme are: Kui, Saora, Santali, Koya, Munda, Kuvi, Oram, Kisan, Bonda, and Juang.

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- ¹⁰ The school subjects include Language and Mathematics from grade 1 onwards. Environmental Studies as a curricular area is included from grade 1 (as a part of the language textbook for grades 1 and 2 and then as separate subject from grade 3 onwards) in Orissa. In Andhra Pradesh, on the other hand, Environmental Studies as a subject is part of the curriculum from grades 3 onwards.
- ¹¹ Labeling of languages as L2, L3 and L4 only refer to the order in which they are introduced in the MLE programmes; no other assumption is made about the manner in which they are developed, taught or learned.
- ¹² Details of the Andhra Pradesh MLE programme and these evaluation studies are available from the last two authors of this chapter and also from the Andhra Pradesh SSA web site (www.ssa.ap.nic.in).
- ¹³ The details are available from the second author of this chapter and also from the Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority (OPEPA) web site (www.opepa.in).