

# An Endeavour to Enhance the Reading Skill of Tribal Children through Revival and Usage of Indigenous Adivasi Languages in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha

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**Abstract** — The State of Odisha situated in the eastern part of India consists of 30 districts, of which Mayurbhanj is the largest one. The percentage of tribal population in this district is around 60%. Mundari, Santali and Ho are the main tribal languages abundantly spoken by the tribes of Mayurbhanj. But, Odia is used as the state language in the government schools. Most of the teachers of these schools belong to Odia background. Multilingual situation exists in the classrooms. The non-availability of tribal teachers and the existence multilingual situation in the classrooms negatively impacted the reading skill of the tribal children.

Keeping this in view, some project objectives were fixed, and innovations were tested. In order to materialise the project objectives, some strategies were adopted, which are as follows.

- Developing School as an enabling system
- Developing Teacher as a Catalyst
- Creating Reading Culture in the community
- Linkages and Networking with System and Functionaries

The above strategies involved certain activities to revive and promote the beliefs, values, morals, ethics and languages of Indigenous Adivasi culture. Abundant use of tribal oral languages in the classroom both by the teachers and the children, development of bilingual tribal books and their uses in the schools gradually created a stimulating environment for the tribal children, which ultimately led to improve their early reading skill.

**Keywords** — *Reading Skill; Bi-Lingual Children Reading; Revival of Tribal Language*

## 1. Introduction

CARE India is working in 5 blocks. 48 clusters and in 516 schools of Mayurbhanj district to succeed in twisted nearly 27000 Government school children through its START EARLY: READ IN TIME project. The project acknowledged that sociological and pedagogical barriers were the most reasons that hindered acquisition of early reading competencies in learners from marginalized context- that specialize in children from tribal context. Early reading strategy followed an inclusive approach; some important and relevant approaches are given below.

At the child level, the focus was to build conceptual understanding through encouraging use of mother tongue and simultaneously building a sound vocabulary base and exposure to the medium of instruction. The strategy focused on respecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of children that existed during a classroom. Thrust was to make sure those teachers and children appreciate the range that existed within the classroom and use it as a part of an efficient context based linguistic approach to foster early reading ability in children. Teachers were encouraged to

use that as a positive dividend not as a deficit. The strategy focused on creating enabling reading environment

(availability of reading resources, creating print rich environment, ensuring use of library in classroom, development of various kinds of materials, display of children material).

## 2. Care India's Endeavour for Revival of Tribal Languages

### 2.1 School Level

The school libraries were made accessible to children. Sufficient numbers aged and grade specific bilingual library books (stories, songs, riddles, jokes) were made available for the children. Provision was made for a separate library period within the school schedule a day. The purpose was to create an opportunity to have an easy access of the children to the libraries. Children were at their discretion to use any language of their interest. Every item or object available in the school campus was named bilingually with appropriate font size. There were regular co-curricular activities (debate, speech, storytelling etc.)

every week to create a multi-cultural environment in schools. Language was not a barrier for the children to participate in any of the activity.



Fig.1: Use of Bi-lingual books in classroom

### 2.2 Teacher Level

Trainings were imparted at a daily interval to equip them with knowledge, skill and attitude towards solving the day to day pedagogical issues faced during early grade language periods. The teachers were made aware of the importance of maternal language for the first grade children. During monthly cluster meetings, the teachers were taught to develop bilingual instructional charts, bilingual word charts and dictionaries for supporting children within the classroom. Developing these materials in schools with the assistance of children became a practice in course of your time.



Fig.2: Teachers developing bi-lingual material

### 2.3 Community Level

Based on different earlier researches, CARE India realized that the association and support of the tribal communities was highly needed for improving the learning level of children. It had been also felt that there was dearth of tribal literatures as supplementary reading materials in schools. Development of tribal literature for children was the necessity of the hour. According to the research

findings, the tribals of Mayurbhanj were very rich in oral culture. They had stock of tribal resources like stories, songs and riddles in oral forms. Some of their cultural practices were on the verge of extinction. In this context, CARE India took an initiative to collect the old oral stories, songs and riddles from the villages through story telling festivals.

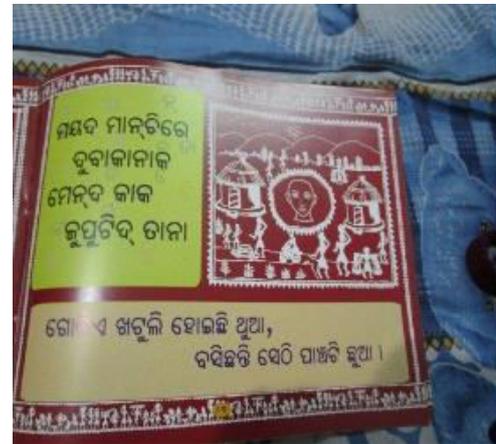


Fig.3: Bi-lingual books developed by CARE Storytelling festival at community

Stories were told by the participants one by one. These were brought to the written form by young children of the villages. After the end of the storytelling session, the written stories were collected from the villagers. These stories were again examined by a screening committee formed by CARE INDIA.

A consensus was taken in the villages to engage the Educated Kishories of the villages on a rotational basis to run the library on Saturdays and Sundays. The Kishories of the villages organized role plays, thematic drawing, painting, storytelling, story writing, and different reading activities for 2 hours with the early grade children using their mother tongue. The International literacy day and International mother language days were celebrated in the

villages to create an awareness among the community people for restoration of tribal languages.

#### **2.4 Advocacy at Different Level**

An exhibition of children's literature was organized by CARE India at the district head quarter in Mayurbhanj to apprise the district education officials about the creation and promotion of children created literature.



**Fig.4: Exhibition of children created Literature**

The secretary of Ministry of HRD appreciated the multilingual classroom model and issued a circular to the states for replication of this model in their respective area.

### **3. Conclusion**

Realising the importance of mother tongue as the base for the language development of children, it revived the tribal languages in the community through establishment of community libraries in the villages. Attempt was made at all levels for promoting mother tongue-based education for early grade children. Trainings were imparted to the CRCCs and the teachers on the development and usage of bi-lingual literatures in schools. The school and community libraries were provided with bi-lingual/multi-lingual books for reference and use. Revival of Tribal languages and their abundant usage in oral and written forms not only created an inclusive environment but also supported in improving the reading skill of tribal children to a larger extent. The results are quite visible in the Cluster study report published by a Delhi based research agency "KAARAK".

### **4. References**

- [1] Cluster study report prepared by "KAARAK", a Delhi based research Agency, <http://kaarak.in/>
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