

Endangered Kumaoni Language and It's Upliftment for Cultural Heritage.

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Abstract

The Kumaon region is the part of Uttarakhand state also known as "Dev Bhoomi" (Land of Gods). This region is known for its colorfulness, cultural legacy, customs, rituals and magnificent beauty. Kumaoni language belongs to the Indo Aryan group and having many regional dialects such as Johari of the Johar Valley, Askoti of Askot, Bhabri of Ramnagar, Khasraharjiya of Almora, Pachhai of Ranikhet and Dwarahat etc.

It is one of the 325 recognised Indian languages and spoken over by 2.0 million people (2011 census) .UNESCO's atlas of the world's languages in danger categorized kumaoni language into the "unsafe" category. There are famous writers in kumaoni like Lok Ratna Pant (Gumani), Kunwar Singh Bhandari, Jeevan Chandra Joshi etc. The folk song 'Bedu Pako Bara Massa' is world famous and was chosen as the best folk song among the other participants from India at Teen Murti Bhavan at a international gathering by Prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Kumaoni language has a rich literary legacy which includes mythological stories, Jaagar (a literary form used for evocation of Gods), love story of Rajula Malushahi (a ballad form) etc. Although having a rich tradition of oral form the speakers of kumaoni language are decreasing steadily which becomes the major issue of concern. This paper will discuss the reasons behind the deteriorating condition of the language and what can be the suggestive measures through which the advancement can be done.

Keywords- Kumaoni language, Endangered, Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Dialects.

Introduction

The mystical land of Uttarakhand known for its mesmerizing beauty lies in the Western Himalayas. The beautiful snow-covered mountains, the lush green Bugyals (grassland), Himalayan Monal (State bird of Uttarakhand), Valley of flowers (Chamoli), Tugnath (the highest Shiva temple in the world), Chota Char dham (Gangotri, Yamotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath), Jim Corbett national park are the emblem of its beauty. The word Uttarakhand is derived from the Sanskrit words *uttara* meaning 'North' and *khanda* meaning 'land'. Uttarakhand is also known as *Dev bhoomi* (land of Gods). It carved out of Uttar Pradesh on 9 November 2000 and became the 27th state of Indian republic. This region is known for its colorfulness, cultural legacy, customs, rituals, and its natural aesthetics. Mahatma Gandhi on his first visit to Uttarakhand called it "Switzerland of India". The state is divided into two regions- Kumaon and Garhwal, comprising of total 13 districts, 6 in Kumaon and 7 in Garhwal. Altogether the people from the two regions are called as Uttarakhand.

It is one of the 325 recognised Indian languages and spoken over by 2.0 million people (2011 census). UNESCO's atlas of the world's languages in danger categorized kumaoni language into the "unsafe" category. The Ad Hoc expert group on endangered languages (2003) defines a language as endangered language "when it is on a path of toward extinction", and further added that a language is in danger when its speakers cease to use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communication domains and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new speakers, adults or children". UNESCO distinguishes four levels of endangerment in languages based on intergenerational transfer:

1. Vulnerable –Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., Home).
2. Endangered – Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in home.
3. Severely endangered- Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.
4. Critically endangered – The youngest speakers are grandparents and older generation, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.

UNESCO has placed kumaoni in the “Vulnerable” category.

Language is a key to one’s freedom. It is said if you want to take control upon the people of some specific area first control their language because “When a language dies , a way of understanding the world dies with it, a way of looking at the world.(Steiner G).

India is the cradle of multilingual and multicultural society where different languages are spoken which carries with them the rich tradition, history and cultural legacy which has been bestowed on us by our ancestors.

The word Kumaon has been derived from the word “ Kurmanchal” meaning land of kurmavatar(The tortoise incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the preserver according to Hinduism).The state of Uttarakhand has Hindi and Sanskrit as it’s official language but there are 3 regional languages – Kumaoni which is spoken in the Kumaon region, Garhwali in the Garhwal region and Jaunsari in Jaunsar region near Dehradun. The Kumaoni language belongs to the Indo Aryan group and shares similarities with Garhwali, Nepali, Gujarati, Hindi, and Kashmiri etc. The script used for Kumaoni is Devanagari. According to language scientist Dr. Trilochan Pandey based on pronunciation, sound elements and creation kumaoni is divided into 4 groups and 12 dialects are fixed which are as following:

Eastern Kumaoni

1. **Kumaya-** spoken in the region of Nainital connected to kali kumaon.
2. **Suryali-**spoken in the Saur region, South Johar and Eastern Gangoli

3. **Sirali-** spoken in the region Sira in the west of Askot.
4. **Askoti-** spoken in Askot region and has influence of Nepali

Western kumaoni

5. **Khasprajiya-** spoken in the region of Barah mandal and nearby area of Danpur.
6. **Pchai** – spoken in the south region of Almora near Garhwal
- 7.
8. border
9. **Falda koti** –spoken in Faldakot region of Nainital, some parts of Almora -and in the region of Pali pchhaun
10. **Chogrkhia** –spoken in the region of chogrkhia pargana
11. **Gangoi-** spoken in some regional belt of gangoli and danpur.
12. **Danpuriya-** spoken in the north part of danpur and south part

Northern Kumaoni

11.Johari- spoken in jauhar or in northern remote area of kumaon. It has the influence of Tibetan language

Southern kumaoni

12.Nainital kumaoni or Rachbhaisi- spoken in the region of Nainital, Bhimtal, Kathgodam, Haldwani etc.

Kumaoni language has a rich literary tradition which is written as well as oral. The written kumaoni dates to 11th c was found in rock and copper inscriptions, Vansavalis, danpatras and sanads. The first written proof of kumaoni is the commentary on Vridha Chanakya written by Ram Bhadra Tripathi in 1728. The famous kumaoni poets & writers are Lok Ratna Pant popularly known as Gumani – (Gumani Kavya Sangrah , Gumani

Niti), Krishna Pandey (Muluk kumaon and kalyug Varnan), Girish Tiwari “Girda”(Uttarakhand Kavya ,Aaj Himal), Mahendra Matiyani-(Hiya Re Udas Kilai), Shekhar Pathak (Kavita Ka Aakhar), Sumitra Nandan Pant (Burunsh) etc.

Kumaoni language is also very rich in its oral tradition ranging from mythological stories, Jaagar (a literary form used for evocation of Gods), love story of Rajula Malushahi (a ballad form) ,Harvest songs, various Sanskar songs etc .The song Bedu Pako Baramasa is a very famous song from the hills, kail le bajaye murli was used in the movie Jab we met ,noteworthy magazines are there like Achal , Aankhar, pehru etc.

The language is very sweet and unique, which give us the sense of belongingness. There are certain typical words which will lose their true essences when translated in any other language whether English or Hindi .Example – Thera (it’s a catchphrase in kumaoni),Gazbaji Jana (get confused) ,Dagariya (Companion),Bhabhri Jana(lost way), Mijaat (Fashion).

A chart has been used to show the kumaoni words with their transliteration and meaning given.

SHORT PHRASES		
Words/Phrases	Tansliteration	Meaning
नमस्कार	Namaskar	Hi/Hello
कस हेरो छा?	Kas haro cha	How are you?
भल हेरो	Bhal hero	I m fine
काँ जाण छा?	Kaa jaan chha?	Where are you going?
होए	Hoye	Yes
कतु?	Kadu?	How much? /How many?
काँ?	Kaa?	Where?

कसिक?	Kasik?	How?
कैक?	Kaik?	Whose?
को?	Ko?	Who?
किला	Kila?	Why?
के?	Ke?	What?
के हेगो?	Ke hego	What happened?
तुमर नौ के छ?	Tumar nau ke che?	What is your name?
आपू कां बटे आछा?	Aapoun kan bate aachcha?	From where you come?

Although having a very rich tradition of oral form and vast vocabulary the speakers of kumaoni language are decreasing steadily which becomes the major issue of concern. Loss of a language is not limited to a certain range but with it the speakers of that language face's identity crisis. The identity which was their hallmark and which they build after a tremendous hard work. Sandesha Rayapa Gabriyal, Assistant Professor in JNU, Delhi comments "The loss a language is also the loss of a culture that it's associated with

. Promotion of indigenous language is

important to save the cultures and traditions that contain the indigenous knowledge with their language systems". Further she adds Indigenous and regional languages are facing threat of extinction because dominating languages such as Hindi and English tend to devour the indigenous

languages. Promotion of indigenous language is important to save culture and tradition which has been contributing to the world since times immemorial.

Reasons for Endangered Status of Kumaoni Language

Economic reasons

1. **Migration**- Most of the population shifts towards an area that doesn't speak or understand kumaoni in- lieu of economic opportunities and educational purposes, hence not much weightage is given to kumaoni in growing years.

2. **Non-accessible**- Overtime Kumaoni writers and artist have shifted from this regional language towards more accessible and in demand language like Hindi which appeals to a much larger group of audience as more people in India understands Hindi.

3. **lack of exposure** - due to lack of widespread market, kumaoni doesn't get enough publishers and readers resulting in a smaller market that restricted to the local area.

Cultural Reasons

1. **Limitation of language**- Kumaoni is limited to a group of native speakers or communities as people from other states are unable to understand it.

2. **Dominance of other culture**- when one culture meets the other culture the dominant culture ends the scope of less dominant culture. Hale (1992) pointed out "Much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity in which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures, placing them in a condition which can only be described as embattled.

3. **Lack of Promotion** - kumaoni doesn't spread outside its regions due to many reasons like not being a part of the curriculum. apathy of locale and government alike. As a result, it was unable to emerge as a language with much scope in higher institution

Political Reasons

1. Unofficial Status- the state of uttarakhand doesn't recognize kumaoni as an official language and so all the official work like legal activities, media, Governmental administration is done in Hindi/ English

2. Regional Division – The state of uttarakhand is divided into two major linguistics groups Kumaoni and Garhwali and making one of them might result in conflict with the other linguistic group.

Suggestions for Upliftment of Kumaoni Language

- 1. Documentation of language-** It aims to preserve the language by recording the native speaker while using the language to conserve the original accent and pronunciation so that it can help in future translation and linguistic analysis .According to UNESCO Ad Hoc expert group on Endangered languages (2003) says “ Without adequate documentation, a language that is extinct can never be revived ”.
- 2. Preservation through translation** – Translation of kumaoni literature into other lingua franca will help it in wide spreading over a bigger platform.
- 3. providing platform for folk music** – Music knows no boundaries. To make any language popular music plays an important role. Folk music reflects the culture of a community, its insights fascination towards the culture amid the outsiders.
- 4. Implmentation of kumaoni language in curriculum-** Till now the kumaoni language is not implemented in the curriculum properly hence it is ignored.

5. Encouraging Reading, writing, and speaking in the community – Initiating the promotion of kumaoni language at local level and from the government side.

6. promotion through social media- In today's globalized world social media is a great platform in endorsing anything. In promoting kumaoni language social media can play a big role through e-Magazine, videos, blogs, vlogs, online articles, apps etc.

Conclusion

Language endangerment is not just a threat to the language but also to the culture and Traditional knowledge which is prevalent in the society of that specific area. Even though having a vast vocabulary the kumaoni language has been on the periphery and highly neglected by the local and government. Language provides us with a sense of belongingness and collective identity. Nelson Mandela once said “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart”. Kumaoni culture is so colorful and picturesque. The folk songs are so soothing, the traditional Jewelleries like Nath, Hasuli, Mangtika, Paunji are so different and unique, the beautiful attire like Pichoda make hill people distinctive from the rest part of India.

To restore the kumaoni language we should start celebrating our cultural festivals, promoting folk music, kumaoni literature and traditional which are carrier of our rich cultural Heritage. Prof Omkar N. koul, former director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) said the best way to keep a language and make it part of studies. For dialects that do not have scripts, he said, the Roman or Devanagari scripts may be used when writing. We all the kumaoni's are hopeful that one day our kumaoni language will get its due acknowledgment and will be part of the recognized languages of the Indian constitution.

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