

Gondi Language: Identity, Politics and Struggle in India

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ABSTRACT: *The Gondi language has been associated with the Tribal community of the Gonds residing in the Gondwana District of India. Contrary to the large amount of speakers of the language, the language itself has faced severe neglect by the government and the unfair prejudice of the general public. The Paper tries to bring out the varied undertones and the class and caste color of the problems. With the specific focus on the state of Madhya Pradesh, the paper lastly highlights the current situation and the attempts by the Government to improve the situation of this script.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Gondi community is an Adivasi tribe which speaks the Dravidian language Gondi. Listed under the scheduled tribe community, the Gonds are spread out throughout the central India and mostly prevalent in Madhya Pradesh and the supposed Gondwana District. Unfortunately, like indigenous people all over the world, India's Adivasis too have been savaged and ravaged by later people who claim to be more "civilised". The account for almost eight per cent of India's population and yet are easily its most deprived and oppressed section.¹ The Gondi community has been in the recent news for the kind of neglect they have faced from both the state and central governments, neglected of even an official language status in India. This is despite the huge population of present Gondi speakers. The 2011 census says that the total population of the Gond tribe in the country is 11,344,629.² Actual number of Gondi speakers, is many times the number reflected in the census. Gondwana Ganatantra Party (GPP) president, Hira Singh Markam, says that based on surveys carried out by the party, the total number of people with Gondi as their first language is an estimated 20 million.³

This amongst other political and social causes has led to the Gondwana Movement which has reached out to around 40 crore people on the basis of poverty and tribal linkages.⁴ They are collecting literature, becoming research oriented, and redefining ancient history and appear aggressive for power. This movement primarily believes that there are further many more sub classifications and global tribes present within the Gondi tribe that need to be absorbed into one solid Gondwana Land and is relied on the continental shift theory of the same land.⁵ The Gondi Movement is re-establishing their auspicious identity and intellectual strength which can redress present world difficulties. The political socialization in India has been peaceful. Modern society is politically conscious and participant of these events.

A 2014 publication highlights the plight of the tribe as seen from the more educated part of the community. For example in Andhra Pradesh, Birshah, who holds two PhDs in English and Ancient Indian History, has for long been seeking a solution to the vexed Adivasi problem, that has also morphed into the Telugu-led Naxalite rebellion that enables the Central and state governments to turn it into a law and order issue, by highlighting the grievances of the Adivasi people. The Gondwana Movement believes that the Centre needs to implement the constitutional provisions and promises made in the Constituent Assembly by recognising the Gondi language and self-rule for the Gond people by carving out a "Gondwana" state out of the Gond homelands in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.⁶

¹The Gond Kingdoms, DOWN TO EARTH, Available at: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/the-gond-kingdoms-46701>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

²GondiShankar population, CENSUS, 2011, available at: <http://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/470085-Gondi-shankar-madhyapradesh.html>

³Gondilanguage: Victim of Governmental Neglect, DOWN TO EARTH, Available at: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/Gondi-language-victim-of-government-neglect-46707>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

⁴ Id

⁵Dr. Rajeev Kumar, *Politics of Tribal Identity and Gondi Movement*, available at: http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_55912.pdf, pp.1-3 accessed on 7th November, 2018

⁶Scripting their Stories, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/scripting-their-stories/>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

History

Unlike other tribes of central India, the Gondi tribe does not have a uniform cultural or socio-economic identity. While a significant section of this community still lives a close-to-nature life involving hunting-gathering, some forms of agriculture and pastoral activity, some sections are no strangers to political and economic power since as early as 12th century.⁷ This diversity in social and economic standing brought on by these four centuries of power continues to this day. While a significant part of the community still lives in the villages and a lifestyle similar to other forest-dwelling tribals in that region, there is also a sizable urban population in almost every city of central India. Education levels are obviously higher in the urban community compared to other tribal groups. There is in fact an interesting discourse on the differentiation between the sub classes within the Gond community and how the strategies used by the forest dwelling, largely apolitical communities are used by the urban dwelling Gonds to enhance their revenue and earning capacities.⁸

The reign of the Gond kings is characterised by the rather remarkable phenomenon where the culture of the ruling class was strikingly different from that of the Gond community. At large this phenomena has interestingly mirrored onto the current trends between the urban and forest dwelling Gonds to as explained. Historians like DD Chatterton, Sir John Malcom and Captain J Forsyth record that the Gonds had acquired customs like the worship of Hindu deities from Rajputs, and barbaric customs like human sacrifice to ensure victory for rulers had also been imported. Gonds in large numbers were also killed in Rajput-style honour wars that their rulers undertook under the influence of Rajput culture. Hence, since early times there was present a lot of mixing and absorption of different cultures and ways of life within the Gond community.⁹

Over time, the outsiders flourished, while the tribals either went back to forest-dwelling lifestyles, distanced from the seats of power, Gond or otherwise, or fell into poverty, debt and land loss. This social pattern can still be observed in the Madhya Pradesh tribal belt. The process of siphoning resources from the tribals to non-tribal, commercially adept communities from outside the tribal belt was intensified but the fact remains that the Gond kings willy-nilly played a significant part in opening up this once difficult to access hilly and thickly forested region to plunder by the outside world.¹⁰

The Language

Few Gondi speakers are able to write their language and there is no written literature in Gondi. There is a rich oral tradition though. When written, the Devanagari or Telugu scripts are generally used for Gondi, while the Gond script, which was created by MunshiMangal Singh Masaram of Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh in 1928, is little used today. This unique script, which is perhaps the only script in the country besides Urdu which is written right to left, also has three or four versions.¹¹ Another unique quality of the script is that in the northern and central parts of India, it is the only language, barring Gujarati, which has a script of its own. All other north and central Indian languages use the Devanagri script.¹²

II. ANALYSIS

In the researcher's analysis about the struggle of the Gondi community with their identity and language, the researcher tries to point out all the various aspects that come in the way of the same, or are the reason or cause of the same and highlight the shared experiences of the Gondi community with other tribal peoples.

Ignorance by the government

The Constitution of India under Article 350-B makes provisions for a special officer, the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, whose sole responsibility would be to safeguard the educational and linguistic rights of minorities.¹³ The Office of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities has been given the task of protecting the educational rights of linguistic minorities in India. The Social and political groups of the Gond tribal community feel that the Gondi language has been unduly ignored by the Indian government, unlike other languages which have undergone a standardisation process and are included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. None of these processes have been initiated for the Gondi language. Further, Gondi has also not been included under the Technology Development for Indian Languages (TDIL) programme of the Department of Electronics and Information Technology, which is developing a Unicode of sorts, a programme for computers, which allows the user to type in any of the 22 Scheduled Indian languages, they seek. Further, the

⁷ Supra N.1

⁸ Id

⁹ Id

¹⁰ Id

¹¹ *Gondi Language*, OMNIGLOT, Available at: <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/Gondi.html>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

¹² Id

¹³ *Article 350*, CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Indian State's general exploitation of tribals and their resources with the collusion between capitalist and casteist forces.¹⁴

The constitutional provision of education in the mother tongue for linguistic minority children (Article 30) has more or less remained defunct with limited application, limited to the privileged 22 scheduled languages leaving out the education of many ethnic and linguistic minority groups in India such the tribal children. The vast geographical area that the speakers are distributed into should also account for the urgency in the need to standardize the language. The speakers are spread across a remarkable 14 states within India and it is a well-known fact about how large of an aspect language plays in cultural, social and political identity. This tribe comprises 13.45 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes' population of India, and is the largest tribal group in the country. The language has taken a step further and even influenced the languages spoken in the respective states of the speakers. Prime examples are TeleguGondi and MarathiGondi. Due to government neglect even the script has been put to disuse, within the millions of Gondi speakers, only around a hundred people know how to write in the language. Recently many efforts have been made by the community to revive this language to enable the language to be imbibed by the community effectively. Books on Gondi alphabet, grammar and usage have appeared, and a few dictionaries have also been compiled. However, none of these is comprehensive, since most efforts are localised and without active support from the government.¹⁵

Another important aspect of the Gondi language and the government discourse is the former's connection with the Naxal community. This divide can be prominently seen in states like Chattisgarh, while the state continues to neglect tribal languages in its textbooks, Naxals have rather in their schools, always given prominence to Gondi.¹⁶ The Educational wings responsible for the same produce an array of educational content in Gondi, published mostly using desktop printers or even crudely handwritten and then photocopied for mass circulation. This connect has transcended the realm of education and reached the marker of popular culture, one that is very significant on the face of it. From using the Gondi language for popular Naxal songs and radio shows, Gondi has become not just the driver of an underground pop culture, but also an efficient way for the rebels to get their worldview across and get closer to the locals. This strategic use of indigenous languages is something the state has overlooked, transfixed as it remains on "mainstreaming" tribals by getting them to learn only Hindi.¹⁷

There is an ulterior motive of using the language to create a distinct identity, one that resonates with their own at the same time elevating the language's status. An example of such attempts can be seen in the dabbling with the setting up an indigenous script for Gondi, which is currently written primarily in Devanagiri. This was confirmed by a former divisional level Naxal cadre member. There are more linguistic and cultural channels of their public outreach machinery such as folk dance troupes and theatres. In regions where electronic forms of entertainment sometimes even radio are difficult to come by, especially in local languages, live performances in them are enormously popular. It is not just their knowledge of Gondi that this literature embodies, but their enviable understanding of the local flora and fauna. The use of local languages is also central to the Naxals other outreach work, like that concerning agriculture and animal husbandry. This extensive use of Gondi and other local languages by the Naxals is something the government has never sought to or been able to match.¹⁸

Another such concern stems from the Maoist area of operation. The state's inability to address the communication gap between the Adivasi community and government officials, who don't speak their lingua franca, has offered Maoists the opportunity to exploit this disconnect. The Maoists have not only spoken the Gondi language but adopted their way of living and leave no chance to reinforce the idea that the government has done nothing for the community and their culture. This communication gap nurtured at schools teaching majoritarian languages like Hindi extends to the local administration and its inability to impart basic governance in a language they understand. Allied with rampant exploitation at their hands, poor economic development and the violence unleashed by both the security forces and Maoists, this is a recipe for disaster.¹⁹

These incidents show the growing repercussions of feigning ignorance of the existence of the Gondi community. Standardization will unify the communities spread over the nation and the inclusion of Gondi into the Eight Schedule of the Constitution would offer the community employment opportunities, the opportunity of having their books translated into other languages, pedagogic benefits, better representation in Parliament, the ability to write competitive exams in their language, recognition from the SahityaAkademi, and monetary benefits. Given this dichotomy, it is interesting to note as to who the real outsider is, is it the Naxals and Maoists

¹⁴ Supra N.3

¹⁵ Supra N.5

¹⁶ *When Naxals Speak Your Language*, THE WIRE, Available at: <https://thewire.in/culture/when-the-naxals-speak-your-language>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

¹⁷ Id

¹⁸ Id

¹⁹ *A Bridge to Maoist Heartland*, ODISHA SUN TIMES, Available at: <https://odishasuntimes.com/Gondi-language-bridge-maoist-heartland/>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

who have mastered the art of learning their language, communicating with them and revering it or the government who constantly neglects it. Though the State would like to paint the picture otherwise, it does not take much to see the practical reality. Along with better infrastructural facilities and services, softer approaches that respect local languages need to find their way into the government's strategy manual. This approach accords not just linguistic sensitivity but also respect for the tribal lifestyles, culture and knowledge that are expressed through these languages. Sincere respect and sensitivity to the local language, lifestyles, indigenous knowledge and culture. These efforts will not only help build trust of the community towards the State but also keep at bay any security tensions arising out of the same situations.²⁰

Struggle for Identity and Linguistic Extinction

The linguistic scene for tribals in India has always been a complex affair, what makes it even more complex is the intertwining of language with recognizable culture and the fact that most of the tribal communities are linguistically heterogeneous in their mother tongue, and some are ethnically heterogeneous. In some cases, the dominant languages with which a tribal community is in contact are also diverse, this is mainly due to the fact that either the geo- graphical boundary of a tribal community living contiguously may have more than one dominant language or in other cases a tribal community may live non-contiguously in the midst of more than one dominant language. Within the linguistic minorities of India, the SC and ST communities form a criterion of their own with the Gondi community being a primary example. Movements like the Gondi Movement believe that identity, social structure and cultural values of tribals in India and the Gond tribe do not match with the structure of Hindu society..²¹

In the past there has also been some confusion regarding the differentiation between caste and tribe. It has generally been assumed that tribe and caste represent two different forms of social organisations - castes being regulated by the hereditary division of labour, hierarchy, the principle of purity and pollution, civic and religious disabilities, etc, and tribes being characterised by the absence of the caste attributes. The two types of social organisations are seen as being governed by different principles. It is said that kinship bonds govern tribal society when in contrast, inequality, dependency and subordination are integral features of caste society. Further, in the 'jati' society, the village is expected to be culturally heterogeneous, with each jati following a unique combination of customary practices. Tribesmen, on the other hand, expect their society to be homogeneous. Though both of these groups have been subjected to stereotypes and assumptions, the he assumptions made about tribes more often than not have, therefore, been misleading and fallacious to a considerable extent.²²

This has even led to a divide in the conceptions as to whether the tribes lived in isolation from. A large number of anthropological works of the post-independence era still points to phenomenon such as tribes being absorbed or assimilated into Hindu society or tribes becoming castes. Tribes are said to have accepted the ethos of caste structure and to have got absorbed within it. Hence they are treated as hardly differentiable from neighbouring Hindu peasantry.

We have seen a few examples of this with the Gondi community too with respect to the prioritization of the Hindi language as a medium and the attitude of ignorance shown towards the Gondi tongue. The Gondi movement is hence, in the pursuit of political power and social status, publishing literature and promoting research. The members are establishing own temples and promoting people of tribal identity particularly those who live in plain areas and have adopted common Hindu rituals, to follow tribal rituals with tribal priests. These are efforts to emphasize the difference between the Gondi community and their Hindu counterparts.

The other common points of problem along with the hinduization of the tribes is the phenomena of sanskritisation of their language, in this case Gondi. Sanskritisation is seen as a process whereby communities lower down the social ladder emulate the lifestyle of the dominant caste of a region.²³ Acculturation, absorption or assimilation are other terms used to describe these phenomena. Tribes have been conceived of as tribes precisely because they are outside Hindu as well as caste society. Sanskritisation demands that tribes must first enter Hindu society and then inevitably it also involves assuming some caste status, something which the tribals do not accord to. Today, acculturation for tribes means adopting the ideas values and practices of the dominant community rather than being part of that society by assuming a caste status. In examining the question of the trans- formation of tribe into caste, it is not enough to look only at the relationship between tribes and caste society. There is also a need to consider how tribes them- selves perceive their equation with caste society.²⁴

²⁰ Id

²¹ Kamal K Sridhar, *Language in Education: Minorities and multiculturalism in India*, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3444906>, pp. 5, accessed on 7th November, 2018

²² VirginiusXaxa, *Transformation of Tribes in India*, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4408077>, accessed on 7th November, 2018

²³ Id

²⁴ VirginiusXaxa, *Politics of Language, Religion and Identity in India*, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4416402>, pp. 4-8 accessed on 7th November, 2018

One significant outcome of the dominance of a few languages is that the linguistic minorities are assimilated into one or the other of these few dominant linguistic groups restricting the use of one's own tongue to the home. In some cases, the dominant street language pervades as the language of the home among the linguistic minorities, dethroning their own native tongue in due course of time. The dominant linguistic groups, on the other hand, remain largely monolingual and look down upon the minority tongues as primitive or not proper or uncivilised. Gondi tribes have been differentiated not only from castes but also from the dominant community of the region. The dominant community is invariably a linguistic community. The process of hinduization also relies heavily onto language, to be Hindus they need to be drawn into the structure of Hindu society, which is possible only if they get drawn into the structure of the regional linguistic community. In the past Tribes have been treated as tribes precisely because they have been outside the dominant regional community and thus outside the complex of civilization which includes the aspect of education, more so, education in the medium of the dominant language. It could be said that linguistic acculturation is more important than religious acculturation.²⁵

This leads us to the aspect of Linguistic Extinction. The proof of dominance and tendency for circumstantial linguistic assimilation is clearly evident in the data for smaller and yet considerable numbers of speakers of languages such as Gondi, the language of Gonds, the tribal community in southern India. The Gondi language is dominated by the respective language of the state of domicile and in the process the Gonds lose their own tongue. The lack of instruction in the mother tongue for the linguistic minority children in schools is often cited as one of the reasons for diminishing numbers of minority tongues. The linguistic minority communities had to opt for the language of the school which is usually the dominant language of the area or the state in which the school is located like Gonds in Andhra getting education in Teleguor Gonds in Chattisgarh learning Hindi, something we have witnessed in the Gondi- Naxal/Maoist discourse too. The situation is precarious for the tribal communities such as Gonds who are promised instruction in Gondi but are seldom taught in that language. What is worse is that the children who speak Gondi and nothing else are taught by a teacher who knows anything but Gondi, the language of the Gonds.²⁶

The National Council for Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) periodic all-India educational surveys also reveal that the number of school languages is significantly shrinking over a period of time²⁷. It is this fact that reaffirms the threat to the minority languages in the country. This cannot be overlooked for linguistic expression and identity forms a major part of ethnic and cultural identity and it affects oneself along with group affiliations. Further for children growing up in the environment of a multilingual society, early experiences lend strongly to the foundation of understanding of self. There are two correlating factors responsible for this, one deals with the experience of colonization and the everlasting importance placed on 'civilizing' or 'modernizing' the citizens and the other is with respect to the formation of the post-colonial nation state the effect of patronization of the dominant language as the lingua franca has persisted.²⁸ Moreover, the rise of sub-national linguistic identities challenging the national linguistic identity has also contributed to the marginalisation of the minority tongues within their sphere of influence and most recently the phenomena of globalization has blurred these existing boundaries between nation states to some extent and brought an increased use of the English language, further contributing to the neglect of minority languages²⁹.

After nearly a century of British rule the significance accorded to educating children in their mother tongue is being realized. The shift towards the role of vernacular language in mass education has been a product of debates existing since the time of political leaders during the British struggle. However, this debate has not given much importance to the minority or dominant vernacular languages as it became an obsession with the nationalists to devise a national language for the emerging independent nation. This debate ignored the presence of other regional languages and the area sparked momentum again during the reorganization of States and the emergence of dominant regional languages. The reason why this is even more imperative to tribals is because language is intrinsic to their survival as a distinct ethnic group and with the assimilative nature of dominant languages, their identity itself is being endangered. Many of these native languages are not even developed properly, for example the written script for Gondi. Even when they do, they are not appropriate for teaching and learning.³⁰

The minority language speakers constantly face ridicule from peers and teachers when they speak the dominant school language or the language of their home. Usually, these are reflected in the informal or formal references to the minority tongues in talk, behaviour and even in imitations that may indicate humiliation and

²⁵ Id

²⁶ Srinivasa Rao, *India's Language Debates and Education of Linguistic Minorities*, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40277928>, pp.2-7, accessed on 7th November, 2018

²⁷ *Journal of Indian Education*, NCERT, 2017, Available at: http://www.ncert.nic.in/publication/journals/pdf_files/jie/JIE_FEB_2017.pdf, accessed on 7th November, 2018

²⁸ Supra N.30

²⁹ Id

³⁰ Id

discrimination toward the speaker of minority tongues. Even when a minority language speaker speaks the dominant language with the accent of one's own native tongue, then also it is considered as a matter of laughter and invites social sanction and hence social rejection of the minority language and its speaker. These have been normalized through portrayals in popular culture and media such as Bollywood movies too. Even if the child is from the dominant language of the land, children like them face hostile reactions, even to the point of ostracism from teachers as the language of the child is not the standard language or the language of the school. School systems go as far as openly disdaining and reprimanding students for conversing in their mother tongues as it is not civil enough. Languages without scripts had no place in the education system and the result is that languages like Gondi and Santhali become minority languages because their population was divided among several states. As a result of this division, tribal groups start lagging behind in education and many took on other languages. Situations like these concludes with less than 100 people knowing their mother tongue Gondi in full accuracy.³¹

Current Status: Efforts for Standardization and Welfare Schemes in MP

The efforts to bridge the communication gap between the Gondi community across the State has brought in a unique initiative was started by CGNetSwara and IGNCA, with support from the Ministry of Culture.³² The goal to standardise the Gondi language has begun, and 80-100 people from the community have been working over the past four years to create a standardised dictionary. This is an initiative by GondAdivasis for GondAdivasis and that is what makes it a unique public participation project according to some. The goal is to build a standardised dictionary of the Gondi language, without side-lining its regional variations spread across Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and adjoining areas.³³ Similar workshops held in the last three years have yielded a thesaurus of Gondi words assembled from dialects of the many Gondi-speaking states. It was published in August last year. The standardisation initiative is a major drive towards a long-overdue inclusion as a scheduled language in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution that lists of 22 languages. Shubhranshu Chaudhary, the founder of the workshop states that this exercise is an effort to offer a big picture solution to the problem of Maoists too but the larger role should come from government, which needs to understand that people join the extremists only when they are helpless. Further, there is not even a single government appointed Gondi teacher in the country of India.³⁴

Other such efforts include the first Gondi font developed by a Bhopal-based undergrad student seeks to empower the Gondtribals of central India. A father-son duo, belonging to the Gond tribe, are trying to take their language online by developing a font for Gondi script. This could fundamentally alter the Gondi-speaking zone and the conditions of tribals across the central Indian forests³⁵. Once done, anyone can type Gondi words using popular fonts, say Arial or Times New Roman, and it would get transliterated into the Gondi script. According to them, "these technological strides will enable Gondtribals to narrate first-hand the most authentic accounts of their lives, their fables and parables, the tragedies and dreams drowned in the din of the police-Naxal conflict in the last few decades."³⁶ A similar project is spearheaded by Choudhury, founder of CGNetSwara, is a voice-based portal that allows people in the Central Gondwana region to report local news by making a phone call. Even The Forest Rights Act has not been translated into Gondi, though this is one community for which the Act is very relevant.³⁷

Gondi is probably the only Indian language is spoken by two million people across multiple States, has six different dialects, a rich folk tradition, but can be written by only 100 people. Efforts such as these lend to the idea of democratisation of communication and media from the current aristocratic or top-down/one-way model to a bottom-up/dialogue model where power is with more people rather than few. This communication model can bring peace to central India. Further, with many of the languages getting extinct because of their speakers being marginalised, Gondtribals will be empowered and able to assert their rights if they have their language. This is even more urgent in the conflicted regions the Gondi tribes inhabit, over and beyond the cultural need of preserving songs, folk tales and more that the tribe has been handing down orally till date.³⁸ In the state of Madhya Pradesh (the state the researcher is primarily dealing with), government has schemes like the MatraProtsahan Yojana (which grants between Rs.3, 000 annually to the mother of a girl who has passed Class 5 and Rs.5, 000 for one who has finished Class Eight) and the Chhatravriti scheme (Rs.300 to children in

³¹ Padma Sarangpani, *Childhood and Schooling in an Indian Village*, Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0907568203104002>, pp. 404-407, accessed on 7th November, 2018

³² *Gondi Community creating a Common Dictionary*, THE WEEK, Available at: <https://www.theweek.in/leisure/society/2018/03/23/Gondi-community-recording-different-dialects-their-language.html>

³³ Id

³⁴ *The Birth of Gondi Dictionary*, THINK CHANGE INDIA, Available at: <https://yourstory.com/2018/03/Gondi-language-dictionary-words/>

³⁵ Supra N.6

³⁶ Id

³⁷ Supra N 38

³⁸ Meghna Majumdar, *This Indian language can be written by only 100 people*, THE HINDU, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/society/this-indian-language-can-be-written-by-only-100-people/article23384526.ece>

primary school and Rs.600 to those in middle school)³⁹. The Gonds are also guaranteed government jobs after completing Class 12. Few members of the tribe, however, are aware of these schemes due in part to the language barrier: the information is disseminated in Hindi, not baigaboli; the medium of instruction in primary schools too, is Hindi. In reality only 20% of the Baiga children are able to finish their schooling, just about five percent pursue graduate-level education while most end up working as wage labourers, or are married as children.⁴⁰ Poor connectivity in the forest areas is a major obstacle, many of the villages are far away from any middle schools. The implementation of tribal welfare policies largely benefits only local private players and political leaders, some find jobs through MNREGA however, the absence of industries in the area means tribal children can only work as labourers. The fact remains that the illusion of reform is somebody's unchanged reality. As things stand, the tribals of Madhya Pradesh and Gonds in the rest of India are in an ecosystem that can only be improved.⁴¹

III. CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding constitutional provisions of securing the development of the tribes without violence to their languages and cultures, actual social reality has been quite the contrary. There has been aggressive incorporation of tribes into the language and religion of the dominant regional community. Yet, in respect providing tribal people's access to the fruits of development, such incorporation has been on the whole avoided and even resisted. Over and above this, the access they had over land, forest and other resources has been usurped without any tangible benefits in return. These constitute the structural settings of identity politics among tribes in India.

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³⁹Madhya Pradesh Tribal Welfare Schemes: A ground Report, FIRSTPOST, Available at: <https://www.firstpost.com/long-reads/for-madhya-pradeshs-tribals-too-wide-a-gap-between-state-policies-and-reality-4447247.html>

⁴⁰ Id

⁴¹ Id