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## REVIVAL OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORM

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### ABSTRACT

Various languages around the world are vanishing due to many reasons, but the most significant one is colonization. In today's digital world, English has become the dominant language. More than 500 languages have ceased to exist and according to linguists, it was estimated that every 14 days, one language dies out. Loss of indigenous languages also means the loss of a person's culture and identity. UNESCO had declared 2019 as the "International Year of Indigenous Languages" with the hope of reviving the languages that are on the brink of extinction. This study sets out to examine reasons for the loss of indigenous languages, the impact of instilling a culture and individual identity on the mass, things that happen when a language dies and how indigenous languages can be revived using digital platforms. The digital era has provided an ample amount of resources to people. The potential of digitization is unlimited and if used properly, can also aid in the resurrection of indigenous languages. There is a good deal of online websites and applications which give an opportunity for people all around the world to interact and shed light on various cultures. Websites like Facebook, an online social media and Wattpad, an internet community for readers and writers are used as examples as to how the digital platform can play a major role in preserving indigenous languages. The revival of indigenous languages will also assure the revival of a culture and its history. Every part of the world has its own unique culture, and it is vital that the present and future generations are aware of their ancestry and carry it forward for many more generations to come.

**Index Terms - Colonization, Culture, Digital Era, Digital Platforms, Indigenous Languages, Revival**

### Introduction

*"Language is the roadmap of culture. It tells you where its people came from and where they are going."* – Rita Mae Brown  
Language has been a medium for communication since evolution. People convey everything about themselves through languages. Every culture has its unique language in which its entire existence is written in or communicated through. Unfortunately, in this digital era, in an attempt to bridge the gap between countries, people have endangered the existence of their language. In India, there are many states where people are worried about losing their culture and language. They are under the assumption that if they lose their language and adopt other communities' language, then they will no longer be the people of minority backgrounds. But, they are also afraid that if their language is lost, then they will no longer be able to use it in their customs and rituals. After losing their culture, people will gradually move on and forget their religion and festivals like many already have. The main reasons for the loss of languages are colonisation and globalisation. In a race to move forward, people are disregarding their past and lose the one thing that makes us humans, that is individuality. This is a characteristic that exists when people know their own culture and language. Nowadays, people are adapting themselves to one single culture. Learning about new cultures is not wrong, but forgetting one's own along the way has led to many indigenous languages on the brink of extinction. Language makes people different, and it is a thing one must not lose.

### Reasons for loss of indigenous languages

The main reason for the loss of indigenous language is the lack of awareness of their culture and language. This happens mainly because of the negligence of the elderly members, who do not transfer the great treasure of knowledge and language to the younger generation. The community gradually starts using another language in the place of their native language and the community becomes multilingual. Later, they will start using the new language more and more until their native language dies out.

Language shift is the process whereby the community of speakers shifts to a completely different language. At times the community chooses a language that is socially acceptable or popular so that they will get access to the social and economic opportunities.

Globalization, which demands a common medium to communicate, plays a major role in the loss of indigenous languages. It made English the dominant language resulting in the extinction of the indigenous languages and the cultural identity of many communities. The main negative impact of globalization on cultural identity is the expansions of multinational corporations.

Colonization played a decisive role in determining the fate of indigenous languages all over the world. Almost every country in the world was once a European colony. The English had not only robbed the country of its resources, but also its culture. In the case of India, the number of languages has been drastically reduced from over 19,500 to 121. Colonial influence has given birth to the self-loathing attitude among the native people towards their culture. It is amazing that people nowadays are diversified and accepting of other cultures, but what is dreadful is for them to forget and detest their own cultural identity.

### Digital Platforms to Revive Indigenous Languages-

Digitization, despite its various bane, undeniably has many advantages. Digital platforms have become a place of sanctuary, where people help each other in solving all sorts of problems. Its major advantage is that it is easily accessible and free of cost. This platform can be used in preserving and reviving our indigenous languages.

**Wattpad-** This website is quite popular among young readers and aspiring writers. Literary works in indigenous languages are scarce and not available everywhere. The revival of indigenous languages through literary works is a splendid move. If the older generations, who possess the knowledge of indigenous languages, are willing to pass it down to future generations, they could do so by writing. Almost everybody possesses a computer now, and if the younger generation teaches their grandparents or anyone with knowledge about this website, the latter can start writing about their history, religion, customs and even fiction. This would help in the revival of indigenous languages and also spread knowledge about different cultures.

**Facebook** – Facebook has a feature called Facebook Community, where people can join and exchange ideas and network with each other. People possessing knowledge of indigenous languages can take initiative via Facebook and form a community where they can share knowledge of customs and culture. This can be a place for people of the same culture living in different countries to keep in touch with their people and their roots. This would also bridge the gap caused by globalization. There are already some communities like this for various gods in which people are sharing mythological stories, information on old customs, organic medicine, and even ethnic food recipe. But all this can be taken a step further where people can encourage each other to teach the younger generation indigenous languages and make sure that none of the languages or cultures die.

**YouTube** – People who have knowledge about languages and have an interest in preserving it can upload videos that would teach the viewers the language and its culture. People of all ages are avid users of YouTube, and uploading content relating to indigenous languages would attract both young and old alike. The young can learn about their culture, and the old, who are experienced can give suggestions for the content of the videos. This would attract people all around the world and would be an incredible addition.

**Duolingo** – It is a language learning website and application, which is very popular among language enthusiasts. It teaches language to users in an interactive manner with various enjoyable activities. One can input the language they are already familiar with, and the language course they wish to learn is modified according to their preferences. To help revive indigenous languages, Duolingo has added Hawaiian and Navajo, the languages on the brink of extinction to their list. There is also an option called Duolingo Incubator, which lets the public contribute to making the content for the other languages that are not available on the website. Anybody with knowledge of indigenous languages can contribute to the Incubator, and once a language has sufficient content, it is added to their website. People who know Indian indigenous languages, that are on the brink of extinction, can also be a part of this initiative and help in the revival of their language.

### Other Media That Can Help in the Revival of Indigenous Languages

**Community Radio Stations:** These tech radio stations are reaching plenty of people around the world with great accessibility. They provide many indigenous people to talk in their language like “Cultural Survival’s network of 80 radio stations”. Indigenous languages and their cultures are in danger of extinction as many of the elder members of those communities are getting older and therefore everything from their traditions to their native tongue are at risk of disappearing with them, but radio stations in those countries are trying to revive those native languages and working on it to bring the culture to the new generation. In this era, when it feels like indigenous languages are vanishing and cultures are suffering from modernization, radio stations are working all over the world to keep the virtue of the Indigenous language safe and revive these dying cultures.

**Films:** Films can help in reviving the fading culture of the community and the beautiful languages that are losing their identity. For example, in Sindhi culture, there were very few Sindhis who were trying hard to conserve the language and protect the language whose existence is at risk. They struggled a lot and finally made a movie on Sindhi culture but couldn’t find their place in cinema space. Like this, there are plenty of directors in India who want to spread awareness about old culture and indigenous language through the medium of films to this growing generation.

**Telecommunications:** The voice programs and emails have the power to connect the dispersed group of speakers living across the world. While English is replacing the other languages on the internet, indigenous language requires some web presence. For example, Google has worked hard to make Gmail, Google Translate and its homepage to be available in multiple global languages so that those are easily accessible by everyone.

### Conclusion-

Language is the core of survival for human beings. Without being able to communicate with languages, people wouldn’t have achieved so much in society. Learning other languages and about other cultures is good, that is cultural appreciation. But along the way, one must not forget their roots, their ancestry. When a language dies, the culture and history also die. One cannot lose their history, otherwise, they would just be lost souls, without identity and individuality. People must embrace the things that make them different from others. Indigenous languages are extremely crucial for people to not lose sight of their ancestry. Since digital platforms are dominant in the society and the younger generation are well acquainted with it, it is up to them to lend a hand in reviving indigenous languages. People must take initiative to make sure that those with knowledge about the indigenous language and culture pass it on to the next generations so that the language, culture, and individuality do not die. History has taught us, once a language dies, it is impossible to decipher or resurrect it.

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