

	<div>ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER</div> <div>A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF KOKBOROK LANGUAGE IN CULTURAL PRESERVATION FOR THE INDIGENOUS TIPRA PEOPLES OF TRIPURA</div>	<div>Sociology</div> <div>KEY WORDS: Kokborok, Indigenous Language, Cultural Preservation, Tipra, Tripura, Oral Traditions, Linguistic Identity</div>
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<div>ABSTRACT</div>	Kokborok, the indigenous language of the Tipra (Tripuri) people, is central to their cultural identity, oral traditions, and rituals. However, linguistic marginalization, modernization, and the dominance of Bengali and English have led to its decline. This study, using ethnographic methods, interviews, and textual analysis, examines Kokborok's role in cultural preservation, the challenges it faces, and ongoing revitalization efforts. Findings reveal that while Kokborok thrives in oral traditions and religious practices, urbanization, education policies, and limited media presence are contributing to linguistic shifts. Despite this, community initiatives, digital engagement, and activism offer hope for revitalization. The study recommends educational reforms, increased digital content, community-driven documentation, and intergenerational transmission to sustain the language. It highlights the need for institutional and grassroots efforts to ensure Kokborok's survival in the face of socio-political changes, reinforcing its significance in indigenous identity and cultural sustainability.	
<div>INTRODUCTION</div>	<p>Language is an essential component of cultural identity, serving as a medium through which societies transmit knowledge, traditions, and collective memory across generations. It is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of social values, spiritual beliefs, and historical consciousness. For indigenous communities, language is deeply embedded in oral traditions, folklore, and ritualistic expressions that define their unique worldviews. Scholars have long emphasized that linguistic diversity is integral to cultural preservation and that the decline of indigenous languages threatens not only linguistic heritage but also the traditional knowledge systems and social structures that sustain indigenous ways of life (Hale et al., 1992). When a language is lost, it results in the erasure of historical narratives, identity markers, and the intricate relationships between people and their environment (Evans, 2010).</p> <p>The Tipra (Tripuri) people, one of the largest indigenous communities in Tripura, India, have historically spoken Kokborok, a language that has been central to their cultural identity, governance, and everyday life. Belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family, Kokborok has played a crucial role in the transmission of oral histories, traditional laws, and ceremonial practices for centuries (Grierson, 1904). Tripura, a northeastern state of India, was once ruled by the Manikya dynasty, under which Kokborok was the primary language of administration and governance. Following the integration of Tripura into the Indian Union in 1949 and the large-scale migration of Bengali-speaking populations, the state's linguistic landscape underwent significant transformations (Bhattacharya, 2009). Over time, the dominance of Bengali in education, administration, and media has led to the marginalization of Kokborok, restricting its use in formal settings and reducing opportunities for its transmission among younger generations (Debbarma, 2024b).</p> <p>The phenomenon of indigenous language decline is not unique to Tripura but reflects broader global trends, where economic, political, and educational factors contribute to the replacement of minority languages by dominant national or international languages (Crystal, 2000). In Tripura, language policies have largely favored Bengali and English over Kokborok, limiting its institutional presence and weakening its role in formal education (Dutta, 2012). Despite Kokborok's official recognition as one of Tripura's state languages, its use in academic curricula and governance remains minimal,</p> <p>leading to a decline in literacy and fluency among younger speakers (Grierson, 1904). Research has shown that when a language is excluded from formal education, it gradually loses its social prestige, and families begin shifting toward dominant languages for socio-economic mobility (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This is evident in urban areas of Tripura, where many Tipra families now primarily use Bengali and English, reducing their children's exposure to Kokborok. As a result, the intergenerational transmission of Kokborok is weakening, posing a serious challenge to its long-term survival.</p> <p>The decline of Kokborok has serious implications for the Tipra people's cultural integrity, as language is closely tied to the preservation of oral traditions, folk narratives, and spiritual practices (Hale et al., 1992). Indigenous oral traditions, including songs, legends, proverbs, and historical accounts, are primarily transmitted in Kokborok, and as fluency in the language declines, so does the ability to retain and pass down these traditions (Evans, 2010). Scholars have noted that language loss among indigenous groups often leads to a broader cultural disconnect, diminishing the ability of younger generations to engage with their heritage and weakening communal bonds (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). In the case of the Tipra people, the reduced usage of Kokborok is accompanied by a decline in traditional storytelling practices, ceremonial songs, and ritualistic prayers, which are integral to their spiritual and cultural life.</p> <p>This study explores the role of Kokborok in preserving Tipra cultural identity and the challenges it faces in contemporary Tripura. It aims to examine the linguistic, socio-political, and economic factors contributing to the gradual decline of Kokborok and analyze the efforts being made to revitalize the language. Given that language is a crucial element of cultural sustainability, this research contributes to broader discussions on linguistic rights, indigenous identity, and language revitalization in the context of globalization and national integration policies. By understanding the threats faced by Kokborok and identifying possible interventions for its survival, this study provides insights into how indigenous languages can be preserved and revitalized in the modern era.</p> <div>Objectives of the Study</div> <ol style="list-style-type: none">To examine the role of Kokborok in preserving Tipra cultural heritage.To explore how oral traditions, folklore, and rituals contribute to language retention.	
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3. To analyze the impact of state policies and globalization on Kokborok's usage.
4. To document community-driven language revitalization efforts.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to linguistic anthropology and indigenous studies by highlighting the intrinsic connection between language and cultural sustainability. It provides insights for policymakers, educators, and tribal leaders to formulate inclusive language policies and educational frameworks that support indigenous linguistic rights.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory developed by Giles et al. (1977), which explains how the survival of a minority language is influenced by social, demographic, and institutional factors. This theory helps in understanding how language maintenance or shift occurs within communities and what conditions contribute to the vitality or decline of indigenous languages like Kokborok. According to this framework, a language thrives when its speakers have strong group identity, demographic stability, and institutional support, whereas a language with low vitality is at risk of endangerment. Applying this theory to the case of Kokborok, the study examines how political, educational, and economic structures in Tripura have contributed to the marginalization of the language and explores the factors that can strengthen its usage within the community. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Linguistic Capital (1991) provides an additional theoretical lens to analyze the social and economic value of Kokborok in comparison to dominant languages like Bengali and English. Bourdieu argues that languages possess symbolic capital, meaning that linguistic competence in high-status languages grants individuals social mobility, economic opportunities, and cultural legitimacy. In the context of Tripura, the preference for Bengali and English in education, administration, and employment reflects a system where Kokborok is assigned lower linguistic capital, leading to its diminished use in formal settings. By using these two theories, the study examines both the structural barriers that limit the expansion of Kokborok and the ways in which the Tipra community resists linguistic marginalization by advocating for greater institutional recognition and revitalization efforts. The theoretical framework thus provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the intersection of language, identity, and power in the case of Kokborok in contemporary Tripura.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of Kokborok in cultural preservation and the challenges it faces in contemporary Tripura. The research is conducted using ethnographic methods, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how the language is used in everyday life, cultural practices, and intergenerational transmission. Data collection involves a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and textual analysis. Interviews are conducted with elders, cultural practitioners, educators, and policymakers who provide insights into the historical and contemporary status of Kokborok. These interviews help in understanding how language is perceived, transmitted, and maintained within the Tipra community, while also highlighting the external pressures that contribute to language shift. Focus group discussions are organized among Kokborok-speaking youth and community leaders to examine generational differences in language use and to assess attitudes toward Kokborok in comparison to Bengali and English. These discussions provide a platform for participants to share their experiences, challenges, and aspirations regarding their linguistic identity. Additionally, participant observation is employed to document the use of Kokborok in festivals, religious rituals, storytelling traditions, and everyday conversations. By

directly engaging in community events, the study captures the nuances of language use in natural settings, providing valuable ethnographic insights. Another key aspect of the research involves textual analysis of literary texts, folk songs, and proverbs in Kokborok, which allows for an exploration of how indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, and historical narratives are embedded in the language.

The study follows a purposive sampling method to select twenty respondents from both rural and urban Tipra communities, ensuring a diverse representation of language users. Respondents include tribal elders who have traditionally preserved Kokborok through oral traditions, educators who are engaged in teaching the language, community leaders who are involved in language activism, and young individuals who are navigating the complexities of multilingualism in modern Tripura. Key informants such as linguists, historians, and policy experts specializing in Kokborok are also included to provide expert perspectives on language evolution and revitalization. The inclusion of participants from both rural and urban backgrounds enables a comparative analysis of how geographic location and socio-economic factors influence language retention and shift.

For data analysis, the study employs thematic analysis to identify patterns in language use, cultural transmission, and linguistic attitudes among respondents. This involves coding responses from interviews and focus group discussions to uncover recurring themes such as the institutional neglect of Kokborok, the impact of education policies, the role of oral traditions in language preservation, and community-driven efforts for revitalization. In addition to thematic analysis, narrative analysis is used to examine oral histories, folklore, and storytelling practices in Kokborok, providing insights into how historical consciousness and indigenous knowledge are transmitted through language. This method helps in understanding how language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a repository of cultural memory and identity. The combination of thematic and narrative analysis ensures a comprehensive exploration of the socio-political and cultural dynamics surrounding Kokborok in contemporary Tripura. By integrating ethnographic observations, participant interviews, and textual analysis, the study captures the complexities of language use and the challenges associated with linguistic preservation, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on indigenous language revitalization and cultural sustainability.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

This section examines Kokborok as a cultural identifier, its role in oral traditions and rituals, the challenges it faces, and revitalization efforts. It highlights how language strengthens Tipra identity, preserves folklore, and is central to religious ceremonies. Challenges include educational policies favoring Bengali and English, urbanization-driven linguistic shifts, and limited media representation. However, community efforts, literary initiatives, and digital platforms are emerging as key tools for revitalization. By analyzing these themes, this section provides insights into Kokborok's current status, threats to its survival, and strategies for its preservation in contemporary Tripura.

Kokborok as a Cultural Identifier

Language is more than just a means of communication; it is a fundamental expression of identity, heritage, and self-determination (Debbarma, 2024a). For the Tipra (Tripuri) people of Tripura, Kokborok functions as both a linguistic and cultural bridge, connecting individuals to their ancestry, traditions, and community ethos. It is through this language that Tipra people articulate their worldviews, spirituality, kinship ties, and shared experiences. As one of the oldest indigenous languages in the region, Kokborok embodies centuries of oral traditions, customary laws, folklore, and historical narratives that have been passed down from

generation to generation, ensuring continuity between the past, present, and future. The significance of Kokborok extends far beyond daily speech, as it encapsulates the collective memory and resilience of the Tipra people, preserving their unique cultural identity in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

For many within the community, speaking Kokborok is more than just a linguistic practice; it is an assertion of cultural pride and resistance against assimilation. Respondents frequently emphasized that language serves as a marker of their distinct identity in a socio-political context where Bengali has become the dominant language in governance, education, and media. Many Tipra people worry that the increasing shift away from Kokborok, particularly among younger generations, is weakening the community's connection to its historical roots. The loss of the language in public and private spaces is seen as a direct threat to cultural survival, as many traditions, myths, and oral histories rely on Kokborok for their expression. A tribal elder from a rural village expressed this concern, stating, "Our language is not just words; it is our history. When we lose Kokborok, we lose our roots." This sentiment captures the widespread belief that language and culture are inseparable, and that the erosion of one inevitably leads to the weakening of the other. Kokborok is not just a medium of communication; it is embedded in customs, rituals, and everyday interactions, making its preservation a matter of cultural integrity for the Tipra people.

Although Kokborok remains strong in rural and semi-urban areas where traditional lifestyles persist and community ties are relatively intact, its usage is increasingly declining among younger generations, particularly those living in urban environments. In villages, Kokborok is the primary language of social interactions, cultural ceremonies, and daily communication, reinforcing a collective sense of belonging. Festivals, religious rituals, and community gatherings provide spaces where the language thrives, as elders continue to use it in prayers, storytelling, and songs. However, urbanization, greater exposure to dominant languages such as Bengali and English, and a lack of institutional support are gradually eroding the presence of Kokborok in these settings. Many Tipra families who have moved to cities for employment and education have begun prioritizing Bengali at home, believing it will provide better social mobility and career prospects for their children. This shift has created an intergenerational linguistic gap where younger Tipra individuals understand Kokborok but struggle to use it fluently in daily conversations. A middle-aged respondent from Agartala reflected on this trend, noting, "I grew up speaking Kokborok at home, but now my children speak mostly Bengali. They can understand Kokborok, but they don't use it as much. I worry that they will not teach it to their own children." This concern highlights a growing issue in language transmission, where passive understanding does not equate to active fluency, leading to a gradual weakening of linguistic competence over time.

Despite these challenges, Kokborok continues to be a powerful ethnolinguistic marker that differentiates the Tipra people from other ethnic groups in Tripura. Many respondents emphasized that their language remains a source of unity, especially in times of socio-political marginalization and cultural assimilation. The resurgence of Tipra nationalism, reflected in the growing demand for "Greater Tipraland" and increased political mobilization among indigenous communities, has reignited interest in Kokborok as a symbol of resistance against cultural erosion. Language activists and community leaders are promoting its use in literature, education, media, and governance, recognizing that linguistic preservation is essential for asserting indigenous rights and ensuring self-determination. A youth activist involved in cultural advocacy reinforced this point, stating, "If we lose Kokborok, we lose a part of who we are. It's not just about language; it's about keeping our history,

our stories, and our identity alive." This perspective underscores the belief that language revitalization is not just a linguistic issue but a larger struggle for cultural survival, autonomy, and representation.

The ongoing battle for linguistic and cultural survival remains a pressing concern for the Tipra people, as Kokborok faces growing threats from socio-political, economic, and educational shifts that favor dominant languages. The decline of Kokborok in urban areas and formal institutions raises concerns about its long-term sustainability, making grassroots language preservation efforts even more critical. However, despite the many challenges, the language continues to be a tool of resilience, resistance, and identity assertion. It serves as the primary means through which the Tipra people connect with their past, navigate their present, and define their future. As long as concerted efforts are made to revitalize, promote, and institutionalize Kokborok, it will remain a dynamic and enduring symbol of Tipra identity and cultural pride. The future of Kokborok depends on the active participation of the community in ensuring that it is spoken, taught, and celebrated across all generations. Only through sustained commitment to linguistic and cultural preservation can Kokborok continue to thrive in the modern era while maintaining its deep historical and emotional significance.

Role of Language in Oral Traditions and Folklore

Kokborok is not merely a language of daily communication; it is deeply embedded in the oral traditions and folklore of the Tipra people, serving as a living record of their history, beliefs, values, and indigenous knowledge. Unlike written histories, which rely on documentation and archival preservation, the oral traditions of the Tipra people depend on storytelling, folk songs, riddles, myths, proverbs, and community performances to transmit historical and cultural knowledge from one generation to another. These oral narratives are not only a means of preserving history but also a tool for reinforcing social cohesion, moral instruction, and spiritual continuity (Debbarma, 2025). Through oral traditions, the experiences, struggles, victories, and spirituality of the Tipra people remain alive and relevant, shaping the cultural identity of the community. For centuries, elders have recounted stories of Tipra kings, legendary warriors, mythical creatures, historical battles, and sacred customs, ensuring that younger generations develop a deep connection to their heritage and ancestral wisdom. These oral histories are often infused with moral lessons, cultural philosophies, and survival strategies, shaping the worldview and social norms of the Tipra people.

A middle-aged cultural practitioner who grew up listening to stories narrated by elders described how these oral traditions shaped her understanding of history and identity. She recalled how her grandmother's words carried the essence of their heritage and how each story conveyed not just historical events but also the emotions, struggles, and triumphs of the Tipra people. These narratives often blend historical facts with mythological elements, making them engaging while reinforcing indigenous identity and collective memory. The importance of oral traditions is also reflected in the many legends, festival songs, proverbs, and folktales that have been passed down through generations. Many respondents recalled how these legends inspired them to remain connected to their cultural roots and uphold the values of courage and unity.

In addition to legends, the Tipra people have preserved their cultural values through Garia festival songs, which are sung during harvest festivals and agricultural ceremonies. These songs celebrate seasonal changes, communal farming practices, and expressions of gratitude to nature, serving as a reminder of traditional agricultural knowledge and environmental ethics. They highlight the relationship between humans and the land, reinforcing sustainable

farming techniques that have been practiced for generations. The collective nature of these songs brings the community together, as villagers sing, dance, and celebrate, strengthening social bonds and reinforcing their shared identity. Another important element of oral traditions is proverbs and idioms, which serve as educational tools conveying moral lessons, social values, and life philosophies. These proverbs often draw on nature, agriculture, and daily life experiences, reflecting the deep connection of the Tipra people with their environment. One widely known Kokborok proverb states, "A tree without roots cannot bear fruit," symbolizing the importance of knowing one's history and culture, emphasizing that a community disconnected from its past cannot sustain its identity and future. Such proverbs carry the wisdom of generations, guiding individuals in their everyday decisions and reinforcing collective ethics and responsibilities.

Oral traditions are not just a means of cultural preservation; they also play a vital role in strengthening intergenerational bonds. In traditional Tipra society, elders are seen as guardians of wisdom and cultural memory, responsible for passing down knowledge to the younger generation. During festivals, social gatherings, and informal evening conversations, grandparents narrate stories, explain the meanings of proverbs, and sing folk songs, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural continuity among children and youth. This practice instills a sense of responsibility among younger community members, making them aware of their duty to preserve and carry forward their heritage. However, many respondents expressed concern that this practice is declining, particularly among urban Tipra families, where children are less exposed to storytelling due to modern distractions. A young respondent from an urban area shared his experience, explaining that while he enjoys listening to stories when he visits his village, his everyday life in the city is dominated by digital entertainment, television, and social media, leaving little room for traditional storytelling. This sentiment reflects a growing concern that modern lifestyles, increased exposure to digital media, and urbanization are reducing the opportunities for children to engage with oral traditions. As a result, cultural knowledge transmission is becoming increasingly fragmented, and many younger Tipra individuals are losing touch with their linguistic and oral heritage.

While oral traditions remain an essential part of Tipra identity, they are under threat due to modernization, urbanization, and the decline of storytelling practices in families. Many young people, particularly those growing up in urban settings, are more exposed to dominant languages such as Bengali and English, leading to a gradual decline in their ability to fully understand and appreciate Kokborok oral traditions. The rapid expansion of television, social media, and digital entertainment has shifted the way younger generations engage with stories, making them more reliant on visual and textual content rather than spoken narratives. This has resulted in a loss of storytelling traditions that were once central to social gatherings and daily life. The migration of Tipra families to urban areas has also contributed to a decline in the transmission of oral traditions, as families increasingly speak Bengali or Hindi at home, reducing the opportunities for children to learn Kokborok through everyday interactions.

Another significant challenge is the lack of institutional support and documentation of Tipra oral traditions. Since these traditions rely solely on spoken transmission, many stories, songs, and proverbs are at risk of being lost if they are not recorded or written down. The absence of government or academic initiatives to document and preserve Kokborok oral traditions further accelerates their decline, making it difficult for future generations to access their cultural history in a structured manner. While some community efforts have been made to compile oral histories and folk narratives, the reach

of these initiatives remains limited, and they often lack the funding and resources needed for large-scale impact.

To ensure the survival of Tipra oral traditions, urgent efforts are needed to document, revitalize, and integrate them into modern platforms. Many cultural activists and scholars have recognized the importance of preserving these traditions and have started initiatives to record traditional stories, folk songs, and proverbs in written and digital formats. Some of the key strategies for revitalization include community storytelling sessions, where elders share narratives with younger generations in organized cultural gatherings, radio and podcast series in Kokborok, which can broadcast folk tales and oral history to a wider audience, school integration programs that introduce oral history projects where students interview elders and document their stories, and digital archiving of Kokborok folk songs, proverbs, and historical narratives through online repositories and social media platforms.

The oral traditions of the Tipra people remain a vital repository of history, wisdom, and cultural identity, but they face significant challenges due to modernization, urbanization, and changing lifestyles. Without active efforts to document, adapt, and revitalize these traditions, much of the Tipra people's rich oral heritage could be lost within a few generations. However, with stronger community initiatives, digital innovation, and educational support, these traditions can be preserved, ensuring that Kokborok remains a thriving language of identity, history, and indigenous wisdom. The preservation of oral traditions is not just about maintaining the language; it is about safeguarding the stories, philosophies, and collective memory of an entire people, ensuring that future generations remain deeply connected to their roots.

Role of Kokborok language in Rituals and Ceremonies

Religious and cultural ceremonies among the Tipra people are deeply intertwined with Kokborok, as prayers, chants, and ritualistic songs are conducted in the language. These rituals serve not only as religious expressions but also as a medium through which spiritual beliefs, communal unity, and cultural continuity are reinforced. Kokborok plays a crucial role in these ceremonies, as it is believed that the ancestral spirits and deities understand and respond to prayers in the language of the people. The use of Kokborok in these sacred practices establishes a connection between the past and the present, allowing the community to maintain its spiritual and cultural heritage through generations.

One of the most prominent ceremonies where Kokborok is used is the Lebang Boomani Dance, a post-harvest festival that celebrates agricultural prosperity and expresses gratitude to nature for a successful yield. During this festival, farmers and villagers sing in Kokborok about the seasonal cycles, the blessings of the deities, and the communal prosperity that follows a good harvest. The songs and chants performed in the language serve to pass down agricultural knowledge, reinforce traditional farming values, and strengthen the relationship between humans and nature. These songs describe not only the labor involved in farming but also the spiritual dimensions of the harvest, where divine intervention is sought to ensure fertility and abundance in the fields. Through generations, these songs have preserved ecological knowledge and traditional farming techniques, making them an essential part of Tipra cultural identity.

Another significant festival deeply embedded in Kokborok linguistic traditions is Garia Puja, a religious ceremony dedicated to Baba Garia, the deity of wealth, happiness, and prosperity. This festival involves elaborate prayers, incantations, and ritualistic songs in Kokborok, all of which invoke the deity's blessings upon the community (Debbarna, 2023). The ritual serves as a spiritual and cultural anchor, reaffirming the bond between the Tipra people and their

ancestors, deities, and land. The prayers and songs, passed down through oral traditions, are considered sacred and are believed to carry the essence of the community's devotion and respect for their spiritual guardians. The use of Kokborok in Garia Puja is seen as a continuation of an age-old tradition, ensuring that the divine connection between the people and the deity remains intact. Many elders in the community believe that when the prayers are recited in Kokborok, the meaning and intent behind the words remain pure and spiritually potent, unlike translations in other languages that may dilute their significance.

Beyond festivals and religious ceremonies, Kokborok also plays an essential role in weddings and funerals, marking significant transitions in life. Traditional wedding songs in Kokborok narrate ancestral blessings, marriage customs, and social obligations, reinforcing the continuity of Tipra matrimonial traditions. These songs celebrate the union of two individuals within the framework of family, community, and heritage, ensuring that the values associated with marriage are passed down. The use of Kokborok in wedding ceremonies strengthens the connection between the newlyweds and their cultural roots, reinforcing their belonging to the Tipra community. Similarly, funerary rites and mourning songs in Kokborok provide a spiritual connection between the living and the deceased, guiding the soul of the departed towards the ancestral realm. The funeral prayers, often recited by elders, are not just an expression of grief but also a reaffirmation of the cyclical nature of life and death within the Tipra cosmology. The lamentations and farewell chants serve as a final tribute to the deceased, ensuring that their spirit is peacefully received by the ancestors. These rituals, carried out in Kokborok, help to preserve the cultural philosophy surrounding death and the afterlife, reinforcing the belief that the soul's journey is guided by ancestral voices.

Several respondents observed that with the growing preference for Bengali and Hindi in formal and informal communication, Kokborok is gradually being replaced in religious and cultural ceremonies. Many younger individuals, who are more comfortable speaking in dominant languages, struggle to understand or recite traditional prayers and songs in Kokborok, leading to a gradual loss of ritualistic language fluency. This decline in linguistic continuity poses a significant threat not only to the survival of Kokborok as a ceremonial language but also to the spiritual and emotional depth associated with these traditions. Elders have expressed concerns that without Kokborok, these rituals risk becoming mere performances rather than deeply felt spiritual expressions, as the language of the ancestors carries a unique energy and authenticity that cannot be replicated in another tongue.

The gradual loss of Kokborok in ceremonies is not just a linguistic shift but also a cultural crisis, as many rituals and prayers hold meanings that are deeply tied to the language in which they were originally composed. Some younger respondents admitted that they struggled to understand the spiritual significance of prayers and ritualistic songs when they were not conducted in Kokborok, as translations often fail to capture the full depth of meaning. A religious leader emphasized that prayers and chants in Kokborok carry the weight of generations, and changing the language dilutes their sacred essence. This linguistic transition is particularly noticeable in urban areas, where Bengali and Hindi have become more dominant in religious discourse, making it increasingly difficult to preserve Kokborok as the primary language of faith and tradition.

The decline of Kokborok in ceremonies also raises concerns about intergenerational knowledge transmission, as rituals serve as a primary way for younger generations to learn about Tipra spirituality, cultural values, and community ethics.

If Kokborok continues to disappear from religious and cultural settings, the younger generation may lose not only the language but also the philosophies and worldviews embedded within it. The oral transmission of prayers, blessings, and sacred songs in Kokborok has historically played an indispensable role in shaping Tipra identity, and without proactive efforts to maintain it, the community risks losing an essential part of its heritage.

To ensure the survival of Kokborok in rituals and ceremonies, it is essential to create awareness among younger generations about the spiritual importance of their native language. Community elders, religious leaders, and cultural activists must work together to revitalize the use of Kokborok in all sacred and communal practices. Efforts such as recording and documenting traditional prayers and songs, integrating Kokborok into religious education, and encouraging younger individuals to participate in ceremonies conducted in their native language are crucial steps toward maintaining linguistic and cultural continuity. If the Tipra people are to preserve their spiritual and cultural identity, they must actively promote the use of Kokborok in their sacred traditions, ensuring that future generations continue to experience the profound connection between language, faith, and heritage.

Challenges to Kokborok Preservation

Despite Kokborok being officially recognized as one of Tripura's languages, its preservation and widespread usage face significant challenges, particularly in the domains of education, urbanization, and media representation. Although the language remains deeply rooted in cultural and community interactions, its decline in formal institutions and public discourse threatens its continuity. The dominance of Bengali and English in education, the shift in linguistic preferences due to urbanization, and the lack of adequate representation in mainstream and digital media are major obstacles that hinder the intergenerational transmission of Kokborok.

One of the most pressing challenges is the absence of Kokborok as a medium of instruction in schools, despite its recognition as an official language of Tripura. The education system remains heavily influenced by Bengali and English, with most schools and higher education institutions prioritizing these languages in their curricula. Very few textbooks and learning materials are available in Kokborok, and as a result, children are growing up with limited literacy skills in their mother tongue. Even though Kokborok is taught as a subject in some schools, its restricted presence in the academic sphere prevents it from being integrated into mainstream education. Many students learn Bengali and English more fluently than Kokborok because they are required to use these languages for examinations, career advancement, and formal communication. A schoolteacher highlighted this concern, stating: "Children are learning Bengali and English at school, but there are very few books in Kokborok. How will they learn their own language?" – (Teacher, 42 years)

This sentiment reflects the frustration among educators and cultural activists who believe that without a structured approach to incorporating Kokborok in education, younger generations will gradually lose proficiency in their native language. Moreover, the lack of Kokborok-language instructional materials, teacher training programs, and policy implementation further marginalizes the language in formal learning spaces. Many Tipra parents and students, recognizing the economic and academic advantages of Bengali and English, have begun prioritizing these languages over Kokborok, leading to a gradual erosion of linguistic competence in the community.

The shift in linguistic preference is further exacerbated by

urbanization and migration, as increasing numbers of Tipra families move to cities for employment, education, and better economic opportunities. Urban settings, where Bengali and English dominate in schools, workplaces, and public life, create an environment where Kokborok is used less frequently, leading to its gradual displacement from daily conversations. Many urban Tipra parents have consciously chosen to speak Bengali at home, believing that it will provide their children with better career prospects and social mobility. As a result, many younger Tipra individuals understand Kokborok but struggle to speak it fluently, weakening the intergenerational transmission of the language.

The linguistic shift is particularly evident in inter-ethnic marriages and urban households, where Bengali or Hindi often becomes the primary language of communication. As fewer children grow up actively speaking Kokborok, the risk of the language being relegated to ceremonial or rural usage increases. This phenomenon is also visible in mixed-language households, where parents may use Kokborok only occasionally while defaulting to Bengali or English for daily interactions, further distancing younger generations from their indigenous linguistic heritage. A cultural activist noted that:

"In urban areas, even Tipra families speak more Bengali than Kokborok at home. If we don't speak our own language with our children, who will?" – (Cultural Activist, 38 years)

This linguistic shift from indigenous languages to dominant state languages is a common phenomenon among marginalized communities, and if left unaddressed, it may lead to Kokborok becoming an endangered language within a few generations.

Adding to these challenges is the limited representation of Kokborok in mainstream media and digital platforms. The media landscape in Tripura is heavily dominated by Bengali-language television channels, radio broadcasts, newspapers, and digital content, leaving little room for Kokborok-language programming. News coverage, entertainment, and official government communications are predominantly in Bengali or English, limiting the exposure of younger generations to their mother tongue in public life. The lack of Kokborok-language digital platforms means that younger generations, who consume most of their content online, are primarily exposed to non-indigenous languages, further accelerating linguistic displacement.

The digital age has transformed the way people engage with language, and for a language to thrive, it must have a strong presence in online spaces, social media, and digital media. However, Kokborok remains severely underrepresented in online content, with very few YouTube channels, podcasts, e-books, or educational apps available in the language. While community efforts to create digital content in Kokborok have been initiated, they remain limited in scale and reach, unable to compete with the extensive Bengali and English-language content available to younger audiences. This digital exclusion creates a vicious cycle where Kokborok remains confined to traditional oral communication, while newer generations interact primarily with digital media in other languages.

A young content creator highlighted the problem, stating: "We need more Kokborok content online. Social media is how people engage with language now, but there isn't enough Kokborok content for young people to relate to." – (Digital Creator, 27 years)

The lack of representation in digital spaces is further compounded by the absence of government-supported initiatives to promote Kokborok in media and technology. While there have been calls for greater inclusion of Kokborok in broadcasting, news channels, and online platforms,

institutional backing remains weak. Without a deliberate effort to expand the linguistic footprint of Kokborok in both mainstream and digital media, the language risks becoming marginalized in modern communication, entertainment, and education.

The challenges to Kokborok preservation—educational barriers, urbanization-driven linguistic shifts, and inadequate media representation—are interconnected issues that require a multi-pronged approach. If formal education does not integrate Kokborok more effectively, if families continue prioritizing other languages at home, and if the language remains absent from digital platforms, its long-term survival will be in jeopardy. The decline of Kokborok is not simply a linguistic issue but a cultural crisis, as language is the foundation of Tipra identity, history, and worldview. The loss of Kokborok would mean the erosion of oral traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and community bonds that have existed for generations. To address these challenges, there must be strong institutional support for Kokborok in education, an effort to encourage families to use the language at home, and a strategic push to create more Kokborok-language media and digital content. Without these proactive steps, Kokborok will continue to lose ground to dominant languages, leading to a gradual weakening of Tipra cultural identity. The need for language revitalization is urgent, and only through collective community efforts, policy reforms, and technological adaptation can Kokborok continue to thrive in the modern world.

Community Efforts in Kokborok Language Revitalization

Efforts to revitalize Kokborok and ensure its survival have been driven primarily by grassroots organizations, cultural groups, and digital creators who recognize the urgent need to preserve the language in both spoken and written forms. Among these initiatives, the role of the Kokborok Sahitya Sabha and other cultural organizations has been instrumental in advocating for the language's expansion in literature, education, and formal communication. The Kokborok Sahitya Sabha, a leading literary organization, has taken significant steps toward promoting Kokborok by publishing books, conducting literary competitions, and pushing for its inclusion in school curricula. Writers, poets, and linguists affiliated with these organizations believe that the presence of Kokborok literature in schools, public libraries, and mainstream publishing platforms will encourage its wider acceptance and usage.

A member of the Sahitya Sabha emphasized the need for more written materials in the language, stating:

"We need to create more literature in Kokborok so that the new generation has access to their language beyond just speaking it at home." – (Writer and Activist, 50 years)

This sentiment reflects the reality that without a strong literary presence, Kokborok risks being confined to oral communication, making it difficult for younger generations to engage with the language in formal and academic settings. By publishing poetry, fiction, historical accounts, and educational materials in Kokborok, these cultural organizations aim to normalize its use in writing, encourage linguistic proficiency, and ensure that future generations can engage with their cultural identity through literature. The demand for Kokborok-language textbooks, dictionaries, and research materials remains high, yet the availability of such resources is limited, largely due to a lack of institutional support and funding. Despite these challenges, the dedication of grassroots activists and scholars has led to a growing literary movement, demonstrating that community-led efforts play a crucial role in sustaining linguistic heritage.

In addition to traditional literary efforts, the expansion of Kokborok in radio, social media, and digital platforms has emerged as a powerful tool for language revitalization.

Community radio stations have started broadcasting programs in Kokborok, featuring news, discussions, folk stories, and cultural segments, helping to reinforce the language in everyday conversations. Unlike written texts, radio provides an accessible medium for people of all age groups, especially elders and rural communities, to engage with the language without formal literacy barriers. This has been particularly useful in maintaining oral traditions and increasing the visibility of Kokborok beyond small community gatherings.

At the same time, the rise of YouTube channels, social media pages, and digital content in Kokborok is attracting younger speakers who might otherwise drift toward Bengali or English for entertainment and information. Digital creators have recognized that social media and online video platforms are central to modern communication, making it essential to create engaging content in Kokborok. Initiatives such as short films, language-learning tutorials, educational podcasts, and music videos in Kokborok have begun to gain popularity, bridging the generational gap and making the language more relevant in contemporary settings. These efforts have been spearheaded by young content creators who understand that for Kokborok to survive, it must evolve beyond traditional oral use and establish a presence in digital culture.

A young digital content creator explained the significance of social media in language preservation, stating: "Social media is the future. We must make Kokborok content for YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts so that our language survives in the digital age." – (Youth Activist, 27 years)

This shift toward digital engagement has also led to the development of mobile apps designed to teach Kokborok through interactive lessons, quizzes, and audio-visual content, providing a new method for learning the language beyond classroom settings. These apps are particularly useful for urban youth and diaspora communities who may not have access to native Kokborok speakers but wish to stay connected to their linguistic heritage. While these efforts remain relatively new, their impact is promising, as they represent a dynamic approach to language revitalization that aligns with contemporary media consumption habits.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in ensuring the long-term sustainability of Kokborok. While Kokborok continues to serve as a strong cultural identifier, particularly among older generations, its transmission to younger speakers is under threat due to modernization, urbanization, and limited media representation. Oral traditions and rituals remain a key medium for language preservation, yet they are increasingly being overshadowed by dominant languages such as Bengali and English. Educational policies that fail to integrate Kokborok effectively, a lack of institutional support for Kokborok-language media, and the sociolinguistic shifts caused by urbanization all contribute to the gradual weakening of the language.

However, community-driven revitalization efforts, particularly those focused on literature, media representation, and digital content creation, are showing promise in reversing these trends. The growing interest in Kokborok books, online platforms, and cultural initiatives demonstrates that with continued advocacy and creative adaptation, the language can thrive even in the modern age. For Kokborok to remain a vibrant and widely spoken language, there must be a collective effort from the community, policymakers, educators, and digital innovators to expand its presence across all spheres of life. Ensuring that younger generations have access to Kokborok in education, entertainment, and digital spaces will be key to its survival, allowing it to evolve while still preserving its rich historical and cultural significance.

CONCLUSION

Kokborok remains a crucial pillar of Tipra cultural identity, acting as the primary medium for the transmission of oral traditions, folklore, rituals, and everyday communication within the community. Its role extends beyond linguistic expression, as it serves as a symbol of ethnic identity, historical continuity, and indigenous knowledge preservation. The findings of this study highlight that linguistic marginalization, the dominance of Bengali and English in education, and socio-political factors have contributed to the gradual decline of Kokborok in formal and informal domains. The shift in linguistic preference among younger generations, urbanization-driven cultural changes, and the limited presence of Kokborok in mainstream media further exacerbate the challenges to its survival. However, the study also reveals that community-driven initiatives, cultural activism, and the expansion of digital platforms have become vital tools in sustaining and revitalizing Kokborok. These efforts reflect a strong collective desire among the Tipra people to preserve their linguistic heritage, strengthen cultural identity, and resist the erosion of their indigenous traditions. Despite the ongoing threats to Kokborok's survival, the resilience of the Tipra community and their engagement in language preservation efforts provide hope for its continued existence.

To ensure the long-term preservation and revitalization of Kokborok, several key recommendations must be considered. Strengthening policy reforms to integrate Kokborok into the educational curriculum at both primary and higher education levels is essential for institutional recognition and formal language development. The inclusion of Kokborok as a medium of instruction and the development of textbooks, dictionaries, and academic resources in the language will create opportunities for younger generations to become proficient speakers and writers. Expanding Kokborok representation in digital media, including radio, television, podcasts, and online platforms, will enhance its accessibility, particularly among youth who increasingly engage with content through digital means. Encouraging the production of Kokborok-language films, music, and educational videos will help in maintaining the language's relevance in modern communication. Community engagement remains a fundamental aspect of language preservation, and cultural organizations should actively document oral traditions, publish literature, and organize storytelling initiatives to promote linguistic heritage. Revitalization efforts should focus on recording and archiving folk songs, legends, and traditional knowledge in written, audio, and visual formats to safeguard Kokborok for future generations. Raising awareness about indigenous linguistic rights through advocacy campaigns, policy discussions, and community-based initiatives will help secure institutional support and legal recognition for Kokborok as a vital indigenous language of Tripura. Encouraging inter-generational language transmission by fostering learning spaces where elders actively teach Kokborok to younger family members and community members is equally important. Traditional storytelling, cultural performances, and community-led language immersion programs can serve as effective tools for strengthening language continuity within households and communal spaces.

Additionally, linguistic revitalization must be linked with economic incentives to encourage younger generations to actively engage with Kokborok. Creating employment opportunities in translation, media, education, and cultural tourism related to Kokborok can provide practical reasons for maintaining fluency in the language. The recognition of Kokborok in official administrative work, alongside Bengali and English, would further legitimize its use in governance and public services, reinforcing its importance in daily life. By implementing these recommendations, Kokborok can transition from an endangered indigenous language to a

thriving linguistic and cultural force that continues to shape the identity of the Tipra people. The survival of the language is not only essential for cultural preservation but also for asserting the linguistic and political rights of the Tipra community. Ensuring that Kokborok remains a living, evolving language in contemporary Tripura requires collective action from policymakers, educators, cultural organizations, and the Tipra community as a whole. With sustained commitment and strategic intervention, Kokborok can flourish as a vibrant language that retains its historical significance while adapting to modern linguistic landscapes.

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