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Negotiating Multilingual Identity: Language Shift and Cultural Resilience in Himalayan Indigenous Communities

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationship between multilingualism, language shift and cultural resilience among indigenous Himalayan communities through the framework of ethnolinguistic vitality and multilingual identity. The research investigates how indigenous populations negotiate linguistic and cultural identities within increasingly multilingual environments shaped by globalization, migration, education and dominant language ideologies. While indigenous languages continue to function as repositories of cultural memory and collective identity, younger generations increasingly engage with dominant regional and global languages such as Hindi and English for education, employment and social mobility. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology based on semi-structured interviews, oral narratives, participant observations and secondary scholarly sources. The findings reveal that multilingualism in Himalayan communities is not merely a process of language replacement but also one of identity negotiation and adaptive cultural continuity. Younger speakers frequently engage in code-switching and domain-based multilingual communication, using indigenous languages in ritual and familial settings while relying on Hindi and English in institutional and digital spaces. Despite the decline in intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages, cultural resilience remains visible through oral traditions, ritual performances and collective cultural practices. The study argues that multilingual adaptation should not be interpreted solely as cultural loss but as a dynamic process of negotiating identity within changing socio-economic realities. The paper contributes to contemporary discussions on multilingual identity, minority language maintenance and indigenous language preservation in multilingual societies. It further highlights the urgent need for inclusive language policies, mother-tongue-based multilingual education and institutional support mechanisms to sustain indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity.*

Key Words: *Multilingualism, Multilingual Identity, Language Shift, Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Cultural Resilience*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Language is not just a mode of communication, it is an integral part of cultural identity, social memory and collective belonging. Language for indigenous peoples is a repository of oral traditions, ecological knowledge, rituals, cosmological beliefs and experiences of the past. In the Himalayan region, indigenous peoples have for a long time used their own languages for cultural continuity and perpetuation of knowledge systems from one generation to the next. But in more recent times, rapid socio-economic changes, migration, globalization and educational modernization have dramatically changed the traditional use, and usage, of the language, and have caused substantial language change and multilingual adaptation.

The Himalayan region is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in South Asia. The region is a highly multilingual setting and there are multiple languages spoken in the covenanted area including the local languages, regional language, Hindi, Urdu and English. These multilingual dynamics have further become stronger in the last few decades because of the expansion of education, digital media, mobility and economic integration in cities. Younger generations often then have to operate in multiple linguistic systems in a variety of settings, such as home, school, administration, work, and internet communication. The multilingual practices affect language use as well as identity formation, cultural continuity and intergenerational relations.

The encroachment by state and global languages has been a factor in the neglect of indigenous languages in institutional and educational settings. Many indigenous communities' local languages are primarily used in domestic and ritual contexts, and dominant languages are used in contexts associated with prestige and with education and economic

opportunity. Consequently, there is a complex language negotiation that happens for indigenous youth between the indigenous and contemporary dreams. The increasing reduction in the functional use of indigenous languages has led to worry over language endangerment, weakening of the ethnolinguistic vitality, and erosion of oral traditions.

But the multilingualism in indigenous contexts should not be analyzed only in terms of a story of linguistic decline. Multilingual adaptation can also be a "survival strategy" and a strategy of negotiating identity. Even when a tradition is not as strong in younger generations, communal memory and symbolism, oral history and ritual participation are often bridges that help to continue the continuity of culture. The link between multilingualism and cultural sustainability is therefore rather complex, and cannot be summarised in simple terms of preservation versus loss.

These new linguistic realities are especially illuminated by the notion of multilingual identity. Multilingual identity is a negotiation of belonging, affiliation and self-representation in the context of several linguistic and cultural systems. In multilingual indigenous societies, speakers are likely to build up hybrid identities, integrating local linguistic affiliations and involvement in wider regional and national linguistic cultures. These identities also indicate more than just linguistic adaptation, but also greater socio-political change in modern indigenous societies.

The current research looks at the relationship among multilingualism, language shift and cultural resilience among indigenous groups in the Himalayan region. Based on ethnolinguistic vitality and the concepts of language maintenance and multilingual identity, the paper examines the ways in which indigenous peoples engage in cultural continuity in multilingual socio-cultural contexts. Special focus is on the use of the D.L., intergenerational transmission and institutional marginalization and adaptive cultural practices.

The study is of a qualitative and interpretive nature to explore the lived experiences and linguistic realities of the people in the community. The research aims to develop an understanding of multilingualism and its influence on cultural identity and community reaction to linguistic changes through interviews, the oral narratives and participant observations. The study also gives focus to the experiences of marginalized communities of the Himalayan region in general and the Pangiwal community of Himachal Pradesh in particular and puts it on the agenda of the on-going debates in sociolinguistics, multilingualism studies and indigenous language preservation. The paper also makes a contribution to multilingualism scholarship by exploring the issues of multilingual identity negotiation in an underrepresented context of the indigenous community in the Himalayas. Furthermore, the study contributes to ethnolinguistic vitality theory by not only showing that multilingual adaptation is not necessarily a process of language loss, but also that it is a negotiation of culture, translanguaging and hybrid identity construction.

Moreover, the paper highlights the importance of not viewing multilingualism as a threat to indigenous languages. Instead, multilingualism may also be a space of negotiation, in which speakers negotiate creatively between cultural heritage and socio-economic mobility. However, educational inclusion and language preservation programs without institutional support are at risk of being not sustainable in practice.

Minority and indigenous languages are becoming more vulnerable in today's global contexts, due to the spread of homogenizing linguistic ideologies that favor the national and international mainstream language. UNESCO has made language diversity a priority in its efforts to safeguard linguistic diversity as a vital aspect of cultural heritage and human knowledge systems. Indigenous languages have unique cosmologies, ecological knowledge and social structures which are not easily transferred to dominant languages. It is therefore important to not only preserve the language, but also the culture, education and ethics.

Although there is increasing research interest on endangered languages and indigenous cultures, there has not been any attempt to explore the interaction of multilingual identity negotiation, translanguaging, and domain-specific language use of indigenous communities of the Himalaya in the context of globalization, educational mobility and digital communication. Previous research has tended to focus on the language documentation and preservation of multilingualism and pay comparatively less attention to the sociolinguistic experiences of younger multilinguals in dealing with hybrid cultural identities.

This research aims to help answer these larger questions by investigating the process of multilingual identity construction and cultural resilience of the indigenous communities of the Himalayas. The paper places local experiences in broader perspectives on multilingualism and language policy, which helps to shed light on the complexities of language shift in modern-day indigenous communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The relationship between language, identity and culture has remained a central concern within sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics and multilingualism studies. Scholars have long argued that language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbolic marker of social belonging and cultural continuity. For indigenous communities, language often embodies oral traditions, historical memory and collective identity.

Early sociolinguistic scholarship emphasized the connection between language maintenance and ethnic identity. Fishman's influential work on reversing language shift demonstrated that intergenerational transmission is essential for linguistic continuity. According to Fishman, minority languages decline when younger generations increasingly adopt dominant languages for everyday communication. Educational institutions, urban migration and economic mobility often accelerate this process.

Similarly, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor's theory of ethnolinguistic vitality highlighted the importance of demographic strength, institutional representation and social prestige in determining language survival. Minority and indigenous languages frequently suffer from low ethnolinguistic vitality because they lack institutional support within education, administration and media.

Recent multilingualism studies have expanded these earlier approaches by emphasizing fluid linguistic practices and multilingual identity formation. Scholars such as Ofelia García and Li Wei argue that multilingual speakers do not operate within rigidly separated linguistic systems but instead engage in flexible linguistic negotiations across contexts. Translanguaging and code-switching are therefore understood as creative communicative practices rather than indicators of linguistic inadequacy.

Recent multilingualism scholarship increasingly views translanguaging as a decolonizing and identity-affirming linguistic practice that challenges rigid monolingual ideologies (Wei & García, 2022).

Research on multilingual identity further suggests that speakers negotiate belonging across multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations. Multilingual individuals frequently construct hybrid identities that combine local, regional and global cultural influences. Such perspectives challenge earlier assumptions that language shift inevitably leads to complete cultural assimilation.

Contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives further emphasize that multilingual identities are fluid, socially negotiated and deeply connected to questions of equity, mobility and cultural representation (Piller, 2020).

Within indigenous studies, scholars have increasingly focused on language revitalization and cultural resilience. Grenoble and Whaley argue that endangered languages represent valuable systems of ecological, cultural and social knowledge. The loss of indigenous languages therefore involves not only linguistic decline but also erosion of cultural memory and knowledge systems.

Studies on Himalayan indigenous communities have largely focused on language documentation, oral traditions and ethnographic preservation. While these contributions remain valuable, insufficient scholarly attention has been given to multilingual identity negotiation, translanguaging practices and domain-specific multilingual communication among younger indigenous speakers. Existing scholarship frequently frames language shift primarily in terms of cultural loss without adequately examining adaptive multilingual strategies and hybrid identity formation within contemporary indigenous societies.

Furthermore, multilingual realities in indigenous communities are increasingly shaped by educational policies, digital technologies and globalization. Younger generations engage with multiple linguistic systems across home, school and media environments. Consequently, contemporary indigenous multilingualism involves complex interactions between local identity and broader socio-economic aspirations.

The present study contributes to these discussions by examining multilingual identity, language shift and cultural resilience within Himalayan indigenous communities. By integrating ethnolinguistic vitality theory with contemporary multilingualism perspectives, the study offers a more holistic understanding of indigenous linguistic transformation.

3. OBJECTIVES

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine patterns of multilingual language use among indigenous Himalayan communities.
2. To analyze the processes of language shift and intergenerational transmission.
3. To investigate the relationship between multilingual identity and cultural resilience.
4. To explore the role of institutional structures in shaping ethnolinguistic vitality.
5. To understand how indigenous communities negotiate linguistic and cultural continuity within multilingual environments.

4. Research Questions

1. How do indigenous Himalayan communities negotiate multilingual identities in contemporary socio-cultural contexts?
2. What factors contribute to language shift among younger generations?
3. How do multilingual practices influence cultural continuity and collective identity?
4. What role do educational and institutional structures play in the maintenance or decline of indigenous languages?

5. How is cultural resilience sustained despite changing linguistic practices?

5. Theoretical Framework

The present study is informed by interdisciplinary perspectives from sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics and multilingualism studies. The theoretical framework combines the concepts of ethnolinguistic vitality, language shift, multilingual identity and translanguaging in order to examine the complex linguistic realities of indigenous Himalayan communities.

5.1 Ethnolinguistic Vitality

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality was developed by Howard Giles, Richard Bourhis and Donald Taylor to explain the ability of a linguistic community to maintain and sustain its language over time. Ethnolinguistic vitality depends upon three major factors: status, demographic strength and institutional support. Communities possessing strong demographic concentration, positive social prestige and representation within institutional domains generally demonstrate greater linguistic continuity.

In the context of indigenous Himalayan communities, ethnolinguistic vitality is often weakened by limited institutional recognition, educational exclusion and socio-economic marginalization. Indigenous languages frequently lack representation within formal schooling, media and governmental administration, thereby reducing their functional status within broader society. Nevertheless, cultural and ritual practices continue to provide symbolic support for language maintenance.

5.2 Language Shift

Joshua Fishman's theory of language shift emphasizes the significance of intergenerational transmission in language maintenance. According to Fishman, language shift occurs when younger generations gradually abandon ancestral languages in favor of dominant regional or national languages. This process is often accelerated by modernization, urbanization, migration and educational systems that privilege dominant languages.

Within Himalayan indigenous communities, younger speakers increasingly rely upon Hindi and English for educational advancement, employment opportunities and social mobility. Indigenous languages are therefore becoming restricted to domestic, ritual and symbolic domains. The present study explores how such shifts influence both linguistic practices and cultural identity.

5.3 Multilingual Identity

Contemporary multilingualism studies emphasize that language is deeply connected with identity construction and social belonging. Multilingual individuals frequently negotiate multiple identities across different linguistic and cultural spaces. Multilingual identity is therefore dynamic, fluid and context-dependent.

In indigenous contexts, multilingual identity often involves balancing ancestral affiliations with participation in broader national and global linguistic cultures. Younger speakers may simultaneously identify with indigenous traditions while adopting dominant languages associated with education and modernity. Such hybrid identities challenge simplistic assumptions that language loss necessarily implies complete cultural assimilation.

5.4 Translanguaging and Multilingual Practices

Recent sociolinguistic research highlights translanguaging and code-switching as central features of multilingual communication. Translanguaging refers to the flexible use of multiple linguistic resources within communication rather than strict separation between languages.

The present study examines how indigenous youth engage in multilingual communication practices by moving between indigenous languages, Hindi and English depending on social contexts. These practices reflect adaptive multilingual strategies rather than linguistic deficiency.

6. RESEARCH METHOD :

6.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design to investigate multilingual identity negotiation and language shift among indigenous Himalayan communities. Qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate because it enables detailed exploration of lived experiences, cultural practices and linguistic behaviors that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative approaches.

The interpretive framework allows the researcher to examine how participants perceive and negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities within changing socio-cultural environments. The study focuses on meaning-making processes, language attitudes and identity construction within multilingual contexts.

6.2 Study Area

The research was conducted among members of the Pangiwal community in the Pangi Valley region of Himachal Pradesh, India. The region is characterized by significant linguistic diversity, strong oral traditions and increasing

interaction with dominant regional and national languages such as Hindi and English. Pangwali, the indigenous language spoken within the community, continues to function as an important marker of cultural identity despite increasing multilingual influence.

The selected communities represent multilingual environments where indigenous languages coexist with Hindi and English. Such settings provide valuable opportunities to examine multilingual adaptation, language shift and cultural resilience.

6.3 Participants

The study involved 36 participants across different age groups and social categories. Fieldwork was conducted between January and March 2026 through repeated visits to selected villages within the Pangi region. Participants included:

- Elderly speakers above 50 years who function as custodians of oral traditions and cultural knowledge.
- Youth participants aged 18–30 who represent contemporary multilingual practices and shifting linguistic identities.
- Ritual practitioners and storytellers involved in cultural transmission.
- Students and educated youth engaged in formal educational systems.

The inclusion of multiple generations enabled comparative understanding of intergenerational linguistic change.

6.4 Data Collection Methods

The study employed multiple methods of qualitative data collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes were conducted to explore participants' experiences regarding language use, multilingual communication, identity and cultural practices. Interviews were conducted primarily in Hindi and Pangwali depending on participant preference and were documented through written notes and audio recordings where consent was granted. The flexible structure allowed participants to elaborate on personal experiences while ensuring thematic consistency.

Oral Narratives and Storytelling

Oral narratives, songs, folktales and ritual performances were documented to understand the role of language within cultural transmission. Oral traditions provided insights into symbolic language practices and collective memory.

Participant Observation

Participant observation enabled the researcher to examine everyday communication patterns, multilingual interactions and cultural practices within natural settings.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources included books, journal articles, policy documents and UNESCO reports related to multilingualism, indigenous languages and language preservation.

6.5 Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling in order to identify participants possessing relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge. This method ensured inclusion of individuals capable of providing meaningful insights into multilingual practices and cultural continuity.

6.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework. Interview transcripts, observation notes and oral narratives were manually coded through thematic categorization. Recurring themes were identified, categorized and interpreted in relation to the study objectives. Particular attention was given to multilingual practices, code-switching behavior, intergenerational language attitudes and symbolic expressions of cultural identity.

Major themes included:

- Multilingual language practices
- Intergenerational language shift
- Multilingual identity negotiation
- Institutional marginalization
- Cultural resilience
- Ritual and symbolic language use

6.7 Researcher Positionality

The researcher's familiarity with Himalayan cultural contexts and indigenous linguistic traditions facilitated culturally sensitive engagement with participants and enhanced interpretive understanding of multilingual practices and identity negotiation within the Pangiwal community. Such contextual familiarity contributed to more nuanced interpretation of oral narratives, ritual expressions and multilingual communicative behaviors observed during fieldwork.

6.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully maintained throughout the research process. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and coded identities. The study also maintained cultural sensitivity while engaging with indigenous traditions and oral knowledge systems.

7. FINDINGS :

The study generates several important findings regarding multilingual identity, language shift and cultural resilience within Himalayan indigenous communities.

First, the findings reveal that Indigenous communities function within highly multilingual environments characterized by domain-specific language use. Indigenous languages remain associated with ritual and familial spaces, while Hindi and English dominate educational and institutional contexts.

Second, the study identifies significant intergenerational language shift. Younger generations increasingly rely upon dominant languages for communication, education and mobility, leading to weakening transmission of indigenous languages.

Third, multilingual identity among younger speakers is highly dynamic and hybrid. Participants negotiate belonging across indigenous, regional and national linguistic frameworks rather than adhering to singular linguistic identities.

Fourth, educational institutions significantly influence linguistic hierarchies by privileging Hindi and English while excluding indigenous languages from formal learning environments.

Fifth, despite linguistic decline, strong forms of cultural resilience continue through oral traditions, rituals and symbolic cultural participation.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that multilingual adaptation should not be interpreted solely as cultural loss but as a complex process of negotiation, continuity and transformation.

8. DISCUSSION :

8.1 Multilingual Environments and Domain-Based Language Use

The findings demonstrate that indigenous Himalayan communities' function within highly multilingual environments characterized by domain-specific language practices. Participants regularly navigate between indigenous languages, Hindi and English depending on social context, educational setting and communicative purpose.

Indigenous languages remain strongly associated with familial interaction, ritual activities and intra-community communication. Elderly participants frequently reported using the indigenous language within domestic spaces and ceremonial contexts.

One elderly participant stated:

"Our language is still spoken during festivals, prayers and family gatherings because these traditions feel incomplete without it."

In contrast, younger participants increasingly preferred Hindi and English within educational institutions, digital communication and peer interaction.

A youth participant commented:

"At school and online we mostly use Hindi or English. We use our traditional language mainly with grandparents."

Another participant explained:

"When we are with friends, we mix Pangwali, Hindi and sometimes English words together. It feels natural to speak that way."

These patterns indicate functional multilingualism rather than complete linguistic replacement. Different languages occupy distinct social domains based on institutional prestige, communicative utility and symbolic value.

The findings further reveal that multilingual practices are shaped by broader socio-economic structures. Hindi functions as a language of regional mobility and social integration, while English symbolizes educational aspiration and economic advancement. Indigenous languages, meanwhile, remain connected to emotional attachment, kinship relations and ritual continuity.

Such domain-based multilingualism reflects broader sociolinguistic hierarchies within multilingual societies. Languages associated with education and employment acquire higher prestige, whereas indigenous languages become increasingly restricted to symbolic and cultural domains.

The multilingual practices observed during the study may be summarized through the following domain-based distribution of language use:

Domain of Communication	Pangwali	Hindi	English
Home and Family Interaction	High	Moderate	Low
Rituals and Festivals	Very High	Low	Low

School and Education	Low	High	Moderate
Administration and Official Work	Very Low	High	Moderate
Digital and Social Media Use	Low	High	Moderate

figure 8.1

The table demonstrates the domain-specific distribution of multilingual practices within the community. Pangwali continues to function as a significant language of ritual, emotional attachment and familial interaction, whereas Hindi and English dominate institutional, educational and digital environments. These linguistic patterns reveal the coexistence of cultural continuity and multilingual adaptation within contemporary indigenous life.

8.2 Intergenerational Language Shift

The study identifies clear evidence of intergenerational language shift within the community. Elderly speakers generally possess high fluency in indigenous languages and regard them as essential markers of identity and heritage.

However, younger generations demonstrate reduced fluency and limited functional use of ancestral languages. Many youth participants reported understanding the indigenous language but lacking confidence in speaking it fluently.

One participant explained:

"We understand our language but are more comfortable speaking Hindi because that is what we use in school and outside the village."

The weakening of intergenerational transmission emerges as a central factor in language decline. Parents increasingly prioritize dominant languages in order to improve educational and professional opportunities for their children.

Formal schooling plays a particularly significant role in accelerating language shift. Educational institutions overwhelmingly privilege Hindi and English while excluding indigenous languages from curricular spaces.

A participant observed:

"Children learn Hindi and English in school, but our language is not taught anywhere. Gradually they stop speaking it."

This institutional exclusion contributes to declining ethnolinguistic vitality. When indigenous languages lack representation within formal domains, younger generations may perceive them as less valuable or less useful for socio-economic mobility.

Nevertheless, language shift should not be interpreted as a uniform or irreversible process. Several younger participants expressed emotional attachment toward their ancestral language even when their active usage was limited. Such attitudes suggest possibilities for future revitalization if institutional support mechanisms are developed.

8.3 Multilingual Identity Negotiation

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the emergence of hybrid multilingual identities among younger community members. Participants frequently described themselves as simultaneously connected to indigenous cultural traditions and broader national linguistic cultures.

Younger speakers navigate multiple identities across different social spaces. Within family and ritual contexts, they identify strongly with indigenous heritage. In educational and urban settings, however, they adopt linguistic practices associated with dominant languages.

A young participant explained:

"We are proud of our traditions and festivals, but we also need Hindi and English for studies and jobs."

This statement illustrates the coexistence of cultural attachment and multilingual adaptation. Rather than completely abandoning indigenous identity, younger speakers selectively negotiate linguistic affiliations according to context.

The findings challenge simplistic assumptions that language shift necessarily results in cultural assimilation. Although fluency in indigenous languages may decline, cultural identity continues to be maintained through ritual participation, oral memory and symbolic affiliation.

At the same time, multilingual identity negotiation can produce tensions and anxieties. Some participants expressed concern regarding the gradual weakening of ancestral language practices.

One youth participant noted:

"Sometimes I feel disconnected because I cannot speak our language as fluently as older people."

Such experiences demonstrate the emotional dimensions of language shift and identity transformation.

The findings also reveal extensive use of code-switching and translanguaging practices. Participants frequently shifted between indigenous languages, Hindi and English within single conversations.

These multilingual practices should not be viewed as linguistic confusion but rather as adaptive communicative strategies reflecting flexible multilingual competence. The frequent movement between Pangwali, Hindi and English demonstrate translanguaging practices through which younger speakers negotiate social belonging, education and cultural affiliation simultaneously.

8.4 Educational Systems and Linguistic Hierarchies

Educational institutions play a central role in shaping multilingual practices and linguistic hierarchies. The dominance of Hindi and English within schooling systems significantly influences language attitudes and aspirations.

Participants repeatedly associated English with modernity, higher education and professional success. Hindi similarly functions as a language of regional integration and administrative access.

Indigenous languages, however, remain largely absent from formal educational contexts.

An elderly participant stated:

"Children are told that Hindi and English are important for success, but nobody encourages them to learn our own language."

This institutional hierarchy contributes to declining language prestige and reduced intergenerational transmission.

The findings further indicate that linguistic exclusion within education affects cultural confidence and identity formation. When indigenous languages are absent from schools, younger speakers may internalize perceptions that their linguistic heritage lacks value within modern society.

At the same time, several participants expressed strong support for mother-tongue-based multilingual education. Participants believed that educational inclusion of indigenous languages could strengthen both cultural identity and linguistic continuity.

Such perspectives align with broader research emphasizing the importance of multilingual education for minority language maintenance.

8.5 Cultural Resilience and Adaptive Continuity

Despite ongoing language shift, the study reveals remarkable forms of cultural resilience within the community. Rituals, oral storytelling, festivals and collective cultural practices continue to function as important mechanisms of cultural continuity.

Even participants with limited fluency in the indigenous language actively participated in ceremonial traditions and community events.

One elder remarked:

"Even if young people do not speak fluently, they still respect our customs and participate in rituals."

This finding demonstrates that cultural identity can persist through symbolic and performative practices even amidst linguistic transformation.

Oral traditions remain particularly important in sustaining collective memory. Folk songs, myths and ritual narratives continue to provide intergenerational connections to ancestral knowledge systems.

The findings suggest that cultural resilience should not be understood as static preservation but rather as adaptive continuity. Communities selectively adapt to changing socio-economic realities while maintaining meaningful aspects of cultural identity.

Multilingualism itself may therefore function as a strategy of cultural survival. By acquiring dominant languages, younger generations gain access to education and employment while still retaining symbolic affiliation with indigenous heritage.

However, the long-term sustainability of such symbolic continuity remains uncertain if indigenous languages continue to decline across generations.

8.6 Digital Media and Contemporary Multilingualism

The study further reveals the growing influence of digital communication on multilingual practices. Younger participants frequently engage with Hindi and English through social media, online education and digital entertainment. Digital platforms contribute to the expansion of dominant languages while simultaneously reducing everyday exposure to indigenous linguistic environments.

Nevertheless, some participants also reported using digital media to share folk songs, cultural videos and local traditions. Such practices indicate potential opportunities for digital language preservation and revitalization.

The integration of indigenous languages into digital spaces could strengthen visibility and encourage youth engagement with linguistic heritage. Several younger participants reported sharing folk songs, traditional celebrations and local oral narratives through social media platforms, indicating the possibility of digital multilingualism as a tool for cultural continuity and language revitalization.

9. CONCLUSION

The present study explored multilingual identity negotiation, language shift and cultural resilience among indigenous Himalayan communities. The findings demonstrate that indigenous multilingualism is shaped by complex interactions between tradition, modernity, education and socio-economic transformation. The study reveals that language shift is occurring across generations, particularly among youth who increasingly rely upon Hindi and English within educational

and institutional contexts. Indigenous languages are gradually becoming restricted to familial, ritual and symbolic domains. However, the findings also demonstrate that multilingual adaptation does not necessarily imply complete cultural loss. Indigenous communities continue to sustain collective identity through rituals, oral traditions, symbolic practices and emotional attachment to ancestral heritage. Multilingual identity within these communities is highly dynamic and hybrid. Younger speakers negotiate multiple linguistic affiliations while balancing indigenous belonging with participation in broader national and global socio-economic structures. The study further highlights the importance of institutional support in sustaining ethnolinguistic vitality. Educational systems and governmental policies significantly shape language attitudes, prestige and intergenerational transmission. Without meaningful inclusion within formal institutions, indigenous languages remain vulnerable to continued decline. At the same time, the research emphasizes that multilingualism should not be viewed solely through deficit perspectives. Multilingual communication practices, translanguaging and hybrid identity formation also represent adaptive responses to changing realities.

Nevertheless, preserving indigenous linguistic diversity remains essential for safeguarding cultural heritage, ecological knowledge and collective memory. Indigenous languages embody unique worldviews and systems of meaning that cannot easily be replaced through dominant linguistic frameworks. The study therefore emphasizes the importance of culturally inclusive multilingual policies, community-based revitalization initiatives and educational frameworks that recognize indigenous languages as valuable components of multilingual societies rather than peripheral cultural remnants. The survival of indigenous multilingualism in the Himalayan region ultimately depends not only on language preservation efforts but also on the recognition of indigenous linguistic identities as legitimate, dynamic and valuable components of contemporary social, cultural and educational life.

10. LIMITATIONS:

The qualitative nature of the study and limited sample size restrict broader generalization. Additionally, the study focuses on specific communities within the Himalayan region and may not represent all indigenous multilingual contexts.

Nevertheless, the research provides important insights into broader patterns of multilingual adaptation and cultural resilience.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The findings of the study carry important implications for language policy, multilingual education and indigenous cultural preservation.

11.1 Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Educational systems in indigenous regions should integrate mother-tongue-based multilingual education. The inclusion of indigenous languages within primary education can strengthen intergenerational transmission and improve linguistic confidence among younger speakers.

Multilingual educational models should allow students to develop competence in indigenous languages alongside Hindi and English rather than treating these languages as mutually exclusive.

11.2 Institutional Recognition of Indigenous Languages

Governmental institutions should provide greater recognition and visibility to indigenous languages within administration, public communication and cultural programming.

Institutional inclusion enhances language prestige and strengthens ethnolinguistic vitality.

11.3 Documentation and Preservation of Oral Traditions

Systematic documentation of oral narratives, songs, rituals and folklore is essential for preserving indigenous cultural knowledge.

Community-led documentation initiatives should be encouraged in collaboration with researchers and cultural organizations.

11.4 Community Participation

Language preservation efforts must involve active participation from indigenous communities themselves. Sustainable revitalization cannot be imposed externally but must emerge through community engagement and cultural ownership.

11.5 Digital Revitalization Strategies

Digital media platforms can be utilized for promoting indigenous languages among younger generations.

Mobile applications, online storytelling projects and social media initiatives can increase visibility and encourage youth participation in language preservation.

11.6 Inclusive Multilingual Policies

National and regional language policies should move beyond monolingual ideologies and recognize multilingual diversity as a valuable social resource.

Policies promoting multilingual inclusion can strengthen both cultural sustainability and social equity.

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