

# The Role of Identity, Unity, and the Present Issue of the Kokborok Language of Tripura

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## Abstract

Kokborok, the language of the Tiprasa people of Tripura, is essential for creating their cultural identity, building communal togetherness, and maintaining Tiprasa customs. It serves as a vital link between generations, with oral traditions and modern modifications ensuring continuity and a sense of belonging. As the Tiprasa community faces modern obstacles like migration, urbanization, and the dominance of other regional languages, Kokborok continues to play an important role in preserving cultural legacy and tribal cohesion. In the backdrop of globalization, Kokborok has both possibilities and challenges. While digital media and technology provide opportunities for the language's revitalization, the movement of younger generations to metropolitan areas, as well as the presence of dominant languages, has raised worries about its survival. The language remains an important component of festivals, rituals, and social activities, preserving its place in daily life. However, its future is dependent on successful preservation measures, such as education and governmental support, as well as its capacity to adapt to modern social and technical environments. This book investigates Kokborok's influence on identity, its function in societal unity, and the contemporary issues it confronts. It also looks at how the language is adapting to digital platforms and what actions are being taken to guarantee its long-term viability in an increasingly globalized environment.

**Key words:** Tiprasa, Kokborok language, Role of identity, Unity, Social issue

Kokborok, the indigenous language of the Tiprasa people of Tripura, is not just a means of communication but a core element of the cultural fabric that binds the community together. As the primary language of the Tiprasa people, it plays a pivotal role in preserving the unique identity of the tribe, encapsulating their history, traditions, and worldview. Spoken by millions of people across Tripura, Kokborok has endured through generations of oral tradition, transmitting not just language but also values, social norms, and spiritual beliefs [1].

As the global landscape shifts and urbanization increases, Kokborok faces both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, the rise of technology and digital platforms offers new ways to revitalize the language, ensuring its accessibility and relevance to younger generations. On the other hand, the pressures of migration, the influence of dominant languages like Bengali and Hindi, and the rise of English in educational and professional spheres pose significant threats to its survival. Despite these challenges, Kokborok remains integral to the cultural and social cohesion of Tripura's indigenous communities [2].

The language is deeply embedded in the rituals, festivals, and oral traditions of the Tiprasa people, with Kokborok serving as the medium for the transmission of folktales, proverbs, songs, and religious chants. It is through these cultural expressions that the language fosters unity, provides a sense of

belonging, and reinforces the collective identity of the Tiprasa people. In a society where traditions are being rapidly transformed by modernity, Kokborok continues to serve as a symbol of resistance and cultural pride [3-4].

This exploration of Kokborok will focus on its role in strengthening tribal unity, preserving identity, and addressing the modern challenges it faces in an ever-changing world. By examining the impact of Kokborok in contemporary arts, education, and digital platforms, this work seeks to understand how the language can adapt and thrive in a globalized context while remaining true to its cultural roots.

## Research objective

1. To study the identity, unity, and present status of the Kokborok language in Tripura.
2. To examine the use of the Kokborok language on social media platforms and the promotion of the Kokborok language.

## Kokborok Language's Contribution to Tiprasa Community Unity

### *Kokborok's historical importance in uniting Tripura's many tribes*

Kokborok has historically served as a unifying factor among Tripura's indigenous tribal groupings. Despite the

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diverse characteristics of the 19 recognized Scheduled Tribes, Kokborok has acted as a unifying language, promoting communication and cultural exchange. It has served as a bridge, bringing together individuals from many tribes to share tales and pass down customs. The language's function in uniting different communities was especially important during times of external pressure, like colonial authority and the socio-political upheavals that occurred after India's independence. Despite these problems, Kokborok remains vital to the Tiprasa people's unity and identity.

Kokborok has 8 (eight) major dialects, and each of these dialects has been named based on a particular tribe. These dialects are: 1. Debbarma (Puran Tripuri), 2. Reang (Bru), 3. Jamatia, 4. Noatia (New Tripuri), 5. Murasing, 6. Uchoi, 7. Koloi, and 8. Rupini. There are different opinions regarding the number of sub-dialects of the above-mentioned 8 (eight) dialects of Kokborok. The sub-dialect may be more familiar as the clan and number of clans of each dialect have a distinct identity. Some are based on the name of a famous person, and some are on the skilfulness of a particular group of people, like handicrafts, weaving, sweet tunes, good speakers, etc. The number of sub-dialects (Binay Debbarma, 2009) of Kokborok is as follows:

- Debbarma - 11 sub-dialects
- Reang - 17 sub-dialects
- Jamatia - 03 sub-dialects
- Noatia - 21 sub-dialects
- Murasing - 09 sub-dialects
- Uchoi - 06 sub-dialects
- Koloi - 08 sub-dialects and
- Rupini - 11 sub-dialects

The language was critical in the maintenance of oral traditions, which were essential for preserving Tiprasa knowledge and values. Kokborok became the means for transmitting crucial cultural and societal information, creating a feeling of communal identity among the Tiprasa tribes.

#### *Kokborok: A tool for promoting solidarity among indigenous communities*

Kokborok has been embraced more and more as a symbol of cultural togetherness in recent decades, especially as contemporary issues like migration and urbanization have proliferated. The language is still essential to the indigenous people's identity because of efforts to promote and conserve it, especially in the field of education. Kokborok still plays a significant part in festivals and other cultural gatherings, uniting many tribes to honor their common heritage.

Younger generations have maintained a connection to their language and cultural heritage by emphasizing the development of Kokborok via community projects, cultural festivals, and educational programs. Since Kokborok is not just a language but also a symbol of cultural pride and defiance against outside influences that jeopardize the survival of tribal traditions, these joint efforts enhance and unite indigenous communities [5].

#### *Identity of the Kokborok language*

Kokborok is more than a language; it is an essential part of the Tiprasa people's cultural identity. In Tripura, where several ethnic groups cohabit, Kokborok represents the Tiprasa community's tradition and perseverance. The Tiprasa people's collective memory is shaped by their language, which is an essential component of their social fabric, reflecting their history, struggles, and ideals. The continuous use of Kokborok

in everyday life, cultural customs, and oral traditions fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity among the community.

Kokborok is important for more than just communication; it symbolizes a critical link to ancestral knowledge and culture. The Tiprasa people's spiritual beliefs, social conventions, and ethical values are encapsulated in the Kokborok language through folktales, songs, and ceremonies. Kokborok introduces younger generations to the ideals of respect, harmony, and oneness with nature, which are profoundly rooted in Tiprasa culture [6].

#### *Problems preserving Kokborok linguistic identity in the face of migration and globalization*

In recent decades, globalization and migration have posed substantial obstacles to the preservation of Kokborok as a cultural marker. As more individuals from rural regions move to cities in quest of better educational and employment prospects, the use of Kokborok has decreased, particularly among the younger generation. In metropolitan areas where Bengali, Hindi, and English are the dominant languages, speaking Kokborok is frequently limited to the home or communal places, limiting its visibility and use in public [7].

Furthermore, the influence of mass media, internet platforms, and global cultures has widened the divide between traditional and modern ways of living. While these foreign influences have created new opportunities for economic and social development, they also threaten language variety. As more young people turn to dominant languages for job success, Kokborok risks losing its importance as a medium for everyday communication and cultural expression.

#### *Preservation efforts to maintain Kokborok in present*

Despite the hurdles, major efforts have been made to conserve and promote Kokborok, ensuring its future importance. Kokborok's incorporation into educational curriculum at all levels has played an important role in keeping the language alive, especially in rural schools where it is still commonly spoken. The emergence of Kokborok as a subject in higher education, including degrees in Kokborok literature, has strengthened its position as an academic field.

Furthermore, cultural groups and grassroots movements are actively working to preserve Kokborok through digital media. The use of social media, smartphone applications, and online courses has helped to bridge the gap between tradition and technology, making Kokborok more accessible to newer, technologically advanced generations. These activities guarantee that Kokborok may prosper in a modern society while remaining connected to its cultural traditions.

In addition, community-driven initiatives such as storytelling festivals, language workshops, and local language radio broadcasts have helped to revitalize Kokborok. These grassroots efforts are key in confirming the significance of Kokborok not just as a language but also as an essential component of the Tiprasa people's cultural identity [8].

#### *Kokborok has present-day difficulties*

##### *The effects of urbanization and migration on language use*

As Tripura has become increasingly urbanized in recent decades, the Tiprasa people's linguistic environment has changed dramatically. Younger generations are progressively transitioning away from Kokborok and toward mainstream languages like Bengali, Hindi, and English in metropolitan regions with better economic and educational prospects. This transition is most noticeable among persons who move from rural regions to cities, where Kokborok is less widely used outside of the household or local community.

The influence of mass media, the internet, and digital technology has hastened this transformation since metropolitan areas are increasingly exposed to global cultural trends that frequently emphasize languages with greater regional or worldwide usefulness. Furthermore, the influx of Bengali-speaking people from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to Tripura has contributed to Bengali's increasing dominance in the region. Along with Bengali and Hindi, English is gradually suppressing Kokborok, posing a threat to the survival of this indigenous language [9].

The movement away from Kokborok in favour of other commonly spoken languages jeopardizes the language's intergenerational transmission. As newer generations acquire new languages for practical reasons such as education, employment, and social integration, Kokborok faces marginalization in daily life, particularly in public venues such as schools, workplaces, and the media. The difficulty is to strike a balance between the need for economic and social mobility and the necessity to conserve and develop a language that is important to the Tigrasa cultural identity.

#### *Educational disparities and the availability of learning resources in Kokborok*

While Kokborok is incorporated in certain school curriculums, particularly in rural areas, educational resources for learning the language are still scarce. There is a substantial lack of textbooks, digital learning tools, and skilled instructors, particularly in metropolitan regions where the language is not widely spoken. In many schools, Kokborok is not given the same attention as Bengali or English, making it difficult for pupils to learn their native language.

Furthermore, the lack of standardized teaching resources in Kokborok, such as dictionaries, grammar guides, and instructional content, hinders the language-learning and teaching process. While attempts are being made to close these gaps, much progress has to be made in ensuring that Kokborok is taught consistently and successfully at all educational levels. This lack of resources not only impedes the language's evolution but also hinders young people's ability to properly participate in their cultural history via language [10].

Furthermore, suitable faculty members must be appointed to teach Kokborok, particularly those who are actively involved in language development research. Such appointments would not only improve the quality of education but would also provide chances for more academic inquiry and research. This emphasis on incorporating research-oriented experts into the educational system has the potential to significantly advance Kokborok studies and ensure the language's long-term viability.

#### *Digitalization's impact on Kokborok preservation*

Kokborok has both potential and disadvantages in the digital era. On the one hand, Kokborok has found it challenging to gain recognition due to the predominance of Bengali, English, and other international languages in digital material, including social media, entertainment, and educational platforms. Because there are so few online resources available in Kokborok, such as websites, learning platforms, and digital libraries, the language is frequently left out of larger international discussions on online forums.

Kokborok, on the other hand, is progressively gaining prominence and spreading over the world, including Europe, Africa, Russia, and a number of Asian nations. This worldwide interest stems from initiatives within the Kokborok-speaking community to generate digital material, promote the language through cultural exchanges, and collaborate with global

platforms to convey their rich heritage. Such initiatives give us optimism that Kokborok can overcome its digital isolation and have a bigger worldwide presence in the future.

However, digital technology also provides a potent instrument for language revitalization. The development of Kokborok-focused applications, online courses, and digital storytelling platforms offers the language a chance to flourish in the contemporary world. Kokborok speakers may exchange information on social media sites like Facebook and YouTube, such as literature, folk melodies, and personal narratives, which helps preserve the language among future generations. As younger people get increasingly accustomed to receiving information in digital media, these digital activities are essential to ensuring Kokborok stays relevant.

To preserve Kokborok's survival in the digital era, it is critical to invest in the creation of digital resources and platforms that make the language more accessible to a larger audience, as well as encourage its incorporation into more mainstream digital and media environments [11].

#### *Kokborok's representation in literature, music, and film*

Kokborok has found expression in a variety of creative forms, reflecting the cultural diversity of the Tigrasa people. Contemporary writers are combining ancient storytelling approaches with current themes to address topics such as identity, migration, and environmental concerns. Kokborok poetry and prose continue to thrive, with writers drawing inspiration from oral traditions to create works that appeal to both rural and urban audiences.

Kokborok songs celebrate themes of environment, community, and spiritual connection and are an essential form of cultural expression and preservation. While contemporary Kokborok performers experiment with styles like fusion and hip-hop to appeal to younger audiences, folk music still plays a crucial part in festivals and ceremonies. These modifications demonstrate how the language may change while maintaining its cultural heritage.

Notable musicians who have sung traditional Kokborok folk songs include Jadu Koliya, Smt. Janu Debbarma, Sri Kulwiya Debbarma, Smt. Krishna Pati Debbarma, and Suana Charan Debbarma, among others. These performers were frequently summoned by households to perform at significant occasions such as Mai Kwital Chamani (New Feasting), Maitukmani (First New Baby Rice Feeding), marriages, and condolence ceremonies. Their performances were usually unpaid, functioning as a show of goodwill and a source of amusement or solace for grieving families.

On the other hand, modern musicians like Bimal Debbarma, Goutam Debbarma, Usha Debbarma, Kwplai Jamatia, Parmita Reang, Manik Debbarma, Rumi Murasing, and Milton Debbarma sing contemporary Kokborok songs. These artists frequently work professionally and get compensation for their performances at a range of occasions, including weddings, ceremonies, yearly gatherings, festivals, and rituals.

Electronics, media, and film have become effective channels for promoting Kokborok language. In addition to telling the history of the Tigrasa people, cinema and documentaries in the language are crucial for conserving their language and cultural heritage. Kokborok's significance in modern media has been further cemented by the respect these projects have received on a regional and national scale.

Among the popular Kokborok documentaries and films are Raima Bai Saima, Swkal, Dungur, and Langmani Haduk. These pieces, which draw inspiration from folktales and true stories, have been essential in encapsulating Tigrasa culture and

popular Kokborok storytelling. These visual media give the language a lively platform for expression while fusing conventional subjects with contemporary dramatic techniques.

#### *The function of social media and digital platforms in promoting Kokborok*

The increase in social media has substantially altered how Kokborok is communicated and preserved. Kokborok is important and is created and distributed via platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, including instructional films, cultural storytelling, and traditional performances. These platforms allow speakers to communicate with a worldwide audience, increasing the language's awareness well beyond its traditional geographical boundaries, including Europe, Africa, Russia, and several Asian nations. Kokborok content creators and cultural aficionados use social media to create greater respect for the language and its rich heritage.

Social media influencers and content makers have become cultural ambassadors, using their platforms to promote the Kokborok tradition. By adapting the language to new digital trends, they ensure its relevance for future generations and also pride in the Tiprasa community's linguistic heritage [12].

#### *Policy and recommendation*

##### *Government initiatives to support the development of Kokborok language*

Kokborok was recognized as one of Tripura's official languages in 1979, marking a significant step forward in its preservation and promotion. Since then, government programs have aimed to incorporate Kokborok into education, governance, and public life. The establishment of Kokborok as a school topic and its inclusion in the higher education curriculum have been critical in guaranteeing its transfer to future generations. Tripura University offers courses, i.e. certificate courses, postgraduate and Ph.D. degrees, which strengthen Kokborok's language.

The Directorate of Kokborok and Other Minority Languages, part of the Department of Education, Government of Tripura, has also established programs such as the Kokborok Learning Course (online), which aims to educate Kokborok to non-Kokborok-speaking officials and government employees. This effort promotes improved communication and administration in government operations, promoting successful governance in Kokborok-speaking regions.

The promotion of the language is greatly aided by state-sponsored cultural events and festivals. The government frequently sponsors events like Garia Puja and Mamita, which offer venues for showcasing Kokborok literature, music, and culture. Furthermore, efforts have been made to integrate Kokborok into the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council's (TTAADC) administrative duties, therefore enhancing its significance in public discourse and government.

Despite these attempts, challenges remain. Limited funding for language development projects, script inconsistencies, and insufficient educator training programs are

merely a few of the challenges that must be addressed to ensure Kokborok's development and longevity [13].

#### *The Kokborok language is being preserved by community-based efforts and cultural organizations*

Kokborok's preservation has been greatly aided by community-driven projects. Cultural groups and community groups have taken the initiative to record oral traditions, publish literature, and use competitions, workshops, and festivals to promote Kokborok. Engaging younger generations and fostering pride in their language heritage are frequently the goals of these initiatives.

To reach a larger audience, cultural groups have increasingly utilized digital channels. They guarantee that Kokborok is available to both native speakers and learners throughout the world by establishing online libraries of Kokborok stories, songs, and instructional resources. Partnerships between NGOs and local communities have produced language revival initiatives that highlight Kokborok's significance as a pillar of Tiprasa's identity.

The function of traditional performers and storytellers in conserving and advancing Kokborok through oral histories is one noteworthy example. These cultural guardians contribute to the preservation of the language in its most genuine form by giving performances at community gatherings and passing along their expertise to younger audiences [14].

## CONCLUSION

Kokborok remains a powerful symbol of identity, resilience, and unity for the Tiprasa people of Tripura. It plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening solidarity among Tiprasa communities. From its rich oral traditions to its integration into modern education, arts, and governance, Kokborok showcases the adaptability and strength of Tiprasa culture. Despite the pressures of globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of other regional and global languages, Kokborok endures as a vibrant and living language. The community's dedicated efforts, bolstered by supportive government policies and digital innovations, offer hope for its continued growth. Grassroots initiatives, cultural festivals, and educational reforms ensure that Kokborok remains relevant to younger generations while safeguarding its rich heritage for future generations of the Tiprasa. Moving in advance, the future of Kokborok is dependent on striking a balance between tradition and modernization. Embracing modern technologies and extending educational opportunities can help the language survive in a more interconnected world. At the same time, a significant emphasis on cultural preservation and community interaction will guarantee that Kokborok remains authentic as the Tiprasa people's voice. The evolution of Kokborok is a powerful reminder that preserving indigenous languages is not just about words or grammar but about maintaining a Tiprasa people's history, values, and identity. Its journey is a testament to the enduring power of language to connect, unite, and inspire.

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