

India's lost 220 languages in last 50 yrs, finds survey

Most Were Spoken By Nomads

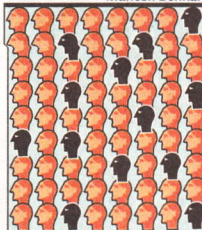
Sandhya Soman | TNN

Mumbai: India has lost around 20% of its languages in the past five decades, a survey by the Vadodara-based Bhasha Research and Publication Centre has revealed.

The country had 1,100 languages in 1961, but nearly 220 of them have vanished, said Ganesh Devy, writer and lead co-ordinator of the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) project. The survey was carried out over a period of two years starting 2011.

"We have found 780 languages and must have missed about 100 or about 880 languages. The rest have disappeared. It's a sad loss," said Devy.

Mahesh Benkar



TONGUE-TIED IN THE COUNTRY

No. of languages in 1961

1,100

No. in 2013

880

Found in new survey (2011-13): **780** + around **100 unaccounted** by PLSI; **220** lost for ever

HOW THE COUNT WENT DOWN IN 1971

The 1961 census listed 1,652 languages, which were cut to 1,100 as many were found to be variants. The 1971 census listed only 108 as the government decided to document only those languages which had more than 10,000 speakers. The rest were included in the 'others' section. The new survey does not follow this norm but includes all languages

METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

Nearly 3,000 PLSI volunteers reached out to community groups, linguists and activists to document various languages and the history of their speakers

Most of the lost languages belong to nomadic communities scattered across the country. "Were they alive, they would have been spoken by 3% to 4% of Indians, that is around five crore people," Devy said.

The main reasons for the

disappearance are lack of recognition, displacement of communities, absence of livelihood options for speakers and stigma against 'under-developed' mother tongues, he said.