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Q5(d)

Dravidian language and their subgroups

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on the Dravidian language family and its subgroups
- Name the branches and major languages
- Keep race and language separate
- Keep the note within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Dravidian is a language family named in modern form by Caldwell, not a race.

South Dravidian includes Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tulu.

South-Central includes Telugu and **Gondi**-Kui languages.

Central includes Kolami and Parji; North includes **Kurukh**, Malto, and **Brahui**.

Oraon and Gond speech show tribal members of the family without making Dravidian a tribal race.

Introduction

Dravidian is a language family of South Asia, not a racial type. It has four commonly taught subgroups and a few northern outliers. Classification is comparative linguistics, not Risley's "Dravidian race".

Body

The family

- **Robert Caldwell** established Dravidian as a family separate from Indo-Aryan in the nineteenth century.
- Core geography is South India and Sri Lanka, with **Brahui** in Balochistan and **Kurukh (Oraon)** and **Malto** in the eastern-central belt as northern members.
- **Tolkappiyam** and later grammars document Old Tamil; inscriptions and loan history show long contact with Sanskrit and Prakrit.

Subgroups (standard teaching set)

- **South Dravidian:** Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Kodagu, and related tongues.
- **South-Central (or South Dravidian II):** Telugu, **Gondi**, Konda, Kui, Kuvi, Pengo, Manda.

- **Central Dravidian:** Kolami, Naiki, Parji, Ollari, Gadaba (the Dravidian Gadaba, not the Munda one).
- **North Dravidian:** Kurukh, Malto, Brahui.

Anthropological caution

- Speakers include caste peasants, city elites, and ST groups (Gond, Oraon, Toda in a Nilgiri setting). Language is not tribe.
- **S. S. Sarkar** already warned against matching one race to Dravidian speech. Genetics shows mixture, not a sealed Dravidian biological box.

Flow diagram

Dravidian family -> South Tamil Kannada Malayalam

Dravidian family -> South-Central Telugu Gondi

Dravidian family -> Central Kolami Parji

Dravidian family -> North Kurukh Malto Brahui

Conclusion

Dravidian is four subgroups plus contact history. Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telugu are the large literary languages. Brahui, Kurukh, and Gondi show the family's northern and tribal spread. Race labels should stay out of the note.

Facts & figures

Robert Caldwell

Nineteenth-century scholar who established Dravidian as a family distinct from Indo-Aryan.

Brahui

North Dravidian language of Balochistan, an outlier far from the southern literary core.

Kurukh

North Dravidian language of the Oraon (Kurukh) people in Jharkhand and neighbouring states.

Gondi

South-Central Dravidian language cluster of Gond regions in central India.

Tolkappiyam

Early Tamil grammatical text showing a long literary history inside South Dravidian.