

PEOPLING OF THE NORTHEAST

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PART 4



A Puzzle

IN December, 2014, I presented a puzzling case in the annual gathering of linguists at the 36th International Conference of the Linguistics Society of India (ICOLSI) in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala; the case was based on my observation since more than a decade until then and it is as follows: linguistically, why do the two unrelated families of languages of India, namely, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman, show countless similarities in many syntactic domains? This is a puzzling phenomenon since as far as known, there has been no contact whatsoever between the two groups. Contact induced linguistic effects are well known, and within India, the *Sprachbund* indicating a linguistic area with common features was termed as 'India as a Linguistic Area' in 1956 by Emeneau (discussed in Part 1 of this series in vol. 02, issue 03, p. 66-73, of the same journal). However, within



the context of the above ‘puzzle’, Emeneau’s idea is problematic for two reasons; first, as pointed out in Part 1, he did not take into account Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages in his *Sprachbund*, and secondly, he was concerned only with phonetic (at the level of sounds) and morphemic (at the level of words) features, not at the level of sentences or syntactic features.

This second lacuna bugs even modern linguistic studies as well. For example, within the branch of sociolinguistics, studying language-related phenomena that are social or lie at different levels of the society of a linguistic community, the most important topic is the study of linguistic variations; that is, how ‘varieties’ – dialects and languages – vary within and across a geographical area or speech community in terms of some linguistic variant. This topic was initiated more than 50 years ago – in 1963 – when William Labov presented his paper “The Social Motivation of Sound Change” at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA); the paper also marks the effective beginning of the disciplinary branch of sociolinguistics within linguistics. Note that the title of the paper clearly reveals the emphasis sociolinguistic studies on variation have put on sound differences; since then, almost all the work on linguistic variation have looked at variation at the level of sound, and later, at the level of word-structures as well, that is, phonetic and morphemic, respectively, but not syntactic. There are of course some valid reasons for neglecting syntactic variation as a parameter – it is much more difficult to spot variations at the sentence level, and until recently, syntactic studies did not consider variation as a worthwhile topic to study. Also, as I pointed out recently (in “Sign Linguistics as Decentring Linguistic Knowledge Making” presented at the conference on ‘Empowering Deaf through Indian Sign Language’ on 21st March, 2017, at VigyanBhawan, New Delhi, organised by the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) this bias is a result of linguistics being concerned only with spoken (or hearing) languages (and not, for example, sign languages), and the idea that syntactic differences and similarities is perhaps the

only stable parameter for determining variation, has evaded our attention.

The Culture of Questions

To come back to the puzzle, and to appreciate the puzzlement further, consider also the fact that the features that are common across Dravidian and TB languages are striking furthermore in their being absent in Indo-Aryan (IA). Thus, in syntactic constructions such as negative verbs, nominalization strategies, preference for participial relatives, verbal reflexives and reciprocals, and Cleft questions, etc., these two families are uncannily closer to each other, with the exclusion of most of these features in IA. Consider for illustration just one construction out of the many, namely, the preference for using “cleft” questions rather than simple questions using a question word (like What, Who, etc.). Both Dravidian languages (Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, etc.) and TB languages (like Meiteilon, Mizo, Naga languages, etc.), prefer the “cleft” construction to ask questions, that is, instead of asking a simple question like *Whom do you like?*, these languages prefer to ask the same question as *Who is it that you like?* This is shown in the following examples from Malayalam and Meiteilon in (1) and (2), respectively:

Malayalam

- (1) *nin-ne təlli-(y)-adə aarə aarə?*
you-to beat-nomz-it who is
‘Who was it that beat you?’

Meiteilon

- (2) *nəŋ-bu phu-bə-du kəna no?*
you-to beat-nomz-it who is
‘Who was it that beat you?’

Most importantly, this is simply not possible (* indicating ungrammaticality) to construct in IA languages, note the following:

Bangla

- (3) **toma-ke marlo-je ke (həy)?*
you-to beat.past-that who is

Note that in both Dravidian and TB, it is also possible to ask a question in the regular fashion (like *Who beat you?*), but the cleft form is the preferred strategy. In my quest to understand why this should

be so, I had earlier noticed (“The Culture of Questions in Grammar and Language” delivered on 4th November, 2011 at Manipur University) that Meiteilon lacks the so-called question-intonation; that is, both in the clefted and the non-clefted version, there is no noticeable question intonation. This can be discerned from the pitch graphs (in Fig. 1) of the following two sentences in Meiteilon:

- (4) a. *ɲaraŋ kəna-nə gaŋi-du wairu-ge ?* (non-cleft)
 yesterday who-NOM car-DET borrow-Q
 ‘Who borrowed the car yesterday?’
 b. *ɲaraŋ gaŋi wairu-bə-du kəna-nə-no?* (cleft)
 yesterday car borrow-NOMZ-DET who-NOM-Q
 ‘Who was it that borrowed the car yesterday?’

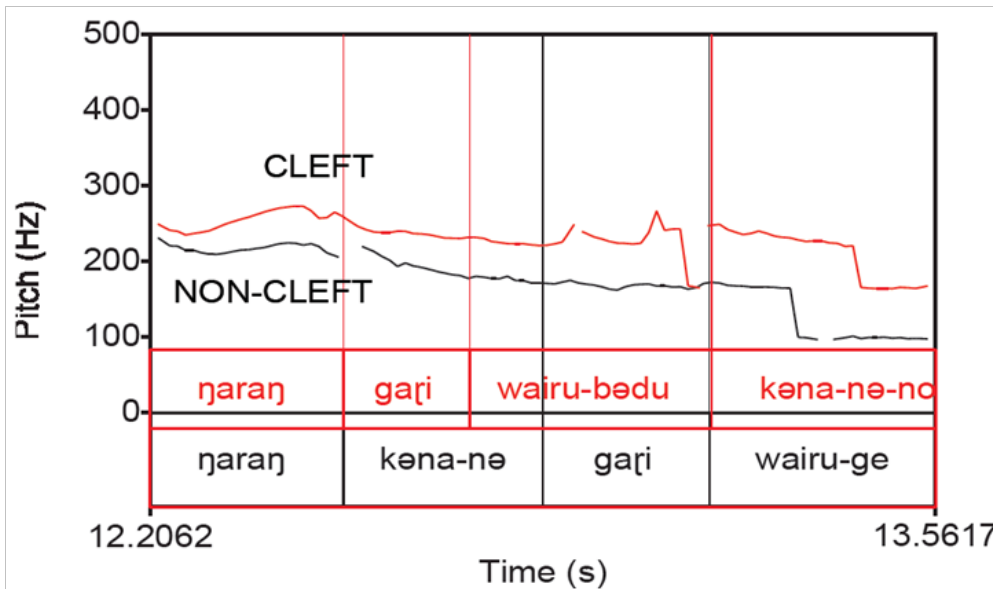


Fig. 1: Pitch graphs of cleft (in red) and non-cleft (in black) questions

The most striking thing to note in the pitch diagram in Fig. 1 for the sentences in (4) is that the pitch contours of the clefted (in red) and non-clefted (in black) versions look quite similar. In addition, the question word *kəna-nə* ‘Who’ cannot be said to carry any sort of emphatic intonation in either the non-clefted or the clefted version (duration being 0.40 sec and 0.43 sec; mean intensity being 74 dB and 69 dB; and mean pitch being 187 Hz and 153 Hz, respectively) and is marked by a typical falling pitch contour. Cleft questions thus are unmarked altogether and are indistinguishable from the typical end-of-sentence fall.

Note that the phrase ‘The culture of questions’ in the title of the talk is meaningful in more than one ways; it indicates that the observed lack of question-intonation is perhaps in consonance with the cultural etiquette of how a question should preferably be asked in the Manipuri culture, and by the suggestions forwarded in several of my own work in this domain, one simple rule to follow is to *not* raise the intonation. In some ways, a direct question like *Where are you going?* can be construed as rude in a culture that values the politeness intricacies in conversations to a high degree. However, a question needs to be understood as a question by the hearer, that is, there must be some other linguistic clue as to the interrogatory nature of the question, otherwise

the purpose of the question will be lost, that is, it will fail to do its job by not eliciting a response. Clefting, therefore, was proposed to be the syntactic “tag” that conveys the interrogatory character of the question to the listener.

Striking parallels like this obtain for all the other constructions or processes listed above. If syntactic variation is the true determinant for linguistic variation across languages, then surely, syntactic similarity must indicate a very close relation between languages. Furthermore, the cultural sanction against rising intonation in a question, as shown above, therefore, seems to be common across Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman. This cultural commonality of intricacies of politeness, a trace of which is remnant in the commonality of linguistic structures highlighted here, indicates the possibility of an ancient archetypal cultural community which can be identified as foundationally ‘Indian’; it is therefore not an accident that fire does not play any major role in Manipuri and at least Malayalam Hindu weddings – arrival of the fire culture, most probably, happened later.

A ‘Carrier’ Effect?

The uncanny similarities of linguistic features between Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman force us to hypothesise that somehow or other, these features were transferred from one to the other group in some distant past. The

directionality of this ancient transfer could have been either from Dravidian to TB or vice-versa. Due to the lack of any evidence of contact between these two groups, the null hypothesis is that the similarities are carried over as a result of admixture via a different linguistic group. Since the only other ancient linguistic group in the region one can think of is the Austroasiatic group (see vol. 3, issue 1, 2017, pp. 60-70, of this journal for more on this group), the following two possibilities obtain:

- (i) contact between Dravidian and Austroasiatic (Dr-AA)
- (ii) contact between Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman (AA-TB)

Note that for each of these possibilities there exist two further options:

- (i) contact outside India
- (ii) contact inside India

That is, in total, we have four cases to consider; in what follows, I will consider each of these possibilities in the historical contexts and examine if they provide any clue to answering the puzzle of similarity between Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman.

Dravidian and Austroasiatic Contact

In part 3 (vol. 3, issue 3, pp. 60-70), I mentioned the work of B.H. Hodgson in 1847 ('Aborigines of the Sub-Himalayas,' *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*), where 'Dravidian' and 'Kol' are erroneously shown as two subgroups of a supergroup called 'Tamulic', and promised to come back to it in terms of an interesting possibility that such an error throws up about a drama that might have happened just outside the north-eastern corridor inside India. Before I do that, let us travel first to outside the Indian borders and examine if there was any instance of a Dravidian-Austroasiatic interaction there.

The Mons

The Mon state by the Gulf of Martaban is one of the few Austroasiatic pockets in Myanmar, and where, by far, the largest concentration of speakers of any Austroasiatic language in the country live. The Mons are the oldest race in the peninsula, and are in many ways distinct from the surrounding Tibeto-Burman populations, in terms of language, culture, and the beginnings of their civilisation; and with regards to the last, according to their own traditions, they derive (along with the Cambodians) their religion and literature from the Indian civilisation. Before proceeding, let us understand the location of the Mon state from the following maps by comparing the Mon



Fig. 2: Mon Kingdom about 100 CE
(<http://www.globalsecurity.org/jhtml/jframe.html#http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/images/map-100.jpg>|||Myanmar%20History%20Map%20-%20100%20AD



Fig. 3: Current Mon State
(adapted from: https://i0.wp.com/nd-burma.org/N4/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Burma_population.gif?fit=800%2C1182&w=640https://i0.wp.com/nd-burma.org/N4/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Burma_population.gif?fit=800%2C1182&w=640)

Kingdom in about 100 CE (Fig. 2) and the current Mon State (Fig. 3).

Although Pegu was the centre-point of the Mon Empire, it was in Thaton on the coast, where the history, as in the Mon legends, begins:

“Concerning the first building of Tha-htun, it is related that before Gau-ta-ma appeared, there reigned a certain king Tí-tha, in the city of Thu-bin-na (or Thu-bin-ga), in the country of Karanaka. He had two sons Tí-tha Kummá and Dzá-yaKummá. The young princes determined to abandon the world and become hermits. They, therefore, left their home, and went to dwell on separate mountains, near the seaside, described as being not far from the future site of the city of Tha-htun. The whole country was then forest. Once when walking on the seashore, the brother hermits found two eggs, which had been deposited and abandoned by a female dragon, who came up out of the sea. The hermits carried away the eggs, from which in due time issued forth two male children. The hermits brought up the boys, one of whom died at ten years of age; but being born again in Mit-ti-la, about the time of the appearance of the lord Gau-ta-ma, became, while yet a child, one of his disciples. The boy, produced from the egg taken by the elder hermit lived in the forest until he was seventeen years of age, when by the help of Tha-kya, he built the city of Thuwanna-bhumi, called also Tha-htun, and reigned with the title of Thiha Rá-dzá.” (from A.P. Phayre, ‘On the history of Pegu’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XLII 1873, p27.)

Dravidians in Burma?

Note that there are clues all over in the passage above that the various names used are derived from IA, the name Thaton itself in Mon signifies “golden land” or Suvarna-Bhumi (or ‘Thuwanna-bhumi’, as in the passage above). By this account Thaton seems to have been established before mid-5th century CE. Similarly, Thubinga is ‘Venga’, the name given to the districts of Godavari and Krishna in modern Karnataka (‘Karanaka’ in the passage). King Títha is probably Ashoka’s brother Tishya, and Dzáya is apparently Jaya Sinha, the founder the Chalukya dynasty in Telengana; and finally Thiha Rádzá is Raja Sinha, the son of Jaya Sinha (ibid, p.33). However, this account is not entirely trustworthy as Ashoka’s reign was established much later than the supposed

founding of Thaton. It is therefore more likely to believe B.C.Majumdar who states that “the Kalingans established an empire in Burma perhaps many hundred years before the rise of Buddhism.” (*Orissa in the Making: Early Dynasties of Orissa*, Patna, 1984, p.31, mentioned in ‘Kalinga and Burma - A Study in Ancient Relations’ by B.Patra, *Orissa Review*, Nov. 2005).

The connection with Telangana (and Kalinga) is clearly marked in Mons being named by others as *Talaings*. In the 5th CE, perhaps the persecution of Buddhists, led to their flight from the Southeast coast of India to the opposite coast of Bay of Bengal, whence in 573 CE, Pegu was established by these early Buddhists. Pegu was then called *Rámanya* or the country of Rama, confirming Indian influence. We thus see almost 1000 years of early Dravidian Hindu and Buddhist influence on the Mons. But who were the Mons?

Where did the Mons come from?

We get some idea from the official report on the Imperial Census of British Burma in 1872

“The Talaing nation appears to have been formed from two distinct stocks, both starting from India, and uniting into one people at Burma. The name Talaing is supposed to be merely a reproduction of Telinga or Telingana, and the people to whom the name was primarily applied are taken to have been Dravidian colonists who came over by sea and settled at Thatun. . . . The other, and probably more numerous stock, are believed to be identical with the pre-Aryan Kols of Central India, and call themselves Múns.”

According to another philologist, J.R. Logan, the first migration from the northern side of the Himalayas is that of people belonging to “Anam, Kambojan, Mōn, and Lau tribes” (*Ethnology of the Indo-Pacific Islands*, *Journal of Indian Archipelago*, 1855). Elaborating on this northern origin of the Mon people, C.J.F.S. Forbes conjectures the Mon-Anam (Anam is the older name for Vietnamese) race to have taken the ‘second’ route via Karakoram into Tibet and into the upper Brahmaputra valley, before proceeding to ‘Farther’ India (that is, their present location of Mon state in Myanmar) via Bengal; and it is perhaps in Bengal that they would have encountered and

Bengal ('On the Connexion of the Mōns of Pegu with the Koles of Central India', C. J. F. S. Forbes, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Apr., 1878, p. 242). Note that even in such early works, the subtle idea of Austroasiatic Mon-Anam being different from the Kols or the Mundas, is explored (see Part 3, vol. 3, issue 3, pp. 60-70, of this journal for more on this distinction).

The 'Belus' as Aboriginal Nicobarese?

In various accounts of arrivals of the Burmese, Shans, and Karens, it is assumed that the Mon-Anam race preceded them, making the Mons to be earliest settlers of the Peninsula. However, earliest Mon traditions state that "when the Buddhist missionaries arrived on the coast, they were welcomed near Thatone, but were opposed and stoned by the *Beloos* when they attempted to land near Martaban" (ibid., p. 234, emphasis mine). *Belus* are considered to be monsters or ogres, and are popular in Myanmar puppetry representing Dasagiri (or Ravana), the devil incarnate (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: A Belu puppet
(from: <http://www.elisabethdenotter.nl/site2/Burmalabmyintthabin.html>)

F. A. de Roepstorff, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, July, 1876 remarks that the tribes in Andaman & Nicobar group of islands in Indian ocean "are possibly the remains of a race of Mongolians, who were peaceably settled on the Nicobar Islands ...," which led Forbes to believe

that the Mons were preceded by Mongoloid people of present Nicobar islands. The genetic studies from Prasad *et al.* 2001 onwards (B.V. Prasad *et al.*, 2001, 'Mitochondrial DNA variation in Nicobarese Islanders'. *Human Biology*, 73: 715-125), also suggested close affinity of the Nicobarese with the populations from Southeast Asia. The study by Trivedi *et al.* (R. Trivedi *et al.* 2006, 'Molecular insights into the origins of the Shompen, a declining population of the Nicobar archipelago', *Journal of Human Genetics*, pp. 217-226) further demonstrates the affinity of the Nicobarese and the Shompen population to Austroasiatic speakers of Vietnam, rather than to mainland Indian Mundas, although all of them share the Y-Chromosome haplogroup M95-O2a lineage; this points towards an early splitting of the Nicobarese and Shompen. This situation is depicted in Fig. 5:

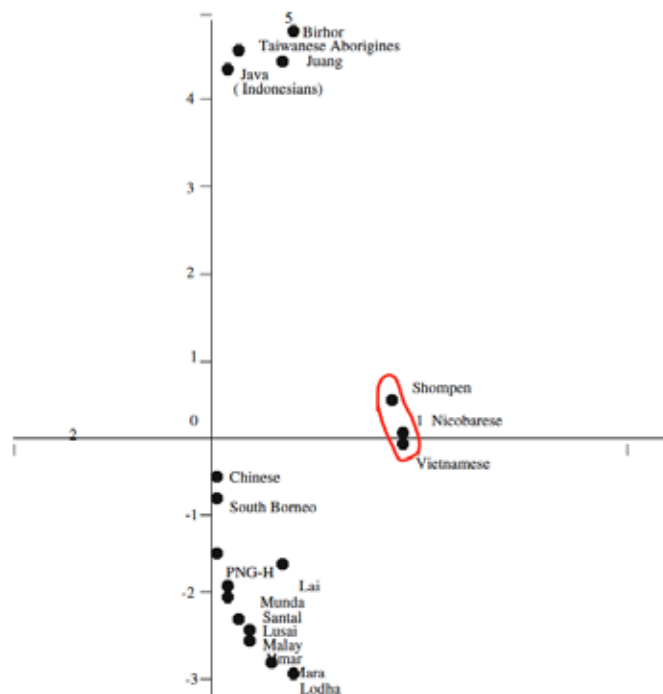


Fig. 5: Distances of Y-Chromosomal frequencies
(from: Trivedi *et al.*, 2006)

The Talaing Language

Thus, the Mons having displaced the 'aboriginals' preceding them, who then migrated to the Andaman and Nicobar islands, were colonised by the Dravidians (Kalingans), followed by arrival of the Buddhists. However the Dravidian influence on Mon is not traceable, except in the name Talaing, indicating that the Dravidians merged into the Mon stock. The

Talaing or Mon language instead was found to share many features with Munda languages of India. This thesis was pushed most vigorously by Rev. Francis Mason, an American Baptist missionary in Burma, in a series of works starting with an article 1854, entitled ‘The Talaing Language’ published in the *Journal of American Oriental Society*, vol. 4, where he remarks thus:

“Talaing language has a radical affinity with the Kole. The first six numerals, the personal pronouns, the words for several members of the body and many objects of nature, with a few verbs, are unquestionably of common origin; while many other words bearing a more remote resemblance, are probably derived from the same roots” (p. 282).

He further conjectures that the first syllable of the name of the languages of the Kols in central India, namely, Munda, is the same as the name of the Talaings, that is, Mon/ Mun. The Mons therefore represent a case of coming together of Dravidian and Austroasiatic speaking people in antiquity, whereas their language bears close proximity to the

Austroasiatic-Munda languages of India.

The Buddhists in Pegu

In terms of culture and religion, as discussed, the Mons have been highly influenced by the Buddhists from as early as 241 BCE, the evidence for which, are in plenty; however, I will mention here only one. Maj. R.C. Temple, published a paper ‘Notes on Antiquities in Rāmaññadesa (The Talaing Country of Burma)’ in 1893 in *Indian Antiquity*, vol. XXII, where on pages 343-5, the inscription on the following two plates representing glazed terra-cotta tiles found in lower Burma (numbered IX and IXa) were discussed (see Fig. 6):

However, the interpretation of the inscription which Temple offers {see (5)}, is something that Temple himself is loath to accept (“I am very loth (*sic*) to accept such a reading, as it would be against epigraphic experience” *ibid*: 18):

- (5) *kwan p'rau mâ pa mat lwat*
 ‘The wife is a friend forever’



Plate IX

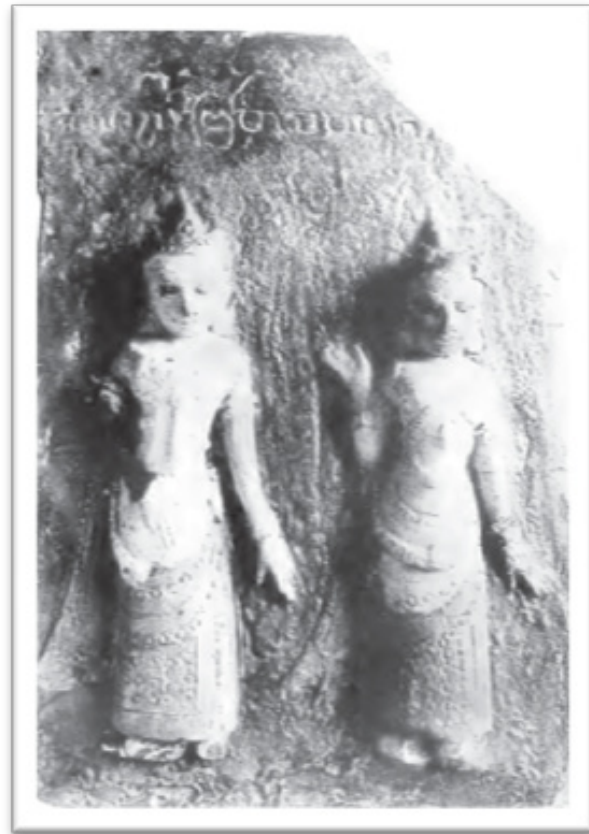


Plate IXa

Fig. 6: Plates representing Terra-Cotta glazed tiles from Pegu (From: Temple, 1893)

Instead, C. O. Blagden in his article ‘Some Talaing Inscriptions on Glazed Tiles’ in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (Jul., 1912), pp.689-698, offered a much more relevant interpretation of the same inscription, albeit with some modifications in the reading of the letters in the inscription{see (6)}:

- (6) *kwan brau mā samat lwat*
‘Young maiden daughters of Māra’

The interpretation in (6) probably refers to Buddha’s temptations under the Bodhi tree.

Before I leave this section, let me point out that the Assamese word for Burmese is *man*, as in *man dhan* or Burmese Coriander, shown in Fig. 7, a temporary pot from our balcony garden. If indeed the Mons passed the Upper Brahmaputra valley on their way finally to Lower Burma, it is quite possible that they left their mark on some local flora and fauna.

This completes our discussion of Dravidian-Austroasiatic interaction outside India; what about *inside* India?



Fig. 7: ‘Maan’ Dhaniya

Dravidians in Austroasiatic Clothing!

In one of the previous sections, we saw that the Nicobarese are really speakers of an Austroasiatic tongue but of Mongoloid race, that is, Austroasiatics in Tibeto-Burman clothing, a matter of perhaps, AA-TB interaction. Another such disguise to be discussed here are the Bharias of Madhya Pradesh, who are speakers of a Dravidian tongue but are genetically Austroasiatic.

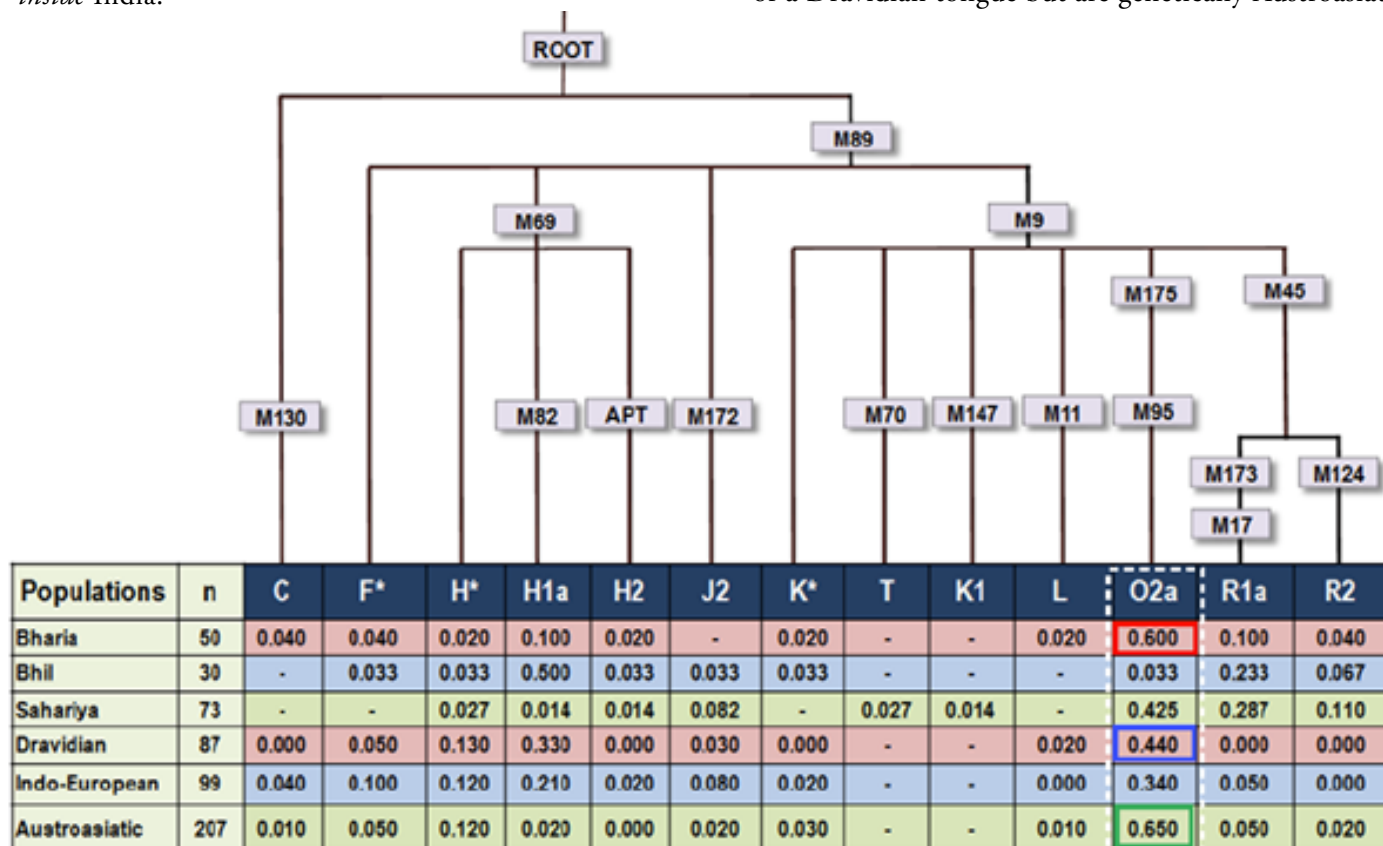


Fig. 8: Rooted maximum parsimony tree showing high frequency of O2a in Bharia
(Adapted from: Sharma et al., 2012)

In Sharma *et al.*, 2012 ('Genetic Affinities of the Central Indian Tribal Populations', in *PLoS ONE*, 7(2)), the typical Austroasiatic haplogroup M95-O2a was found to be high among the Bharia tribe of the Chindwara district of Madhya Pradesh. This is shown in Fig. 8, where the frequency of O2a in the Bharia is the highest among the tribes studied, and nearly matches the percentage of the Southeast Asian Austroasiatics themselves (65%).

A M95-O2a network tree also revealed that the Bharias were closer to the North Munda population in the area, who are Austroasiatic for certain (speakers of languages like Ho, Mundari, Santhali). Furthermore, an expansion time of 6.83 ± 2.65 thousand years ago (kya), suggested a geneflow from a nearby North Munda group to the Bharia. Sharma *et al.*, also point out that the TMRCA (Time of Most Recent Common Ancestor) for O2a-M95 in Bharia is 13.18 ± 3.24 kya, indicating that an expansion of O2a in this region is an event older than differentiation into language groups. The upper boundary of the expansion time, that is, 9.48 kya, is the time of migration rather than the origin of the tribal group itself. This indicates that the Bharias are not recent migrants and have been there since at least from pre-Neolithic times. The TMRCA figures are shown in Fig. 9:

Population	n	Haplogroup	Variance	TMRCA (kya)
Bharia	24	O2a	0.29	13.18 ± 3.24
Saharia	17	O2a	0.42	16.48 ± 3.06
Saharia	12	R1a	0.29	10.97 ± 1.86
Bhil	15	H1	0.45	13.18 ± 3.24

Fig. 9: TMRCA for major Y-Chromosome Haplogroups observed (Adapted from Sharma *et al.*, 2012)

The dominance of M95-O2a in the Bharia is perhaps due to genetic drift as a result of random sampling and affecting mostly the genotype.

North/Central Dravidians

Finally, within the Dravidian-Austroasiatic interaction within India, the role of the North/Central Dravidian linguistic groups can be highlighted. There are pockets of Dravidian speakers in the North

and central India (for the latter, recall that the Bharias live mostly in Madhya Pradesh), which are recognised as North/ Central Dravidian languages. Reddy (1980, 'Non-Dravidian element in Manda syntax, a study of linguistic convergence, *Osmania Papers in Linguistics*, 6, pp. 71-87; 2016, 'Odisha as a Minilinguistics Area', *Indian Linguistics*, 77(1-2), pp. 1-19) found many non-Dravidian features in languages such as Manda, Kuvi, Kui, Pengo, Indi-Awe, and other Dravidian languages, and considered them as diffusion of Munda (as well as, Indo-Aryan) features into the (North/ Central) Dravidian. Some of the Munda features in these languages that he discusses are (i) Emergence of a glottal stop sound, (ii) Vigesimal numeral system, (iii) Echo-formation, (iv) Person-object agreement, (v) Distal action, and (6) Plural action; let us discuss only the first two of these features here.

(i) EMERGENCE OF GLOTTAL STOP

Glottal stop (indicated by the symbol 'ʔ' in (7), and appears in the sound for 'tt' in the English/ Cockney pronunciation of words like 'mitten', 'button', etc) is not a common sound in Dravidian in general, but the Kondh Dravidian languages like Kui, Kuvi, and Indi-Awe have acquired this sound as a result of their contact with Munda languages. The following are some examples from Kuvi:

- (7) *viʔe* 'tomorrow'
roʔosi 'one man'
reʔila 'day after tomorrow'
vāʔesi 'he will not come'
tinʔatesi 'he did not eat'
 (Reddy, 2016: 4)

(ii) VIGESIMAL NUMERAL SYSTEM

Both the decimal (base 10) and vigesimal (base 20) counting systems can be found among languages in India, and Odisha, where several North/ Central Dravidian languages are spoken, is no exception. Odiya, Telugu, Hindi dialects, and Marathi, all show decimal counting system, whereas Dravidian languages like Kuvi, Manda, Gondi, and Konda are influenced by the Munda languages like Kharia, Parengi-Gorum, etc. and show a vigesimal counting system unlike the standard Dravidian languages. This is shown in (8):

(8) No.	Kharia	Telugu	Hindi
1.	<i>moiṅ</i>	<i>okai</i>	<i>ek</i>
2.	<i>ubar</i>	<i>reṅḍu</i>	<i>do</i>
3.	<i>uʔphe</i>	<i>mūḍu</i>	<i>tīn</i>
.			
10.	<i>ghol</i>	<i>padi</i>	<i>das</i>
11.	<i>ghul</i>	<i>padakoṅḍu</i>	<i>gyārah</i>
12.	<i>gholsiṅ</i>	<i>paṅḍeṅḍu</i>	<i>bārah</i>
13.	<i>ṭāk</i>	<i>padmūḍu</i>	<i>terah</i>
14.	<i>oya</i>	<i>padnāḷgu</i>	<i>caudah</i>
15.	<i>raba</i>	<i>padahaydu</i>	<i>pandrah</i>
.			
20.	<i>ekri</i>	<i>iravay</i>	<i>bīs</i>
21.	<i>ekrimoiṅ</i>	<i>iravayokai</i>	<i>ikkīs</i>

(Reddy, 2016: 6)

With this, we conclude the discussion that there is enough evidence to suggest that Dravidian-Austroasiatic interaction took place both outside and inside India, and therefore that AA can plausibly be a carrier group responsible for featural similarities between the two unrelated language families of India, namely, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman. However, for this to hold, we need to also complete the transference cycle by examining whether there was any substantial evidence of interaction between Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman.

Austroasiatic-Tibeto-Burman Interaction

To a large extent, an account of the interaction between these two groups outside India was given in Part 3 (vol. 3, issue 1, pp. 60-70 of this journal). Consider in addition the fact that Schuessler (2007) in his *Etymological dictionary of Old Chinese* asserts that Austroasiatic forms underlie many Sinitic etyma, indicating that AA was widespread in the Sino-Tibetan area. For example, tigers were common throughout the region and they play a central role in many cultural belief systems. Wide distribution of this important word across the region is shown in (9) (which is modified from Schuessler, along with an example from Meiteilon added):

(9) Phylum	Language	‘Tiger’
Austroasiatic	War Jaintia	k ^h la
Austroasiatic	Munda	kula
Sino-Tibetan	Old Burmese	klya
Sino-Tibetan	Monpa	khai-la
Tibeto-Burman	Meiteilon	kəi

Similarly, certain Austroasian agricultural terms have found echoes in Tibeto-Burman languages like

the generic Austroasiatic *mei* for ‘rice’ can be found in Proto-Bodo/Garomey, and generic Austroasiatic *brak* for ‘pig’ finds an echo in Meiteilon *ək*. Similarly, Old Chinese for ‘bitter’ *khie*, which appears as *ə-kha-bə* in Meiteilon.

The Pronominalisation Spread

Still within the general discussion of AA-TB interaction outside India, let us discuss a central feature of the Munda languages of India, which may also therefore count as evidence for interaction between these groups inside India as well. One of the most salient syntactic features of Munda languages is the availability of what linguists call Pronominalisation, or the phenomenon of the verb in a sentence incorporating shorter versions of the pronouns used in the sentence. The older scholarship noticed the phenomenon carefully (J.B. Hoffman, 1903, *Mundari Grammar*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta; L. Burrows, 1915, *Ho Grammar*, Catholic Orphan Press, Calcutta; R. Macphail, 1953, *An Introduction to Santali Grammar*, Santal Mission of Northern Churches, Bengaria, etc.). For example Hoffman (1903), provides the following example:

(10) nel-ko-tan-a-le
see-**them**-PRES-FIN-**we**
‘we are seeing them’

Here, the pronouns in the gloss (in the 2nd line) are highlighted to indicate how Hoffman viewed those elements; thus, *ko* is the direct object ‘them’ and *le* is the subject ‘we’ in (10) – the verbal complex itself carrying the full information about the different actors of the sentence.

Now, as it so happens, a similar phenomenon is found in some languages of Bihar, like Maithili, Magahi, Angika, etc., where the verb has (unlike in Hindi) *two* slots, one meant for the subject of the sentence and another for another ‘actor’. Chatterji 1926 (*Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* (ODBL), George Allen & Unwin, London) when faced with such “intricacies of the verbal system”, pointed towards the Munda languages: the pronominal affixation could be due to the influx of Kōl people from the South. However, Grierson (1887, *Seven Grammars of the Dialects and Subdialects of the Bihari Language*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta) had much earlier detected this phenomenon correctly: “This is due to the fact that the verb agrees not only

with the subject, but with its object;” in this context, Chaterji’s puzzlement is unexpected.

Hodgson (1849, ‘On the aborigines of north-eastern India’, *JASB* 18:350-59) ‘unites’ the Himalayas, Indo-China and Tibet as speaking languages of the same family (TB) that is nonetheless marked by “syntactic poverty”, among other traits – this poverty being the existence of pronominalisation in these languages. He further considers that the Himalayish and Munda languages show pronominalisation in fullest form, though he does not hint at any directional view of the spread of this feature from, what many people considered, substratal Munda to TB. However, the substratum thesis was a very popular one in the 19th century language studies in and around India, and Sten Konow, being in-charge of parts of the *LSI* (*Linguistic Survey of India*), drew a directional link between Himalayan TB languages and Munda by proposing that substratum Munda influence is the cause of pronominalisation in the former:

“It therefore seems probable that Mundas or tribes speaking a language connected with those now in use among the Mundas, have once lived in the Himalayas and have left their stamp on the dialects there spoken at the present day” (1909, *LSI* 3(1):179 and 1(1): 56).

However, as J. Bauman (1975, *Pronouns and Pronominal Morphology in Tibeto-Burman*, University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D.), convincingly argues, pronominalisation as a features is widely distributed across North, Northwest, Northeast and Indo-China, which gives credit to a native origin within TB of pronominalisation theory; this is shown in Fig. 10:

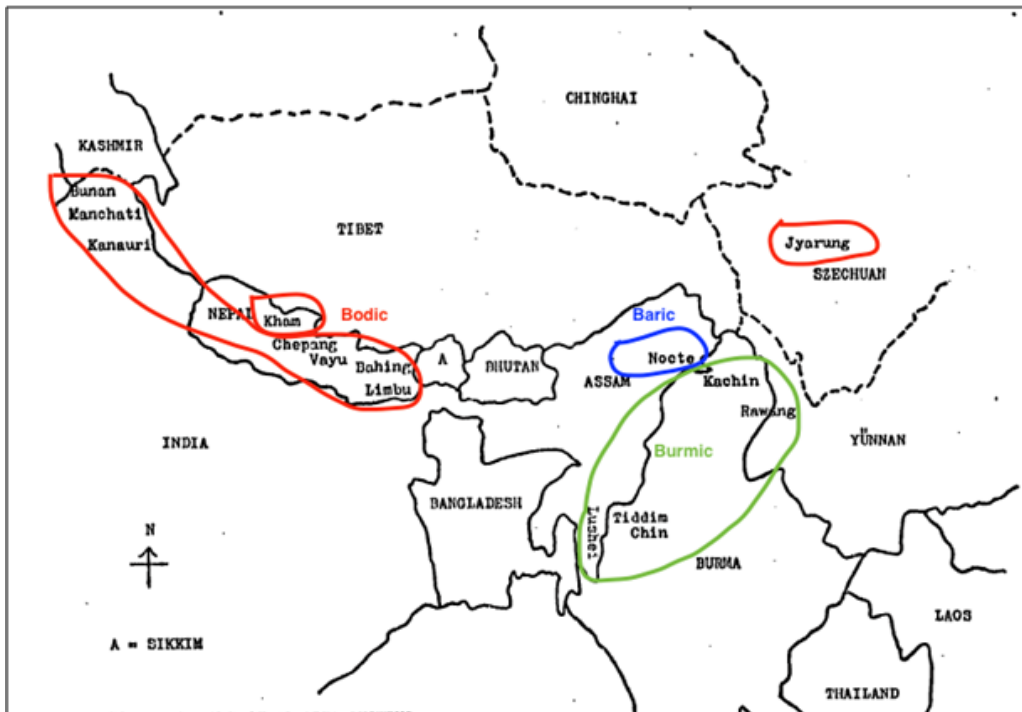


Fig. 10: Classification of pronominalised languages modified from Bauman (1975)

Notwithstanding this demonstration, it is quite clear that the significant linguistic feature of pronominalisation is a result of TB-AA groups coexisting in this geographical expanse that this series of articles has brought into focus.

A Chinese Girl in Singbhum?

Finally, in a lighter vein, consider the following entry of one Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of ‘Chutiá Nágpúr’ (Chota Nagpur, Jharkhand) in ‘Rude Stone Monuments in Chutiá Nágpúr and other places’ published 1873 in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XLII, pp 112-119:

The Saranda Pir is a mass of hills forming the southern geographical division of the District of Singbhúm, and has a population, chiefly Kols, of about 700 souls. I entered the northern portion of this wild, unfrequented tract on the 1st January, 1872, and passing through it from end to end, emerged in Bonai on the 7th. ... Most of the men were away clearing the road but those we saw, and the girls, in number twenty-five, who danced for us, were of strikingly fine physique, ... The predominance of eyes, nose and mouth of the Mongolian type was very remarkable; some of them were of very light and bright colour, one of the group from her features and complexion might have been taken for a Chinese girl.

This account, even if totally off the mark, perhaps hints at some form of admixing between the two races within India as well.

Having considered the possibility of AA-TB interaction both outside and inside India, we have now completed the transference

path of features from/to Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman – the puzzle that we started with – with Austroasiatic as the ‘carrier’ group. However, for Austroasiatic to be carrier group – however difficult that notion may sound – these same features need to be also present in AA; as far as I can tell, not all of them show up in this group of languages. We are forced then to consider one last possibility.

An Eastern Origin of Diversity

Explore here in this last section the thesis that to account for the uncanny similarity of certain significant syntactic features across Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman, one would not need recourse to the idea of a carrier, if only these two so-called unrelated groups could be shown to have interacted directly – a possibility that has not been considered by any linguist or historian in the past. I will suggest this latter interaction as a distinct possibility if indeed Aryanisation of eastern India happened much later than understood *and* that the East is the real melting pot of India that witnessed the coming together of different civilisations.

With regards to later Aryanisation, in *ODBL*, Chatterji asserts that Aryanisation of Bengal happened much later, he claims it to have been completed only by the 7CE. Prior to that, the North-West, West, South, and Central areas of the state were inhabited by Dravidian and Munda races. In addition, I would like to claim that Chatterji’s excerpts from the ancient Sanskrit texts repeatedly indicate existence of a water source, river, or most probably a sea, whenever the so-called Indo-Mongoloids (a new classification coined by him in 1951 in the book *Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti*, Asiatic Society, Calcutta) are mentioned, suggesting that Tibeto-Burman races were occupying the greater part of Bengal all the way up to the western border of Odisha.

The phrases such as the following indicate that a Tibeto-Burman substratum existed geographically:

- (11) a. *kāruṣē ca samudrāntē*
“edge of the sea”
(*kāruṣē* alternatively as *vāriṣeṇā* identified with Barisal district of Bangladesh, which is by the sea)
(from *Sabhā-parvan* of Mahābhārata)

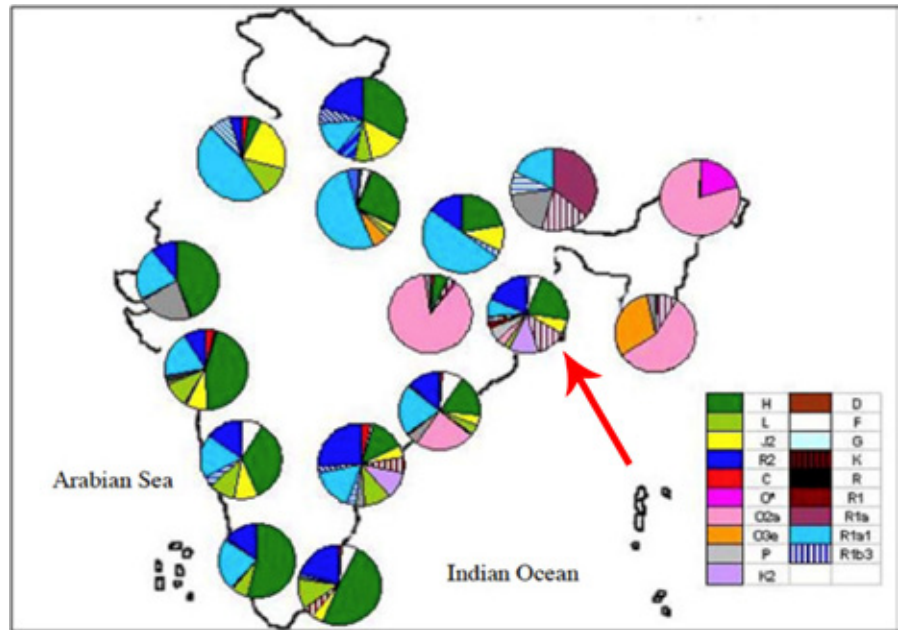


Fig. 11: Overall Indian Haplotypes (Trivediet al, 2008)

- b. *sāgarānūpa-vāsibhiḥ*
“dwelling by the coast of the sea”
(in Mahābhārata)
- c. *antar-jala-carā*
“moves under water”
(in Ramayana, *Kiṣkindhyā-Kāṇḍa*)

Thus, although the term *kirāta* has been used pejoratively in the *Shastras* as ‘wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains’, their association with sea or water bodies is clear. Furthermore, the Greek work *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* speaks of *Kirrhadaī* (that is, the *kirātas*) as living beyond *Dosarenē* (= *Daśārṇa*), which is nothing but modern Odisha. We can thus conclude that the Tibeto-Burman races were dwelling as far as the western edge of Odisha.

Further, it can be shown that there is evidence of a Tibeto-Burman substratum in Bangla (Ashok Biswas, 2008, *Bangla Bhashay Bhotbormi Bhashar Probhab* [‘Influence of Tibeto-Burman language Family on Bangla’], Bangla Academy, Dhaka). For example, there are Toponomical, and names of rivers and Mountains which bear a TB imprint:

- (12) a. *changmaṛi*, *kochgɔr*, *mechiḍanga*, *harɔng*, *tilɔng*
(placenames) meaning fish or village (*chang*),
water or river (*ɔng*).
- b. *distang*, *meghachori*, *doikhowa*
(rivers) meaning water (*doi* and *qi* in Bodo),
mid-river, river water (*chori*).
- c. *longtraī*, *khangtang* (mountains) full word
derived from Bodo

Also types of ‘Pujas’ and music forms have TB influence:

- (13) a. *saiTol, kati, Shubchoni, etc.* (Pujas)
- b. *tistabuṛirgan, hudumargan, bhandanigan, kushangan* (music)

Finally, consider the overall picture of the Y-Chromosome Haplotypes in India as shown in Fig. 11 (from Trivedi *et al.*, 2008, ‘Genetic Imprints of Pleistocene Origin of Indian Populations: A Comprehensive Phylogeographic Sketch of Indian Y-Chromosomes’, *International Journal Human Genetics*, 8(1-2): 97-118).

One thing that is strikingly clear from the above distribution is the extent of diversity in the east (the circle marked here with a red arrow), as compared to any other region it has as many as 12 Haplogroups present in one geographical area. This is indicative of a true melting pot; I take this to be a support for the hypothesis proposed here.

This diversity in the East is confirmed by the Haplogroup frequency data in Trivedi *et al* (2008) for O2a and O3e distribution is shown in Fig 12.

This clearly shows sharing of at least the quintessential SEA Austroasiatic lineage O2a across the Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and to some

extent the Dravidian (and to a lesser extent the IA).

Secondly, it is clear from the admixture plot from Chaubey *et al.*, 2011 (‘Population Genetic Structure in Indian Austroasiatic Speakers: The Role of Landscape Barriers and Sex-Specific Admixture,’ *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 28(2): 1013–1024) in Fig. 13, that the Dravidian specific ancestry component (in dark green) intrudes all the way into the Austric-TB zone (orange) – this is more clearly visible in the extract in Fig. 14.

Now bring this discussion to a close by suggesting that in terms of diversity, the most likely corridor of interaction between the Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman must have been the East of India, and that the common syntactic features between these ‘unrelated’ groups, hitherto un-noticed, are but a natural residue standing as testimony to this ancient interaction before Aryanisation of this land.

	O2a	O3e
IA	0.010	0
Dr	0.023	0
AA	0.729	0
TB	0.554	0.267
Geo	0.325 (east)	
	0.519 (north-east)	0.250 (NE)
Social	0.339 (Tribes)	

Fig. 12: O2a and O3e distribution

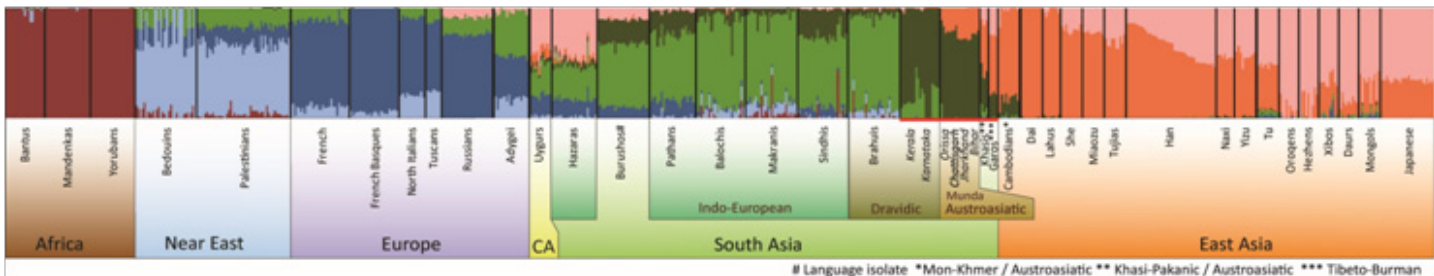


Fig. 13: Admixture plot from Chaubey *et al.*, 2011.

Fig. 14: Extract of the admixture plot from Chaubey *et al.*, 2011

