

The Harmonious Bilingualism Network (HaBilNet) is pleased to award Nishita Grace Isaac with a HaBilNet Travel Award in order to attend the Georgetown University Round Table, GURT 2020, on “Multilingualism: Global South and Global North Perspectives” for her paper on **A Tribal Child's Schoolscape: From Politics to Pedagogy** which contributes to HaBilNet's mission to support and stimulate scientific research into harmonious bilingualism.

#### ABSTRACT

##### **A Tribal Child's Schoolscape: From Politics to Pedagogy**

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Multilingualism in India is rich and complex. Though national educational policies have always attempted to be most inclusive of the linguistic diversity found in India, existing school-based research suggests hegemonic attempts at assimilation to “national identities” may have a possible impact on students’ experience of language. This presentation reports on a study of the *schoolscape* (Savela, 2018) in tribal communities of central India. The selected schools are located in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. They are Hindi-medium, government-run residential schools exclusively serving tribal children coming from *Muria* and *Madiya* tribes speaking dialects of *Halbi* or *Gondi* languages. Images, symbols, and visual referents found in the schoolscape were collected and analysed in terms of the information they convey, the languages they use, the cultures they represent, and their modality. The first aim was to identify and explore these artifacts for what they may tell us about the hidden curriculum (Johnson, 1980) followed in these schools. Additionally, implications were drawn for the impact that this hidden curriculum may have on the second language learning experience of students. Only 1 out of 98 signs found in the micro space of these schools reflect the use of the tribal languages. This unapologetic and unchecked use of one language over the rest suggests hegemonic attempts at assimilation and enculturation into “national identities”. The absence of representation of these languages in the schoolscape is likely to be related to the fact that in the public imagination tribes in central India are often associated with backwardness and socioeconomic and socio-political vulnerability. I argue that the limited presence of a child’s mother tongue in school spaces runs counter to well-known learning mechanism and developmental needs of minoritized bilingual children. I discuss future research directions, and particularly the need to investigate interactions of the participants with the schoolscape.