Int.J.HIT.TRANSC:ECCN.Vol.7: Issue 1A (2021) Page 21-24 ISSN: 0973-6875

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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Promotion of a Tribal Language in Indian Education: A Case Study of Santhali Language from West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Being a multilingual country India has seen several language movements in the recent decade. These movements have created separate state boundaries but the languages itself did not get high recognition and promotion in government's language education policies. Though several languages made it to the VIII scheduled as the scheduled languages, the indigenous or tribal languages of the country remain unaffected and are struggling to survive. The Government's recent efforts to promote tribal languages in school seem to be somehow positive but the different language policies and the widespread acceptance of English and Hindi put a shadow on the efforts. The scenario of the language situation in India is quite complicated and dynamic; incorporating languages in Indian education has always been a centre of both debate and controversy. The central issue in the recent decade is the medium of instruction in schools or in higher education. Educational planners have, by and large, committed themselves for an inclusive education system without questioning the elitist framework of education followed from the British era. In this multilingual setting with a federal polity, one can find a wide variation in states' Education curriculums as far as the medium, content, duration, and nomenclature of educational stages are concerned. The present paper aims to focus on the role of a tribal language, which is Santhali, in Education in the light of the education system in West Bengal. A case study on Santhali which explores the situational and attitudinal aspects of the language in education is the central work of the present paper, where Bangla plays the dominant role. It also tries to find out whether Santhali can be a medium of instruction in a class of heterogeneous learners.

KEY WORDS: Tribal Language in education, Santhali language, Language policies in India, Language education, Santhali in Language education, West Bengal, Bangla, Education Curriculum in West Bengal.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's linguistic diversity can be found in a popular aphorism, which is in Hindi: '*Kos-kos par badle paani, chaar kos par baani'* (At few lengths the taste of water changes, at four kilometre the language changes). It means that the languagespoken in India changes at a few kilometres likewise the taste of water changes at a few kilometres.

Several states were formed in the name of language and people, and politics played a significant role to make it a reality. Language movements had made tremendous effects on the geopolitical scenario of the country and it took the shape of national and historical movements. Indians have witnessed Urdu Language Movement, Pure Tamil Movement, Kannada Movement, Bangla movement (which led to the recognition of 21st February as the International Mother Tongue Day) and so on and so forth. Albeit all of these movements, most of the languages of the tribal communities are yet to get national attention. Tribal education, more or less, has been neglected in independent India to large. Indian constitution recognized the several non-scheduled languages as the tribal languages of India. These non-scheduled languages have either written scripts or without scripts. Though they figure in the census of India in terms of the number of speakers, they do not have literacy traditions - except oral.

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The paper focuses on the promotion of tribal language as the language of education, in other words, as the medium of instruction in the schools of West Bengal and examining the economic and social factors associated in determining the language of instruction. The case study aims to present the current status of a tribal language such as Santali where its constant effort to secure a higher status against the dominating language around it remains quite unfulfilled and unsatisfactory. The government policies and NGOs are concerned with the issue of the alarming rate of school dropouts among school dropouts but never addressed the problems associated with the textbooks and the prescribed teaching in the dominant language.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the data and information collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are formal talks, informal conversations, and interviews which offer an account of the native speakers' attitude toward their language and their knowledge of the language. On the other hand, the secondary sources consist of books, journals, printedrecords and documents of different educational agencies and organisations. Therefore, the data and information collected were analysed to make an evaluative study of the tribal education in India with reference to Santhali language in West Bengal**.**

3. TRIBAL LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF SANTHALI

A mother tongue model of education has become the need of the hour to ensure better and quality education for all, where there is scope to learn in your own native language. The questions which arise are "Is it practically possible to implement what we mention in our theory?" and "Why is it necessary to give special attention to tribal language in education?"

According to Census 2011 Santhali has a total of 73,68,192 speakers and the mother tongues which are grouped under Santhali are Karmali with 3,58,579 speakers, Mahili with 26,399 speakers, Santali 69,73,345 speakers and Others with 9,869 speakers.The 2011 language data also shows that there is a 0.02 percentage reduction in the total number of Santhali speakers, from 0.63 (2001) to 0.61 (2011). Between 1991 and 2001 the growth of Santhali is 24.03 percentages while during 2001 and 2011 the growth of Santhali is 13.82 percentages, as mentioned in the data of Growth of Scheduled Languages in Census 2011. West Bengal has a total population of 24,29,073 Santhali speakers, out of which 12, 07,231 are males and 12,21,842 are female speakers. According to 2001 census (2011 data could not be retrieved due to access problem) , Santhal or Santal, a scheduled tribe, has a population of 51.8 per cent of the total ST population in West Bengal, which is followed by Oraons, Mundas, Bhumij, Kora and other major Scheduled Tribes with sizeable population. The literacy rate of Santhals in West Bengal is 42.2%, of the total literacy the males constitute 57.3% and the females constitute 27.0%.

With the conceptualization of *Ol Chiki Script* by Raghunath Murmu of Orissa (District Rairangpur) in the 1920s and giving it a final shape in the 1940s, the Santhals have got a unique writing system and gradually established itself as the only Indian tribal script to have impact in teaching, printing and distribution.

The 8th All India School Education Survey report indicates that there is a 5.42% (from 92.07% in 7th survey to 86.62% in 8th survey)reduction in the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary schools. The report also showed reduction in the use of mother tongue in rural schools (87.56% from 92.39%) and in urban schools (80.99% from 90.39%).

In West Bengal, Primary schools with 2 languages as medium of instruction constitutes only 1 percent, i.e., 495 schools, Primary schools with 1 language as medium of instruction constitutes 99%, i.e., 41,438 schools and no primary schools use 3 languages as medium instruction.(7th AISES report). This shown there is a huge gap in the equal distribution of (monolingualism and multilingualism) in the state's schools. In this scenario, the condition of Santhali language is quite critical in the state.

In the 1950s, Pt. Raghunath Murmu started an institution under the name of ASECA (Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association) to develop and spread Santal culture and literature, to promote Santhali language in teaching, printing and also to propagate the Ol Chiki script. There are several regional and national organisations who working toward the development of the community in every field.

The Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association, West Bengal, has submitted a 15 pages long "A Draft education policy of ASECA (W.B.) for introduction of education in Santali medium."They have segregated School education in 5 phases where different medium of instructions have been suggested based on the Three Language Policy. In Phase I,the language formula being suggested for Santhal Primary Schools with only Santhali as medium of instruction (from Class I to IV) in Santhal concentrated areas is as follows: i) First Language: Santali ii) Second Language: English (From Class – III) iii) Third Language: Bengali (From Class – II). For Thinly populated Santhal areas, the schools will have both Bengali and Santhali as medium of instruction with the subjects in Ol Chiki and with the same language formula. This draft aims to promote Santhali in an effective way keeping Bengali at bay but never undermine the importance of English language.

With a report published in the Indian Express newspaper, the condition of the Santhali medium schools has come to the limelight. At Jambani primary school, set up in 1924, the medium is Santhali, but there are only two teachers instead of the mandated six. Only one teacher is appointed for Santhali, and headmaster Sukumar Soren pitches in, 'The children come from very poor families. If I don't teach them, they won't learn'."(Indian Express: April 2016)

Though several Santhali medium schools have been set up in the state, the problems of teaching materials production, appointing qualified teachers of that language and designing a separate syllabus for the Santhali students have been prevalent till date due to absence of concrete ground research to address the issues.

4. SANTHALI SPEAKERS ON SANTHALI AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Some data have been collected through formal talks, informal conversations, and also through a short informal interview. The formal talks,which I had with some Santhali speakers from various parts of the state,revealed that they are not happy with the government's education policies and they are one of the most neglected ones among other tribes. All of them (some are from Santhal dominated areas) are students at the Jadavpur university studying at different disciplines. One of them told me that "I wanted to study in my own mother tongue from my childhood but this government is imposing Bangla on us....we will fight for this and we are fighting. We will have our Santhali medium schools in each and every part of West Bengal." When we asked them on their feeling towards English language, most of them said that English is needed because we need government jobs and a few of them responded that "Santhali has everything to get a job". Though we got mixed responses, but it was clear that they carry a negative attitude towards Bengali language.

I had a short interview with a Santhali Activist, Sushil Mandi, whom we asked a few question on his mother tongue status and future perspectives and the answers were interesting and thought provoking. His answers to the questions are related to Santhali language education but they are also politically and ideologically motivated. So, we have decided not to include the extracts as it will be against the ethics of research. But, the person wholeheartedly wants their future generation to study in Santhali medium Schools, from Primary to Doctorate Degree, and told us that they have larger agendas to make everything possible.

I had an informal conversation with some 8th standard students, mainly Santhali students studying in Bengali medium schools, and to our surprise they have shown greater interest to study in their own schools and to have textbooks and learning materials in their own script, i.e. Bengali Medium but they want English to be

also taught in Santhali medium schools from Primary class.

5. DISCUSSION

The basic problem, which is relatable from the above observation, is that a significant number of children enter the classroom without knowing or speaking the language of the classroom. Teaching and learning process is mainly conducted in the international language or in the dominant state language. The Three Language Formula puts a shadow on the tribal languages as it allows the State's dominant language, an International language or the nation's official language or any foreign language.Children in Santhal dominated areas have no contact with the school language outside the classroom, who speaks mainly in their mother tongue, often have the biggest problems in understanding the lessons taught at school.It has been observed that though 40% of the Santhal population is bilinguals, either Bengali or Santhali, they have keen interests to learn in their own language.

6. CONCLUSION

Santhali medium schools should be given priority along with Bengali medium schools; their every demand should be met, from recruiting proper teachers to material production in Santali language and from providing proper infrastructure to recognition of the language at all levels. Merely giving a status of a scheduled language will not solve the problem at the ground level. If we think constructively the problems of Teaching Learning Materials in the language and setting up schools for that community will be gone forever.Teachers should also show their creative and innovative minds to deliver the contents in local languages.

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