

Changing Pattern of Santali Language: A Trilingual Situation and the Emerging Conflict

S. M. Arif Eftakhar*

Abstract: Santal, is a group of people leading ethnic community in Bangladesh, are struggling from long past since their settlement in Bangladesh for their survival in language and culture. As of today, the Santals have become bilingual and even to some extent, they are now turning to be trilingual. While it is true that we always express our thoughts by using our own languages with which we are most familiar and conversant; Santals in Bangladesh are using Santali, Bangla and Roman scripts together in their everyday communication, making it very complicated for them. Most of the Santals especially their young generations are now using Bangla language for purpose of reading, writing and speaking in their everyday communication. But, the Santali religious scriptures are written in Roman language, which they recite and pronounce in Bangla format. This is because of the reason, that the new generation does not have any fascination either for learning or practicing the Romanized Santali language nor do they have any desire to revert back to their traditional language which seems to them very obsolete nowadays. The main reasons behind these attitudes are remaining with the fact that the new generations are becoming more concerned about their social exclusion, marginalization as using a language is problematic having adverse effect on their everyday life. Under this conflicting situation, it has been found that due to their survival, the Santals have now been turned to be trilingual. The main objective of this paper is to know about the controversy that exists among this trilingual nature of Santali language in present times and the implications of it in their society and culture.

1. Introduction

The Santal is a group of ethnic minority living in the Barind Tract¹ in the north western part of Bangladesh, mostly being agglomerated in the districts of Dinajpur, and Rajshahi although the Santals are often found to live in scattered in parts of a few other districts Bangladesh, as they are more visible in the northern part of the country. From numerical point of view, the Santal is one of the major ethnic groups being originally descended from a place named 'Radha' in West Bengal and also at

*Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹ Barind Tract or region is largest Pleistocene physiographic unit of the Bengal basin, covering an area of about 7,770 sq. km. This physiographic unit is bounded by the Karatoya to the east, the Mahananda to the west, and the northern bank of the Padma to the South. The Barind tract covers most parts of the greater Dinajpur, Rangpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Joypurhat and Naogaon districts of Rajshahi division (Banglapedia 310).

the same time, coming from the adjacent forests of Bihar (Jharkhand), Orissa, and Chhota Nagpur of India. With this trend of Santal settlement in these areas in India, the British Government at certain time had assigned them this special region for their living and settlement informally naming it as Santal Pargana. A survey conducted on the Santal population of present Bangladesh area in 1941 estimated that their number is 829,025 and based on 1991 census, this population of the Santal is recorded to be 200,000 in the country (Banglapedia 319). The Santals however, some sort of have bio-cultural affinity with that of Munda people who also have long been living in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, and Assam. And the Santals residing in Bangladesh are simply the offshoots of these groups of people in India. Having such lingua-cultural similarity, most of the Santals speak a Santali dialect which is the part of Munda language (Grierson; Dey 31).

2. Methodology and Objectives of the Study

This research is a field-based study conducted among the Santals in Rajshahi having collected some empirical data based on interviews, conversation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A total of 38 households living in the Court Mission Campus nearer to its surrounding areas were included in the sample and accordingly, they are interviewed most extensively with a set of structured questionnaire.

The principal objective of this research is to know about the linguistic formation of the Santals and contextually desiring to ascertain the position as to whether the Santals are bilingual or trilingual. Based on this broad objective mentioned above, the research also explores the following specific issues as sub-objectives outlined below:

(a) The study mentions more specifically as to what language the Santals usually prefer to use in their everyday speaking. (b) In addition to these, the research is designed to ascertain as to how many languages do the Santals use in their everyday communication with the outsiders? (c) And in this context, the research finally is also designed to learn about the problems and constraints that the Santals usually face in regard to preserving their own language.

3. Review of Literature

Language is a system for the communication in symbols, of any kind of information that means it is considered as a symbolic and a communicative system that creates meaning of sound, symbols and signs (Haviland 96). Language is also a system of ideology by which it becomes related to power and politics of representation. Language and power constitutes social or individual identity and it is never neutral; rather, it often makes control easier over the minority. Linguists and anthropologists have discovered that all languages have some basic binary structure which creates an identity of 'self' and 'other' to naturalize the inequality. Language also plays an active role in creating and changing perception, cognition, and emotions as it affects the way we think (Jackson 1-4). According to the psychological constructionist Conceptual Act Theory (CAT), an instance of emotion occurs when information from one's body or other people's bodies is made meaningful in light of the present situation using concept knowledge about emotion. The CAT suggests that language plays a role in emotion because language supports the conceptual knowledge used to

make meaning of sensations from the body and world in a given context (Kristen 1).

Bangladesh has an estimated indigenous population of 2.5 to 3 million, or around 2% of the total population. Language is an important issue for ethnic or racial identities in nation states which made up of different and majority, minority language groups that often creates antagonism and inequality among those groups. There are a number of minor ethnic groups in Bangladesh which are not recognized by the constitution of the country because they are the full of complexities and also their population lives on the basis of lower economic standing and lower level of education (Borchgrevink and McNeish 16). The literacy rate is much lower among the minority ethnic groups as compared to the main stream Bengali-speaking people and the language of minority ethnic groups is used in informal settings only (Hossain and Tollecfson 241-243). Yet, many anthropologists believe that language itself plays a big role in this recognition because 'proper' acts a kind of asset for the benefit of the position and power in society (Gal 349; Kottak 90).

French anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu claims that language acts as a *symbolic capital* because it has a symbolic value. According to him, language increases individual's social status, dignity, honor, economic opportunities and identifies individuals with established institutions in the society. Bourdieu also believes that hegemony of a dominant language of the mainstream destroys the creativity of other minority languages. It has been proven when these speakers are of trained to apply their own language and to using the skills they could develop (Gal 353-357). With such process the indigenous communities of Bangladesh are also victimized and marginalized. The reasons behind such marginalization are 'negative socio-religious views' and 'open discrimination' against the indigenous minorities by the main stream Bengali-speaking people. For that reason, most indigenous people lives in distant places that is remote from the main stream communities where the government fund do not reach and schools are situated too far from children's habitations to arrive there easily (Durnnian 2). While discussing about Indian educational development Saini mentions that the tribal children at the initial three years should have their education in their own mother tongue what as a matter fact, is to ensure their cognitive development (205). Sarangapani and Ahmed have shown in their discussion on employment opportunity and medium of education in school level. Some Santali parents decide Santali language as a medium of their children's education. Thus, while the Santal elites try to give an English medium education to their children, by all means the lower middle classes often decide to learn Hindi, Oriya or Bengali mediums for their children access to administrative jobs. The rejection of one's mother tongue is motivated by individual strategies which is not a good indication for any language. (Sarangapani 27-45; Ahmed 51, 56-58).

Draper refers about Arnold van Gennepe's famous work named, *The Rites of Passage* (1909) which provides us with a remarkable analysis on the life-crisis ceremonies according to particular recurring model. On the other hand, another renowned anthropologist, Victor Turner is also very much influenced by the model of rites of passage. The fundamental thought of van Gennepe's work is to identify the process of changing and acquiring a new status; he however, does not focus on the nature of the position or role in society (9-12). Gennepe finds that this process involves three

phases: firstly, rites of separation, secondly, transition rites and finally, rites of incorporation all of which transform social identity. During the rites of separation, a person is detaching his or her former status being acculturated into a new one. In the transition rites, Van Gennep described this stage as one in which a person may have been separated from the older status, however not yet attached to the new status (28). Draper described the stage as one in which the individual occupies a non-status, a kind of no-man's land seen as potentially harmful. The stage is seen as *betwixt and between* the former status and an uncertain future. Transitional rites are termed as confusing periods. The last stage, incorporation is when the passage from one status to another is perfected. This phase involves the reintegration of the transformed individual into the social group to which the person previously belonged. The individual is once again in a stable stage (14). Doglus wrote that during the liminal period, a person has no place or status in society-temporarily there is *no sense of belonging*. Thus, the life circle of indigenous peoples is transmitted from one stage to another with the touch of globalization. Causes, people from almost every territory of the world are being connected with the globalized world (121-122).

The continual enhancement of globalization has many effects on language, having both positive and negative aspects. These effects on language in turn affect the culture of the language in many ways. However, with globalization allowing languages and their cultures to spread and dominate on a global scale, it also leads to the extinction of other languages and cultures. Language contributes to the formation of culture, such as through vocabulary, greetings or humor. In a sense, language is the substance of culture. Languages serve as important symbols of group belonging, enabling different groups of people to know what ethnic groups they belong to, and what common heritages they share. Without a language, people would lose their cultural identity. Languages are the essential medium in which the ability to communicate across culture develops. Knowledge of one or several languages enables us to perceive new horizons, to think globally, and to increase our understanding of ourselves and of our neighbors. Languages are, then the very lifeline of globalization without language, there would be no globalization; and vice versa without globalization, there would be no world languages (Steger 82-84). Cross-cultural contact, therefore, is often viewed as a potential source of unmanageable, or at least undesirable, culture change and of language shift; given that power differentials are to be expected between ethnic groups in interaction (Fishman 177).

4. The Linguistic Formation of the Santals: A Brief History

To understand the present situation of the Santali language and to predict its future, it is essential for us to know about the history of Santali language as they are performing their activities which help us to make a foundation for future life. Languages can give us an understanding of different cultures of a region; it is also a very significant factor for learning and understanding the history and culture of that society. Contextually, the history of Santali language is also much important to understand Santal community. In regard of Santal language, Nandini Nair in her writing mentions about varieties of scripts used in different areas such as Latin script that is used in Bangladesh, Bengali script is also used in both Bangladesh and West

Bengal, Oriya is used in a certain areas of Odisha and the OIChiki script is used in certain pockets. It is noteworthy that Santals represent more than half (51.8 per cent) of the total Scheduled Tribe population of West Bengal (12-15). During 1930s, Indian educationist Pandit Raghunath Murmu innovated Santali script, in the purpose to promote Santali Culture, which is known as 'OICemet', 'OIChiki', or simply 'OI' (Lotz 134; Carrin 28).

Since 1867, the Santals in many parts of Bhutan, India and Nepal are said to be frequently using an 'extended form of Latin' or 'Roman' language in their occasional use of their scriptural writings. It is perhaps because after the ceasefire of the direct conflict with the Santals, the British afterwards tried to influence them in their socio-cultural and religious activities, and thus the Romanization of the Santali script became essential at that time. In the post-independence era, the Santals residing in different states of India started using the language script of their respective state in their writing in Santali as opposed to the 'Roman script'. As a consequence, the West Bengal Santals have the Bengali form of Santali language while the Oriya script has been used by the Santals of Orissa. Nevertheless, these rival scripts sponsored by different state governments of India could not however, eliminate the influence of the Roman scripts of Santali language fully since all the basic materials for learning the Santali language are found exclusively in the Roman script (Raksha). It is found that Santal families in West Bengal during the 1990s many of them using their local language and also at the same time, they were following the Hindu religious practices side by side with their own *sanatoni* (traditional) religion. As Santals are not influenced to use the Roman script, it seems that religious following and local influence acts as an important force to inspire linguistic practices. The religious conversion does not affect the use of language. Thus there is no denying of the fact that a kind of conflicting situation however prevails where their own ethnic integrity is impacted. In order to understand the Christianization impact on the Santals, it is essential for us to understand their linguistic patterns as formulated enthusiastically by a group of activists having inclination towards Christianity. It does not however work as they expect it (Karim and Eftakhar 87).

The Santali script uses thirty letters and five basic diacritics, including six more basic vowels and three additional vowels. Santals were neither written at all, nor were written using the Bengali or Oriya script before the development of this script. In the British period, the Roman alphabet was preferred as written form of Santali. Santali language is a member of the North Munda subgroup and belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language group (Anderson 749). The Munda group of languages, often known as Kol or Kolarian, is split into the South Munda and the North Munda subgroups. Within the North Munda group there exists a dialectic continuum between Korku and a sizeable group of Kherwarian languages, of which Santali is a member (Anderson 390; Majumder 539). As mentioned, the Santals in Bangladesh belong to a group of autochthonous ethnic minority who has long been living in very widely dispersed areas of the Barind region in the northwestern part of the country. From the ethnic point of view, most of the inhabitants of the Barind region are the Bengali Muslims and Hindus. Apart from these Bengali communities, there are sprinklings of aboriginals who are socio-culturally different from the majority of the Bengali People (Maheen and Karim 122). All these ethnic minorities are often

referred to by the term *adibashis*. The word *adibashi* in Bangla is connoted as the 'early-comers' who are believed to have arrived in this land as the first settlers. But it is often stated that since, most of the tribal people in the northern part of Bangladesh had arrived from India during the British period, the authenticity in using this word *adibashi* exclusively to mean them as early settlers remains questionable (Karim 1).

5. Santal Identities and Santal Rebellion in the Colonial Period

The beginning of individual ownership by the British in 1770 was to result, later, in the alienation of tribal lands and in the migration of Santals to clear jungles or work as contract labour. The British allowed non-tribals to settle in tribal territories, which led to exploitation of the Santals by moneylenders and other intermediaries. The feeling of deprivation led the Santals to rebel in 1855 under the inspiration of two charismatic leaders who are still considered as heroes today, even if the rebellion was crushed by the British after two years. After the Santal rebellion, various missionary societies established themselves in the Santal Parganas, and sustained colonial penetration by developing infrastructures such as schools. The Orientalism of the missionaries was oriented towards the noble savage and contributed to reinforce Santal identity (Tamslyche 3-4).

Table: 1
Socio-Demographic Information of the Santal Respondents

1	Gender	Male	Female	-	-	-	-	-
	f(%)	66	44	-	-	-	-	-
2	Age (Years)	25-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	-	-
	f(%)	18.43	36.84	28.95	10.52	5.26	-	-
3	Educational Qualification	Literate	1-5	6-S.S.C	H.S.C-Degree	M.S.S	-	-
	f (%)	10.53	44.74	31.57	10.53	2.63	-	-
4	Income (BDT)	No income	1000-5000	5001-10000	10001-15000	15001-20000	20001-25000	-
	f (%)	21.05	23.69	34.21	13.16	2.63	5.26	
5	Occupation	Govt. job	Private job	House wife	Cook	Daily labor	Jobless	Others
	f (%)	10.53	47.38	13.16	5.26	7.89	7.89	7.89
6	No. of family members	1-3	4-6	7-9	-	-	-	-
	f (%)	25	50	25	-	-	-	-

6. Importance and Results

The Crisis in using Santali Language: the Respondents' Viewpoints

Using Bangla Language instead of Santali or Roman Languages

Nowadays, most of the Santals are mostly using Bangla language in their everyday life in different work activities. According to Philip Kisku age of 45, the ratios of using Bangla language in their every day practices are increasing very sharply. It's alarming in general message for Santal community as well as for the indigenous groups of the world. He thinks that if we use Bangla language in every sphere, once the time might come when we may lose our own identity and culture gradually. Already, we have entered in a mixed culture and many of us have lost our numbers of cultural practices.

Relations among Language, Practices and Experiences in Santal Community

Santals are using Santali, Bangla and Roman languages for everyday communication. Most of the Santals especially young generation is using Bangla language for purpose of reading, writing and speaking nowadays. Though Santali religious books are written in Roman language, they read or pronounce most of these books translated in Bangla language. Because, new generations don't have adequate attention for learning as well as practicing Santali language so that this language can alive or go for generation to generation.

Rebecca Parlakian and Sylvia Y. Sanchez show in their study that as to how we view the world as shaped by the beliefs, values, and experiences of prior generations. Each generation has refined its sense of importance for children to know, believe, value, and do to ensure survival of the cultural and social community. This unique family culture is passed on to the new generation through the stories that are told to the children and through the family and community's child-rearing practices. As we grow, our individual experiences and interactions also impact the cultural lens we use to understand the world around us (Parlakian and Sylvia 53).

One of the respondents named James Romario Tudo of age 24 is a telecom engineer who mentioned that new generation is going far away from their traditional culture and traditions day by day. Desire for higher education, family orientation as well as socialization process, technological development and many other factors are responsible for this situation. He puts his argument in favor of changing situation. Parents take all decision for their child from childhood. James Tudo does not know as to how to write Santali language, but he can write and speak Bangla and English properly. His parents didn't emphasize on speaking and writing Santali language. They thought Tudo needed to know Bangla and English properly for his better academic future. That's why they admitted Tudo in an English medium school where he had to stay from morning to noon socializing with his friends from Bengali speakers. Tudo's parents are government service-holder. They did not contribute proper time for their son's for writing Santali language and others Santali cultures as it should be. In case of educational development of tribal children in India, Saini mentions that it is necessary to acquire educational knowledge at the initial three years in their own mother tongue (205).

But the Santali parents, who feel the time spent at school should lead to quick results in terms of employment, view the concentration on the mother tongue with little enthusiasm. While the Santal elites by all means try to provide English medium education to their children, the lower middle class people often decides that learning through Hindi, Oriya or Bengali mediums will allow their children having access to administrative jobs. The rejection of one's mother tongue is motivated by individual strategies, however, which often turn to disaster (Sarangapani 18-39; 215). In a changing corpus of knowledge, the distribution of knowledge, like the network of trust and identification, is changing, as well as positioning towards power and disempowerment (Barth 3-5).

Cultural practices are being changed by the influence of Bangla language as well as changing the meaning of practice for proper meaning of language. New generation is

likely to use Bangla language. Because the impact of globalization as well as the development of technologies have engaged them with social media like facebook, twitter, instagram etc. Every day they are acquiring diversified knowledge and ideas from different types of cultural practices by watching movies and used languages in it. It is also true that they are listening Bangla, Hindi, Kawali songs besides Santali songs. Diversified practices are making mixed ideas what is absolutely creating a massive problem for Santali cultures. When the boys and girls are going to the schools and colleges for taking general education, they have to interact with main stream people as well their culture too.

Santal People feel shy or are afraid of Speaking Santali Language in Public

According to one respondent named Philip Kisku (45), 'Santali people feel shy or are afraid of speaking Santali language in front of main stream people in public. State or social conditions do not allow them to perform it smoothly in the common structure'. That is why Santali peoples are using Bangla language spontaneously in their daily life, where they are quite reluctant to use Santali. This has become a spontaneous practice.

Accordingly, Elvira Riera Gil wrote that language firstly is a universal capacity of human beings which is only exercised through proper use of it. Secondly, language has both an individual and a collective dimension; on the one hand, also it is an individual skill that acquires value through its collective practices (its use among a group of speakers of a particular language); on the other hand, there is general agreement on the value of language as an individual asset (a capacity influencing individual autonomy) as well as a public good for its community of speakers. Finally, every language functions as a communication tool and also acts as a marker of identity (Gil 23-24).

The Actual Meaning of Santali Language is Changing after Transliteration

When the Santals are translating their religious texts and songs from Santali to Bangla language, its exact inner meaning and explanation is not however, expressed properly. Since meaning and explanation are changing, obviously their practices in terms of religion and marriage are also changing. In some ritualistic ceremonies, marriage is found to be practiced fully in a different style as new generation utterly is influenced by different languages (Bangla, Hindi, English etc.) and cultures, social media (like face book, twitter, instagram), as well print and electronic media. In some cases, Santali people are listening Bangla or Hindi songs besides Santali songs in their marriage ceremony. Different languages are playing sturdy role for changing the practices of Santali language and culture. As a result, new generation is continuing some practices what they have learnt from Bangla language where some exact explanations have already been excluded. These missing practices will never be possible to add or rectify again. It has lost its proper inner meaning. Besides these, new generation has lost their eagerness. So, interpretation is playing a very crucial role for changing the inner sense of language as well it can pose a crisis in cultural identity.

Joshio Hembrom (25) says that nowadays the Santals prefer to listen and watch Bangla, Hindi and English songs, music videos and follow those cultures and

practices. It is however not fully true that everyone is doing the same thing as a few of them still have some fascination for their songs and music. To improve this situation, it is needed to expand the practices of Santali language and cultures in national and international level and need to include Santali language in national curriculum as soon as possible.

Creating a Knowledge gap between Generation to Generation in the Case of Acquiring Santali Language

Philip Kisku (45), one of the respondents mentioned that for our study area he does not have adequate knowledge on Santali language and he also added that his conceptual depth of Santali language is extremely poor. Philip also told that his father had sound knowledge on Santali language which he had developed through his exposure and expertise on it being received from its version in India. Santali language in the past was taught institutionally by the Government of India as well through different television and radio programs. For which, he was capable in writing and reading the Santali language properly. But unfortunately, he could not acquire this knowledge from his father because of the reason is that at present, they do not have suitable Santali books for our learning. Santali basic books are available in India. Moreover, Santal community's involvement with main stream people in India has been growing gradually.

7. Conclusions

Language is a vital medium for everyday communication and accordingly, the study focuses on the nature of Santal language specifically exploring to know that whether the Santals are bilingual or trilingual. They are seriously struggling to cope up with the present situation without having any change in their language and in its linguistic patterns and traditions. But, Santal community itself has come out of their traditional practices by using three languages and as such they are now moving forward with their higher education relating to modern technology. Having such influences and impacts of modernization the Santals are very much eager to make significant changes in their linguistic practices. More particularly, such change brings influence on their cultural values, working structure and also on role sensitivity.

The most visible impact that the Santals are facing now is that of the marginalization which is the social disadvantage and also it is a kind of relegation to the fringe of society in which the individuals are blocked from various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to the members of dissociate groups. The outcome of marginalization of indigenous community is affected and individuals on community are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and politics of the society they live in. Language has a great relation with education because through the policy and rules of education it changes the position or status of a community or its members. For this reason, indigenous peoples go through rites of passage. When they enter into a new language system in the schools they have began to be separated from their own language and culture, ultimately social position. When they learn the language of the mainstream they are in a transitional period where they practice and use both of their mother tongues and the language they have learned in academic institutions. So, they belong to the liminal state of their social

and cultural life where there is no certain position or status of an individual. In the rites of incorporation there arise the new social identities as marginalized or as assimilated.

Similarly, globalization has also a thoughtful impact on Santali language. It has been found in the study that the Santal as a new generation is well fascinated by the global weapons. Language is one of those global weapons which are playing a crucial role for changing linguistic aspects of Santali people. At present world is so competitive as well as challenging too very rapidly as part of these types of information and knowledge that we are sharing in our everyday life. In this context, availability of diversified knowledge helps us to solve or mitigate our all these problems of ours. But, the question is that what type of language we are practicing for our everyday survival? We are engaging ourselves day by day with different cultures gradually. Globalization thus is making its role as a dominant actor. Language and its representation is the most crucial factor, because all small community has its own traditions and culture. And language for them is one of the most important cultural components. By the influence of dominant languages and cultures, minor groups and their languages are seriously struggling for their existence. In this study, it is found that new generations are dependent and also are influenced by these dominant languages and cultures. New generation are trying to make them fit to the situation as well as they are also trying to come out from their traditional sphere for survival. Today, Santal literature is a living phenomenon expressing itself in a range of literary expressions, drama, poetry, novels, history, folk-tales, riddles, as well as newspapers. Santal writers emerge as charismatic figures capable in framing traditional cultures as a source of inspiration and also contextualizing the different problems that Santals face when they feel engaged in a globalized world (Tamblyche 6). Based on the above, we have to take note of all these issues for future planning relating to Santali language.

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