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Can Translation Save the Dying Tribal Dialects? (*Sadri* Taking over Kharia, Munda, Oraon and Kisan Dialects of Western Odisha)

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Abstract:

Official languages of the states and the international languages which have become the necessary evils have consciously or unconsciously, affected the tribals to twist their tongues for other languages. The paper points out to the fact that a popular dialect Sadri is taking over the tribal dialects Kharia, Munda, Oraon and Kisans of Western Odisha. Can translation of their life and literature to other languages save them is a big question to be answered. The decision to keep the tribal languages alive rests on the tribals themselves.

Keywords: *Dialects Sadri, Kharia, Munda, Oraon, Kisans, culture, translation*

The number of languages listed for India is 418. Of those, 407 are living languages and 11 are extinct. The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 languages as the official languages. There are about 1635 languages being spoken all over the country. The number could be more, but a major chunk of it is on the verge of extinction. Indian tribes make 8.2 percent of the total population. Their lives and livings, languages and literatures, soul and society now seem to be out of place. Some argue that modernity has invaded and ruined their habitats while others are of the opinion that they failed to respond to the changing signs of time. Official languages of the states and the international languages, which have become the necessary evils have consciously or unconsciously, affected the tribals to twist their tongues for other languages. Whatever may be the reasons social, economic or political the fact is most tribal languages in India and their literatures are on the verge of extinction.

Whenever we think of language, a defined system of signs or scripts, alphabet, there are methods of putting these together and a prescribed way of pronouncing the letters and words occurs to our mind. What is a dialect? The linguists have different opinions on the definition of dialect. 'Dialect' refers to a language of a particular community, tribal group, region or even a family, which does not have a script of its own. Sometimes when they are written, alphabet of letters is used from other language. Thus 'dialect' here does not mean "a regional variety of a particular language, nor to a language which is a mixture of two languages." Dialect is a language which does not have scripts of its own. In other words, it is a 'folk language.' It is the language of the folk, the people.

Odisha is the home of 62 tribal groups. The Kharias, Oraons, Kisans and Mundas mostly live in the western part of the state. Sundargarh is largely populated by them. The Kharias and Mundas are believed to be originated from the family of Astro-Asiatic whereas the Oraons and the Kishans are from Dravidian family. Though they have number of similarities in their cultural and social practices, each tribal group speaks different dialects. The Oraon's dialects is known as Oraon or Kuruk, the Kharia's kharia, khadia or khedia, the Munda's Munda, in some cases Mundary, the Kisan's Kisan. The lingua franca *Sadri* is a connecting dialect between these tribes. They live in each other's vicinity. There are instances of all four tribal groups or at least two to three of them living in a single village. They also participate in each other's social functions. We also find that some of the older generations of the said tribes could speak each other's dialects, especially in those clusters where they lived together. And that's the reason there are a lot of linguistic equivalence in each other languages. Kharia and Munda have more similarities between them as they belong to the Austro-Asiatic family. Similarly the Oraons and the Kisans have quite a lot similarities between them as they both belong to the Dravidian Family. As a result the syntactic patterns of Oraon and Kisan have a lot more in common. The same applies to Kharia and Munda. But linguistic equivalents of their words are a lot. The dialects have been influenced by each other and also by *Sadri* their connecting tongue, Hindi as they have counterparts in the neighboring Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, Odia as the state language and some common words from English.

These tribes have moved with the times. Their literacy has increased. Some of them are well placed in life. They have moved to different parts of the world, country and state. This movement is on the rise. They are now going everywhere, learning the language of the states, country and even some international languages. And they have begun to leave behind their tribal tongues. *Sadri* being the most popular dialect emerging in western Odisha particularly Sundargarh is a widely spoken language in the tribal households. Even among those who have migrated, *Sadri* remains close to their heart rather than their own tribal tongues. These tribal languages are slowly headed to oblivion. The tribal languages are no longer spoken in most of the families in the hamlets. *Sadri* and in some places Odia has replaced these languages. But *Sadri* taking over these languages and dialects is but natural because the language was always there with them. The opinions about

Sadri's origin can always be discussed. But the fact is that the tribal groups have used this language to interact with each other much before the times the memory of the oldest of them can imagine. Consequently it has occupied a prominent place in the tongue of these tribes.

These tribes, however, kept up their traditional dialects. Even in the present time a lot of conscious effort is being made to safeguard their languages, but it is of a very little use. All the four tribes have their annual meets at different places and the focus is on the preservation of their culture and languages. There are tribes heads known as *Jait rajas* or kings of the tribes who are elected. One of the important tasks of the said platform is to preserve language and culture of the respective tribes. But it seems almost impossible to keep these dialects alive. *Sadri* is taking a toll over these languages. Most of the people of the communities prefer *Sadri* over their tribal languages. Reason is quite obvious because it has become a common language of the adivasis of the area in real sense. Most of them have been converted to Christianity, but the services of the churches are done in *Sadri*. For those who go to the *Sarana*, the services and rituals are again performed in *Sadri*. Thus, these tribal languages are shown an easy exit. The situation is such that after fifteen years only the fifteen percent of the population of these tribal groups will be speaking Kharia, Munda, Oraon and Kisan. Odia, the official language of the state, Hindi, the national language of India have their share of blame. The educated lot of these tribal groups is ashamed to use their dialects in their conversations. They feel inferior to others in speaking their original tongue. The present social and economic settings are also responsible for the same. These tribes are not under the so called group of endangered ones. But their language and culture is certainly on the verge of extinction if the warning of UNESCO report is to be taken seriously, "A language is in danger when its speakers cease to use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new speakers, adults or children."

Is there a need to preserve these dialects? It is a big 'Yes'. According to UNESCO Report, "Language diversity is essential to the human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity." Languages and cultures are said to be inseparably associated with each other. Individuals come to know their cultures through languages. They practice their cultures and live through their life through language. And therefore there is a need to save the dying languages including the dialects. Can recording the lives of these people on the papers and by cameras save these dialects?

Sociologist and Anthropologists have tried their best to preserve and showcase the life of the endangered communities, especially the tribes. The question here is can translation, which is quite often seen as a tool to save the dying cultures save these dialects. Translation is transfer or transformation of an idea or thought process from a language to the other. A language has more cultural function than one can think of it. Language is a reflection of a culture, everything of an individual and the society he lives in. People learn to live life through feelings, but mostly through languages because feelings and emotions get transmitted through it. Language is sometimes marked and separated by the boundaries of geography, culture, community, religion and sometimes by economy. Language can be defined in number of ways, but most importantly, it is the expression of thought process of a particular culture. Culture is hard to separate from language, so hard sometimes that it becomes nearly impossible to translate it to other languages. It may be easier to find a linguistic similarity between two languages, but cultural similarities are almost impossible.

The translators too have their linguistic barriers so do the social researcher. Collecting information in a particular language and presenting it another language poses a great challenge. "When collecting data in one language and presenting the findings in another, researchers have to make a number of translation-related decisions. Words which exist in one language but not in another, concepts which are not equivalent in different cultures, idiomatic expressions and/or differences among languages in grammatical and syntactical structures are issues which call for very specific decisions. These decisions along with factors such as, for example, who the researcher or her translators are and what they 'know' have a direct impact on the quality of the findings of the research and the resulting reports." (Maria Birbili). Despite all these issues translations can help in making the richness of a community available to the world. But preservation of a language through translation is impossible. We can have a whole library on a particular community. We can document their lives, culture and social practices for future references by means of research and translation. But a translation does not have caliber to save a dying dialect. It will certainly encourage the speakers of a particular language but we need to do more to preserve a language. Our language policies are to be on right track. However, our policies may be on the right track. No one can save a dying language or dialect but the speakers, "In the end, it is the speakers, not outsiders, who maintain or abandon languages. Still, if communities ask for support to reinforce their threatened languages, language specialists should make their skills available to and work with these ethno linguistic minorities" (UNESCO Report 2003). If a particular language community, whatever may be the reasons wants to lose his language and adopts some other tongues there is no way out. Outside technical and financial support can be provided to save a dying language but the decision is purely a collective responsibility of the group.

The Kharias, Oraons, Mundas and Kisans of Western Odisha consciously or unconsciously prefer *Sadri* to their own dialects. *Sadri*, their lingua franca which was necessary evil is now taking a toll on their individual languages. *Sadri* was a language of the weekly bazaars. The cluster living of the tribal groups, their common culture, religious practices has now made *Sadri* a prominent language among them. Inter tribe marriages between the communities is also gradually becoming quite rampant. The children of such marriages could be taught only *Sadri*. The educated lot who migrate to different parts of the state and country also speak *Sadri* as it helps them to relate with each other. And in those places they form a different community from their homeland and most often called as *Sadri* Adivasi communities. Another reason why *Sadri* is very popular is because the tribes' counterparts in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Bihar also speak *Sadri*. The decision to keep their tribal languages alive rests on them. Some of them are of the opinion that these dialects should be allowed to die a natural death. However they wish to preserve their culture through *Sadri*. They have adapted well to the language. They have made it their own. Only the time to come will testify whether this is a boon or bane.

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