

Research Article

Marginalisation, Exclusion and Identity of Santals

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ABSTRACT

Santals, being a tribal community, have faced the consequences of economic backwardness. Therefore, they have migrated to different areas in order to search for jobs. This paper focuses on the Santals in the age group of 20 and above who live in Rakshitpur village of Kanksa block in Burdwan district of West Bengal. In order to facilitate communication with the dominant community, they have taken up Bangla as their language of communication. Now a significant difference is observed in Bangla as spoken by Santals and that spoken by the Bengali community. This difference is in use of second person pronouns to indicate tu-vous (T/V) distinction. This tu-vous (T/V) distinction is a marker of power-distinction and solidarity prevalent within the society. While in other variations of Bangla there are three distinct terms 'tui-tumi-aapni' to indicate this distinction, Santals use only /tui/ as a second person pronoun which is a tu (T) form. Thus, the migration of Santals has led to their social exclusion which finally resulted in their marginalisation. Apparently, Santals have left their linguistic identity as one of the consequences of marginalisation. However, a deeper analysis will reveal that they have retained their linguistic identity through certain subtle usages. This paper attempts to analyse how the particular usage of 'tui' by Santals has affected the solidarity-power distinction between the Santal and Bengali communities and also how this particular usage becomes a marker of the identity of the Santals.

Keywords: Santals, tu-vous(T/V) distinction, Bangla, Marginalisation, Social exclusion, Identity, Solidarity-Power

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Santal' is the Anglicized version of the ethnic name *Sāotal*. The Santals mainly inhabit the western part of West Bengal, the southern part of Bihar which is now Jharkhand, the areas of Bihar adjacent to Jharkhand, the northeastern districts of Orissa and Assam (Ghosh, 2008). In West Bengal, the Santals are mainly concentrated in the areas surrounding Birbhum and Burdwan districts, and also on the border of Bankura, West Midnapur and Purulia districts. The economic setback of these Santals, as a tribal society, has forced them to migrate to neighbouring areas in search of employment. The concept of migration involves 'crossing spatial boundary' by an individual or a group for the purpose of 'change of residence' (Kok, 1999). An important dimension of migration is the distance which not only includes a spatial aspect but also resulting change in social and economic conditions. Thus, concepts of migration and social change are closely related to each other. Social change can be defined as an external transformation affecting the material and non-material culture of a society. An important consequence of this social change is the possible social exclusion of the migrating individual or group. In the case of Santals who have migrated to West Bengal, it is this political, social and economic exclusion for being on the margins of the dominant Bengali community that has ultimately led to their status as a marginalised community. Marginalisation can be defined as a phenomenon that restricts participation in the productive activities of a society at the level of an individual or a group. This paper takes up a particular aspect of marginalisation which is the effect on linguistic identity of the marginalised group of Santals due to their migration to different parts of India. The area in focus of this paper is that of West Bengal. This paper analyses how the concepts of empowerment and power have affected the solidarity-power distinction as manifested in their use of Bangla. Furthermore, this paper attempts to analyse how a particular use of second-person pronoun in Bangla by Santals asserts their identity among the dominant Bengali community of West Bengal.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section which is the current section gives an introduction to the Santals. The second section discusses about the effects of social exclusion and related marginalisation on this community. The third section discusses the factors responsible for their loss of linguistic identity and the effect of certain social factors on their use of Bangla. The fourth section discusses about the issues of identity in the light of solidarity-power distinction as reflected in the Bangla spoken by Santals of West Bengal. The fifth section deals with the observations made in the previous sections. However, it is important to note that this work is no novelty. It takes up certain sociological, psychological and linguistic concepts from the perspective of Santals as a tribal community and tries to give it an overt verbal expression.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALISATION OF SANTALS

The concept of exclusion is considered to be multi-dimensional. The term 'social exclusion' refers to deprivation from access to resources that result in exclusion of the particular individual or the group. According to Percy-Smith (2000), the different dimensions of social exclusion include economic, social, political, neighbourhood, individual, spatial and group dimensions (as cited in Peace, 2001). According to Peace (2001), this nominalisation of the verb 'to exclude' has two linguistic effects - of disappearance of agency and occurrence of reification. There are two important aspects of the concept of social exclusion – constitutive and instrumental (Sen, 2000). Constitutive relevance of social exclusion implies deprivation as a direct result of exclusion. On the other hand, instrumental importance of exclusion emphasises on the relational deprivations resulting from exclusion that lead to other results. Thus, marginalisation can be regarded as the result of relational deprivation of social exclusion. The term 'marginalisation' refers to the situation when the human communities living in the margins of a dominant society are socially excluded which eventually leads to their limited access to resources causing economic restriction and also to political exclusion. These communities are the tribal groups that live on the borders of dominant communities and are isolated from the productive systems of the society and are considered as the 'problematic consumers' of the benefits of these systems (Mallick, 2013). The concept of marginalisation is multi-dimensional. According to Billson, the term 'marginality' in sociology has three dimensions: cultural marginality, social marginality and structural marginality (as cited in Bernt and Colini, 2013). Cultural marginality deals with issue of cross-cultural identities and assimilation. Social marginality indicates the isolation of an individual or a group from participating in a positive reference group. Structural marginality refers to the social, economic and political powerlessness and disadvantage of an individual or a group. Therefore, the issues of poverty or economic dislocation and disempowerment or social dislocation are considered as two important dimensions of marginalisation (Burton and Kagan, 2003, in press). In another perspective, two fundamental conceptual frameworks are considered to be the basis of defining marginality: societal and spatial (Gurung and Kollmair, 2005). According to the societal framework, the concept of marginality emphasises on human dimensions of social structure, economic and political relations, demography, religion in relation to the individual person or a group. The spatial framework, on the other hand, focuses on the physical distance and location of the individual person or the group from the centre of development. Thus, the concept of marginality is an ubiquitous concept.

A tribe can be defined as a simple society that is a collection of various kin groups. The primary occupation of a tribe is horticulture. Although there is no formal leader or chief in a tribe, nonetheless the members of a tribe are aware of their

behavioural conduct towards each other and hence, deploys a greater degree of social organisation. Therefore, kinship ties, common territory, one language, absence of internecine strife are some of the basic characteristics of a tribe. The common features of a Santal village are agricultural lands, graveyard and a common place of worship termed as *jaher era*. The socio-economic, health and educational status of the Santals are the indicators of their marginalisation. These are discussed in this section. The concept of social exclusion has immediate consequences of unemployment and poverty. The level of poverty seems to be much higher in Jharkhand as compared to rest of India, mostly in the regions inhabited by the Schedules Tribes. The highest concentration of poverty among the tribes of Jharkhand is found to be among the tribes of Santhal Pargana and Palamu districts (Roy, 2012), majority of which include Santals. About less than half of the tribal population constitutes the working population. In rural areas, livelihood system is a combination of agriculture, forestry and labouring. Most of the marginal workers are engaged in agricultural labour and they have lands that have small land holding sizes and are mostly either less productive or unproductive (Roy, 2012). This is true of the Santal population whose main occupation of agriculture is not sufficient to meet subsistence requirements and hence, they resort to seasonal fruit collection as a subsidiary source of income. The health of children in a community is an indicator of community health status. In the Santal tribal community, especially the groups residing in the Purulia district of West Bengal (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2008), there is widespread prevalence of undernutrition among the children and this is observed to be higher among Santal girls than the boys. Literacy also plays an important determining factor in estimating the development of a community. However, the literacy rate among the tribal communities of Jharkhand was observed to be 40.7% (2001) which was much lower than the national level of 47.1% and it was mostly evident among the Santals and some other tribal communities (Roy, 2012). These instances from different regions inhabited by the Santals are evidences of their socio-economic exclusion that has affected the health and education of the members of this community, particularly the children.

LINGUISTIC IDENTITY OF SANTALS

The economic plight and the related social exploitation of the Santals dates back to the period of British rule in India. Before colonisation, different tribal groups were engaged in shifting cultivation and they shifted from one forest region to other when the resources of the earlier were exhausted. However the British rulers restricted use of the forest resources including lands and products. Moreover, they also introduced new taxes to cover tribal products (Johari, 2012-13). This created great agitation and outburst among these groups. One of such economic exploitations resulted in the Santal rebellion in 1855-56. They were suppressed using the military force which they justified by characterizing these tribal groups

as 'savage' and 'barbaric'. These descriptions of the tribal communities in different official documents gradually created a stereotyped notion about them among the people belonging to mainstream society (Prasad, 1991). This resulted in their social exclusion that has continued even today.

This social exclusion has serious implications in terms of their economic status. Therefore, in order to gain economic empowerment, the Santals migrated to different parts of India. The neoclassical theory of migration research states that migration is primarily the result of economic considerations of relative benefits and costs which are primarily financial but also psychological (Kurekova, 2011). Therefore, the Santals gradually shifted to industrial areas that are nearer to towns and cities in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa in search of employment. This paper focuses on the group of Santals who have migrated to West Bengal in search of employment. This migration has resulted in language contact between two language communities, Santali and Bangla. Language contact occurs when two or more languages interact and influence each other. The Santal tribal community speaks Santali which belongs to the Kherwari group of North Munda subfamily of the Munda group. This, in turn, belongs to the Austroasiatic family of languages (Ghosh, 2008). The Bengali community of West Bengal speaks Bangla which is an Indo-Aryan language and belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. In the industrial areas, Santali has less 'potential' when compared with dominant languages of these regions for employment purpose (Ghosh, 2008). Therefore, the Santals gradually shifted from Santali to other languages like Bangla in West Bengal, or Hindi in Jharkhand, Bihar, or Oriya in Orissa. Moreover, the children also receive education in the dominant languages of these regions resulting in the slow shift from Santali to these languages. This has created a significant loss of linguistic identity among the Santals, especially the younger generation. The term 'identity' can be viewed in four ways, of which 'affinity perspective' (Gee, 2000) is closer to what can be termed as linguistic identity. The 'affinity identity' describes the shared experiences and common practices which become the identifying factor for different groups. One of the ways to manifest this affinity is when an individual modifies the patterns of his or her linguistic behaviour with respect to the group with whom he or she wishes to be identified with or differentiated from (Rickford, 2011). Thus, the term 'linguistic identity' can be described as a 'double-edged sword' that fulfils two functions of creating a sense of belonging as well as distinguishing a particular group from other groups simultaneously (Joseph, 2006). The Santals of West Bengal, in order to search for jobs, have left their linguistic identity and adopted the dominant language of the region which is Bangla. Therefore, a negotiation occurs in terms of linguistic identities for the Santals.

The following data shows how Santal speakers speak Bangla:

*tur songe dekhati kurte elam go |loke bulchhe tu saheban loker loker songe lorai
dichhis| abar bulchhe onek sob likhchhis porchhis |chhapa hochhe si sob gulan| ta
tu janis ei pithimi to ki kore toiar holo? |bulchhis i mati gulan tuder| ta janis i
sob? |sun amar kachhe| tur boie likhe dis |ar bichar kore tobe kaam koris| bujhli?*

The data presented here is quoted from Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's work. This story is a narration of the memories that the narrator had with a person named Kamal Majhi. This person was a Santal old man and used to work in the narrator's house when he was small. Kamal lived in the Santal community of Kalkepur Danga. Probably this is the present Kalikapur village in the Bolpur-Sriniketan block of Bolpur in Birbhum district. The above mentioned speech is a monologue by Kamal Majhi which the narrator recounts in memory of the speaker. The narrator was an author and participated actively in the independence struggle. Kamal had visited his house again at that time. It was in this context of the narrator's participation that Kamal had uttered the above mentioned dialogue. Few utterances of the monologue are glossed below:

1. *tu-r* *songe* *dekha-ti* *kur-te* *el-am* *go*
you-GEN with see.PRS-EMPH do.PRS-IMP come.PRS.1 EMPH.DIM.HON
'I have come to visit you.'
2. *abar* *bul-chh-e* *ki* *sTb* *likh-chh-is* *por-chh-is*
again say-PRS.PROG-3 what all write-PRS.PROG-2 read-PRS.PROG-2
'Again they are saying what all you are writing and reading.'
3. *tu-r* *boi-e* *likh-e* *di-s*
you-GEN book-LOC write-CPM give.FUT-2
'You write them in your book.'

In the above data, the pronoun */tu/* is used by Santals speaking Bangla which is equivalent to */tui/* of Bangla. '*tui*' as used by santals presently living in the villages of Kanksa block of West Bengal while using Bangla. However, an interesting observation is made in (1) in this context. The word */go/* is used in Bangla to emphasise on the action. However, this is strictly used only with */tumi/* which ranks higher than */tui/* in the hierarchy scale in Bangla. Now the speaker is a servant in the listener's house and therefore is lower in the social status. So here the use of */tu/* and */go/* contradict each other. While the solidarity is emphasised using */tu/*, social status difference is indicated using */go/* by the Santal speaking Bangla.

In this process of negotiation, Santali is the first language and Bangla is the second language. The first language has effects on the acquisition of second language

and much research has been conducted on this area (cf. Karim, 2003; Bond *et al.*, 2011; Lasagabaster, 2001). This is reflected in the use of pronoun system of Bangla by the Santals. In Santali, there is no use of honorific pronoun (Ghosh, 2008). In contrast, Bangla has three-level and two-level hierarchies in use of second and third person pronouns respectively. However, due to linguistic influences from their first language, the Santali speakers use only one form of second person pronoun in their use of Bangla. So, while there are terms like /*tuj*/, /*tumi*/ and /*aapni*/ for second person pronouns in terms of hierarchy in Bangla, the Santali speakers use only /*tui*/ for their use of Bangla, which ranks the lowest in the scale of hierarchy in Bangla. Thus, the effect of Santali is manifested in their use of Bangla. On a closer analysis of this situation of language shift as a result of negotiation will reveal two layers of negotiation. On the surface level, this difference between the two variations is the result of substratum influence. But there is also an underlying level to this variation of use. The concept of marginalisation has a subtle psychosocial-ideological threat (Burton & Kagan, 2003, in press). This implies that the social and historical phenomenon of marginalisation of a particular community, which is Santal community for the present study, becomes a biological and intrapsychic phenomenon. This leads to an ideology that the situation of the marginalised group is the result of the characteristics of the members of the community. It is in response to this ideology that the concepts of resistance and resilience emerge. The concept of resilience focuses on the enhanced, reclaimed and re-invented identity. This is what has happened in the use of Bangla by the Santals. They have adopted the language but have resisted the hierarchy as manifested in the pronoun system of Bangla and have retained the notion of egalitarianism which is the basis of many tribal societies including the Santal tribal society. However, an important note is to be made in this context. This use of Bangla is restricted to the Santals who are in an economically disadvantageous position which has limited their means to education. In the recent years, a large proportion of Santals who have migrated to West Bengal are educated in Bangla and therefore, their use manifests this three-level hierarchy in terms of second person pronouns.

SOLIDARITY-POWER AND IDENTITY OF SANTALS

In many languages across the world, there are specific distinctive forms termed as *tu-vous* distinction. In these forms, *tu* indicates a grammatically 'singular you' and *vous* indicates a grammatically 'plural you'. However, their usage is dictated by social conventions in certain situations. This implies that the *vous* form is used in specific situations to address an individual. Generally, the *tu* form is termed as a 'familiar' form and the *vous* form as 'polite' form (Wardhaugh, 2006). The mutual V forms are generally used in upper classes, mutual T between lower classes and asymmetrical T/V usage in situations where the upper classes address

the lower classes using *tu* form but are addressed using *vous* form. So, this asymmetrical *tu-vous* distinction becomes a symbol of power relationship (Wardhaugh, 2006). Like most other languages, this distinction also exists in Bangla where there is a three-level hierarchy in use of second person pronoun forms. So, the words /*tui*/ and /*tumi*/ are considered as *tu* forms and the word /*aapni*/ as a *vous* form. Therefore, the pronoun form /*aapni*/ indicates a power relationship in Bangla. However, there is further distinction between /*tui*/ and /*tumi*/. The former form is used to address close friends or family members of the same age group or younger to the speaker. On the other hand, the latter form is used to address people of the same age group or younger whom the speaker does not know well. So, while /*tui*/ involves more of an informal setting, /*tumi*/ involves more of a formal setting. In other words, while the use of mutual T form /*tui*/ indicates solidarity, use of the other symmetrical T form /*tumi*/ is neutral in the sense that it neither indicates power nor indicates solidarity. A striking contrast to this is observed in Bangla as used by Santals. They use only /*tui*/ to address a person in Bangla. This choice of using a *tu* form which ranks the lowest in the scale of hierarchy by Santals points to an important aspect of tribal community. This usage indicates that the Santals emphasise on solidarity as a more important factor in general (Choksi, 2010) than the power-distinction which is manifested in the asymmetrical T/V usage or even symmetrical V usage. While this usage is a marker for the Santal tribal community, the same usage is considered as a stereotype in the dominant language community of Bangla leading to the stigmatisation of their variety of Bangla. Labov has defined a marker as a linguistic variable that carries social information and a stereotype as a 'conscious characterization' of the speech of a particular group by another group (as cited in Wardhaugh, 2006).

This stigmatisation of the variety spoken by Santals can be viewed as a subtle effect of the contesting concepts of solidarity and power and related concept of empowerment which emerges from the dominant Bengali community of West Bengal. While the Santals indicate solidarity by their use of /*tui*/, the dominant language community in West Bengal finds it difficult to accept the solidarity with a tribal community which is considered as a marginalised community. A major reason for this conflict lies in the concept of power. Power can be defined as an exercise of control over different resources that include 'material, human, intellectual and financial' by different communities in a society. However, this control over resources is often asymmetrical because some communities exercise greater control than other communities which can be observed in West Bengal between the Santals and the Bengali community. This unequal distribution of access to resources calls for the need of empowerment. According to Sadan, the concept of empowerment can be differentiated into three categories- individual empowerment, community empowerment and empowerment as a professional practice (2004). Individual empowerment leads to the enhancement of self-acceptance and self-confidence

of an individual that helps in his or her political and social understanding with increasing participation in decision-making and control over the resources. Community empowerment of an ethnic minority ensures removal of obstacles in the path of social equality without any significant loss of their culture, including language and customs. According to Solomon, community empowerment of an ethnic minority involves removing the direct and indirect ‘obstacles of power’ leading to the deprivation of these communities (as cited in Sadan, 2004). Finally, empowerment as a professional practice involves professional intervention from the practitioners helping with tools and methods for social change. In a society where there is a process of empowerment employed as a measure to ensure greater participation of underprivileged marginalised community in the society and polity, the solidarity manifested in the use of pronoun forms indicates no power distinction. However, in the Bengali community of West Bengal, like any complex society, the system of stratification plays an important role. Therefore, unlike the tribal communities that are simple and identical in their intents and purposes, the complex societies have distinct and clear differentiations in their activities. Hence, this solidarity of the tribal community of Santals contradicts the system of stratification of the Bengali community. Finally, this leads to the stigmatisation of the variety of Bangla as spoken by Santals.

However, a deeper analysis of this particular usage of Bangla second-person pronoun by Santals will reveal a subtle effort towards maintaining and securing their identity. The term ‘identity’ can be defined in terms of two important aspects – personal and social (Fearon, 1999). In another perspective, social cognition and symbolic interaction form two important aspects of identity (Howard, 2000). Social cognition includes self-schemas and group schemas which are considered as the cognitive versions of identity (Howard, 2000). However, in both these versions the definitions of the two aspects remain the same. Personal identity or self-schema refers to the ‘organized knowledge about one’s self’ that distinguishes him or her from others at the social level. On the other hand, social identity or group-schema refers to the ‘organized knowledge’ about social similarities and differences that distinguish one group from the other. Symbolic interaction emphasises on transmission of the symbolic meaning that people attach to different things through interaction. It is in this sense of interaction that language plays an important role. Thus, it is through interaction that people assert their group identity which, according to Deaux (1993) (as cited in Howard, 2000), both determine and depends on personal identity. For the Santals, the use of */tui/* as a second person pronoun in Bangla manifests the symbolic meaning of solidarity that forms the basis of their cultural values. Although, they have taken up Bangla as the language of communication they have retained the solidarity through this usage that marks their group identity as separate from the dominant Bengali community.

CONCLUSION

The Santals in West Bengal have left their linguistic identity so that they can participate in the society and polity of West Bengal. However, the manifestation of solidarity in the second person pronoun forms of Bangla as used by Santals has contradicted and affected the power distinction of the Bengali community. Moreover, this has also implicitly indicated that the need for empowerment is more of an abstract concept of the mainstream society than a real need for the Santals. This is viewed as an obstacle in the path of distinction between a simple society like the Santals and a complex society like that of Bengalis when there is a process of assimilation taking place in the society of West Bengal. Therefore, this absence of power distinction in their use of Bangla has led to the stigmatisation of Bangla as spoken by the Santals. Thus, the loss of linguistic identity of Santals triggered by marginalisation has affected the power distinction of the Bengali community which again has stigmatised the variety of Bangla spoken by the Santals. However, this particular usage can be viewed as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Santals to retain their group identity even after losing their linguistic identity. The final result is an explicit distinction at a time when there is an effort made to accommodate these two communities in West Bengal.

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