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**Titre : Language, Culture and Identity among Internally Displaced Tribals in Nandurbar
(Maharashtra): A sociolinguistic perspective**

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Comments and questions by Shahzaman HAQUE

Introduction

First of all, I want to thank Michel Boivin for having invited me here as a discussant. I am also very thankful to Sonal Kulkarni-Joshi and I am really honored to comment on your text.

This text is devoted to a very important issue concerning the sociolinguistic and socio-cultural dimensions of displacement and resettlement of two tribes due to the construction of dams in Western India, notably in the state of Maharashtra. As Kulkarni-Joshi pointed out, this paper is about the sociolinguistic consequences of the migration in terms of retention of /change in patterns of language use and socio-cultural practices. The methodology dwells on sociolinguistic and ethnographic tools. Data were collected from the original village and the resettled villages of the tribes. The objective of the project is to find the patterns of continuity and change in language use and sociolinguistic practices among the tribal communities in their original and resettled villages.

Let us first start from the river Narmada. This river starts from Amarkantak in the Shahdol district of Madhya Pradesh and it travels around 1312 km before it falls into the Gulf of Cambay near Gujarat. The Narmada Valley Development Project was the mastermind of the Gujarat government. While only 70 km of river stretches into Gujarat and the rest across the two other states Gujarat has claimed that it is a drought-prone area and portrayed the Narmada Project as its lifeline. However, one can understand very well the drought-prone problem of Gujarat as it is a coastal part of India and the problem is not as severe as it is represented. According to Jashbai Patel (1994), the Gujarat government declares some region as drought-prone to score some political capital in order to gain some welfare schemes to please its people. Gujarat's dam building policies have earlier damaged the Maharashtrian adivasis and later have also affected the Rajasthani tribes by building a dam at Kadana.

Internal displacements for the sake of development projects is a big issue in India as we can see in other cases when looking at dam-building politics around the world such as Mekong Delta Dam Project in Vietnam. Few studies, particularly from a sociolinguistic viewpoint have been taken to comprehend the consequences on the language practices of the individuals affected. Undoubtedly, there is also a cultural and linguistic loss which are at stake. In this regard, I find your work highly stimulating and challenging. I find that your contribution is very significant not only in the field of sociolinguistics but also for policy makers particularly concerning tribal groups.

According to GOI (1985), around 40% of the tribals are affected because of development projects and one of the major reasons for such displacements is dam building projects because vast chunks of land are absorbed in the process. The Land Acquisition Act 1894 was the central act empowering the government to acquire land. The Act was amended first in 1984, later in 2013 and now that is hugely controversial because the current BJP government wants to amend the bill, which seems that it is very much in favour of the corporate sector. The Land Acquisition Bill in India gives very few powers to the people, because, once the government decides to take away the land for any public project, there are few chances to fight the decision. One can imagine the plight of tribal groups who have been subjected to forced displacements due to the Land Acquisition Act. The foundation of the Sardar Sarovar Project was laid in 1961. Dhagamwar et al. (1994) indicate that in the initial phase of the Sardar Sarovar Project, land was acquired by «mutual consent» as the landless and powerless knew that they could not stand up effectively against the government's decision.

Bhils and Pawras are two distinct tribal groups and for both their main occupations are as daily wage labourers, hunters or land cultivators. Despite this commonality of working life, it has been noticed that in Lakkadot (Madhya Pradesh), Pawras regard Bhils as inferior because the Pawras are financially better off. Basu (1992: 197) wrote that in Shahda Taluka, Udaspur village which comes under Nandurbar Headquarter, Pawras consider themselves from Rajput clans and they remain politically inactive. Bhils are low waged poor peasants and they often borrow money from Pawras which may lead to disputes between the two groups.

Remarks and questions

I didn't understand the use of the term «sociolinguistic methodology», perhaps you meant to use the term sociolinguistic tools instead? I would like to know: What are the other tools apart from questionnaires or interviews you have used in order to elicit your data? Which ethnographic tools and observations have been most beneficial to you? Have you relied upon «Outcropping», an ethnographic tool coined by David Fetterman, which helps to give information on the landscape, with things like burned-out buildings, graffiti etcetera? Perhaps you have noticed linguistic markers inside households during your fieldtrip which might have helped you to refine your data. What was the the language of communication between you and informants? Were you perceived as «outsider», as we say in the ethnographic jargon? Are you also considered as «*researchwalla* from Pune» as you were referred to in the Kupwar region?

The construction of the dams started in 1979. I wonder: Was there any sociolinguistic study conducted about the displacement between 1979 and 1994 in this region? If we consider it started in 1961, when the foundation of the Sardar Sarovar was laid, it has been around 33 years, and that's about one generation. It means then that the families displaced since 1961 are now in their second generation of resettlement. The resettled villages are Narmadanagar and Rewanagar, both of them are found in Madhya Pradesh where the main official language is Hindi and other

dialects of Hindi such as Nimari are spoken over there. Rozwa is the village found in Gujarat. What are the languages of communication among the two tribes in the resettled villages who are affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project? Are the languages of the parents transmitted to the children? What are the languages spoken by the second generation or by the children? What is the status of parental languages vs the status of prestigious official languages like Marathi or Hindi or Gujarati inside the household?

If some of you are familiar with my work, which also covers the intergenerational transmission of parental languages among the Indian diaspora in Europe, it has been found that the role of women were instrumental (Haque 2010). They have imbibed the traditional values with pride and took the necessary steps in order to transmit the heritage language and culture in some families. I am interested in knowing the role of women in Bhils and Pawara tribal groups in the retention of heritage language.

Concerning the linguistic attrition and gain : In what language have you noticed losses and gains in the lexicon? As the story-telling practices have ceased to exist, has it also meant that there is a significant loss of cultural and linguistic transmission ? Does the impact on socio-cultural practices have consequences for the tribal languages? Can you illustrate examples of folkloric items that «got lost» in the migration process and on the contrary of some that have been retained ? And, your hypothesis or observations on why it is so?

Did you have any information about the belief-system of these two groups? Is there any particular sacred language to perform the rites? The deities for Pawara tribe are mainly animals, nature, hills, forests etc. Do they use the Pawri language during their prayers?

How does the tribal identity articulate with the religion and cope with the sudden rise in economic status? What were your observations about the changes in identity? Do Bhils and Pawras benefit from any reservation in terms of jobs and education?

Conclusion

I find the study fascinating. The interplay between place, language, culture, identity, migration in your research work shows a complex phenomenon of societal dynamics. The gales of development projects, based on national capitalism, have uprooted the tribal groups. There is an attrition of heritage language besides significant loss in cultural practices under the overarching status of Marathi language entwined with urban culture's influence.

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