CHAPTER VII

LANGUAGE SHIFT : INTEGRATION OR ASSIMILATION

1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

In this chapter attempts have been made to understand two basic questions on language change such as integration and assimilation. How language consciousness leads to language regionalism in the country in general and in the tribal areas in particular has been studied in the second and third sections of the chapter. Lastly, the politics of language in India and the choice of language in the selected tribal regions have been studied. The efforts have also been made to understand the reasons for the choice of language in the tribal India.

2. IMPLICATION OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

Language shift among the tribal people in India is taking place. According to Royburman, more than 50 per cent of India's tribal population have already declared non-tribal languages as their mother-tongue (Royburman, 1972: 42). The first implication which one can draw from the above estimate is that the process of detribalisation is taking place among the tribals in India. The Adibasis of jungle who
have been speaking their traditional dialects are gradually switching over to the national languages of the country. It further implies that the tribes are being encompassed under the process of national integrating force.

2.1. INTEGRATION

Integration implies unification and consolidation of a community with the objective of ensuring maximum well-being including better education, economy, social, political and moral status, provision of equal opportunity, employment, social security, etc. All these privileges are possible to be achieved by the tribal people through the process of interaction with the non-tribal people, belonging to advanced culture. In this process, language has been playing a vital role to facilitate the course of interaction between tribals and non-tribals. Issues like social, political, economic, etc. may be well understood and investigated properly and rationally by educated persons. Thus, the importance of education was felt by the tribal people and as a result, they were attracted to formal education. Since, education is imparted, in most of the cases, in regional languages, the tribes of India gradually adopted non-tribal languages. The tribals also speak the non-tribal language in their day to day life especially those who left their
traditional home and settled in the urban centres in search of their livelihood. At present, majority of tribal people of the country, as pointed out earlier are bilingual using their traditional language at their homes and the regional language outside. Bilingualism itself is indicating a positive sign of the process of national integration.

Language shift among the tribal communities in India leads one to the conclusions that they are slowly being assimilated by the major linguistic groups of the states in which they live (Doshi, 1972: 465). In most of the cases such a change implies shift towards the non-tribal languages which have been recognized as national languages in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Language shift in some cases occurred due to compulsion but it is fact that knowledge of non-tribal language opened the windows of opportunities for the tribal people. They would not have got many facilities while keeping themselves away from the non-tribal language. It was found that those who have declared non-tribal language as mother-tongue and reached at certain levels of advancement, feel superior than their counterpart who are still living in remote areas and preserving their original culture and language.
Barring a few tribes belonging to the north-east India, majority of them especially the central and southern Indian tribes have undergone the process of integration. During the recent decades, further expansion of modern influence stimulated by the process of exploitation of mineral resources and establishment of industries, commercial and administrative centres in the tribal areas further accelerated the process of national integration.

2.2 ASSIMILATION

Contrary to the above hypothesis, some scholars believe that language shift among the tribal people in India may not be taken as the positive sign of national integration rather, in most cases, it can be said that it is a process of assimilation which occurred either due to compulsion or by the forces exerted by the modern society upon the tribal society. In their opinion, such a forcible assimilation of the tribal languages into the non-tribal is not a healthy sign. They further believe that the languages and cultures which the tribes of India belong are very rich in themselves and therefore, efforts must be made to preserve these old pristine cultures of India. All possible help should be given for full development of tribal languages and situation must be created for these languages to flourish in due
course of time in the region in which they are localized. Bringing them into the mainstream of national culture or integrating them into the mainstream of national culture never means to destroy their precious historic culture and language rather they should be given priority in the development programmes of the government before these language vanish from our land.

3. GROWTH OF LANGUAGE REGIONALISM IN INDIA

3.1 LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

Language consciousness leading to language regionalism is a recent phenomenon especially among the tribal people as compared to the non-tribal population in India. The study on language regionalism itself is at its infant stage of development and is of a common interest to all the social scientists. Contributions to this issue have come from various disciplines, "still it remains an emotionally unattached but academically challenging concept" (Seshadri, 1969: 435).

India being a multi-lingual and multi-national society having a federal Constitution, the problem of regionalism, communalism, casteism, lingualism and nepotism crept out. On
the linguistic ground, there is a disparity among the people
of India. The hundreds of languages belonging to different
territories of their own may be considered the most
prominent obstacle to the cultural unity of India and
helping the origin of linguistic regionalism. On account of
linguistic barriers, people from one region find extremely
difficult to understand people outside their own linguistic
area (Husain, 1956: 143). Linguistic area in which people
speak cognate language (Hoijer, 1964: 455) became the
strong basis for the formation of states in the Indian
Republic. Each state, thus, becomes an independent
linguistic area with a distinct language of its own. The
state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya
Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh; together formed a linguistic
area of Hindi. Besides major language, all these states also
have languages of minority groups of people. These languages
are distributed either uniformly or concentrated in a
compact geographical region in the state. The minority
languages do not find protection of their linguistic
heritage under the democratic India although they constitute
a considerable number of speakens.

The consciousness among the people for their language
is natural and legitimate but trouble arises when different
groups begin to quarrel among themselves on account of different regional languages (Broker, 1969: 387). It is in this Chauvinism, unfortunately present in India which has created a painful situation and became a constant threat to the very solidarity and security of India. The cultural and other rights of linguistic minorities in each state have been disregarded in many cases which led the minority community to demand for the right and due place for their language or sometimes for a separate linguistic area. The sentiment attached for such struggle of a group of people which is basically related to a language spoken in certain geographical region may be termed as language regionalism. Thus, "language regionalism without a region is hard to conceive, though it can be preached in many languages" (Nair, 1969: 428). The origin of language regionalism basically depends on dissatisfaction of a group of people because of social, economic, and political backwardness.

3.2 LANGUAGE REGIONALISM

A proper understanding of language regionalism is possible only when it is studied along with other social attributes such as religion, ethnicity, caste, colour, etc. Since, this is not a proper place to discuss regionalism as such, attention is given to language regionalism only.
Language regionalism, mentioned earlier is the language consciousness which is present in many countries of the world. Countries with more than one language have always been encountering this phenomenon. Even the Soviet Union which is known for taking this problem very successfully is also not spared from language regionalism. The Hindustan Times reported that hundreds of thousands of people staged a day long rally in Moldavian capital, Kishinev, to demand that Moldavian be made the Republic's official language. In the third world countries lingualism combined with ethnicity promoting the centrifugal forces against the central power. In India too, the regional feeling is growing at a higher degree especially in the regions of non-Hindi states. The seeds of regional conflict, according to Pannikar (1963) was sown by the State Reorganisation Commission while giving over-representation to Uttar Pradesh and under representation to other states especially non-Hindi. While studying language regionalism in India Nair (1969) believes that Indian unity is already finished by linguism or regionalism (Nair, 1969 : 433). Language regionalism in India viewed by Orwell as a major mental disease, by Toynbee as a disintegrating force. Nehru viewed it as political reactionary or communal activity. He pointed out that
"scratch a separatist in language and you will invariable find that he is a communalist and very often political reactionary". Based on Nehru's perception of language regionalism, Nair termed language regionalism as language communalism and/or language politics (Nair, 1969: 429). Regionalism and communalism are siamese twins in politics while language and regionalism may only be second cousins. The mix of language and regionalism has followed the mix of language and nationalism. A national language is believed to stand for nationalism and regional language for regionalism. (Nair, 1969: 431-34).

Language regionalism has a past history and must be looked upon through the history of India. Ray noted that the germs of linguistic regionalism were already there in India's past history, ecology and culture (Ray, 1969: 6). All India political parties were organized on the basis of linguistic regions. The Congress as early as 1920 passed a resolution on the formation of linguistic province. The idea was to bring the people speaking the same language together and thus ushering in participating democracy. No one at that time saw the seeds of lingualism in this resolution. These linguistic regions did not conflict with each other as long as they were united against the English but soon after, the
erection of linguistic wall between state to state and state to the centre was noticed. (Seshadri, 1969 : 438). The formation of states on language criterion released certain social forces for recognition of the rights of local contact languages. Maharashtra has to be formed after much blood shed and outrage. Telangana region was formed after the death of Patti Sriramulu. The separation of Malabar region from Maharashtra and Haryana from Punjab must be taken as the best and recent examples of language regionalism in India. Besides the demand for the formation of Mithila state, Vishal Dogra state, Gorkahland, there is a serious pressure to include Maithili, Dogri, Manipuri, Napali, etc. in the VIII Schedule of the Indian constitution. These are some of few examples of language consciousness leading to language regionalism in India.

4. LANGUAGE REGIONALISM IN TRIBAL AREAS

The growing consciousness among the tribal people has led to many tribal uprising in different parts of the country at different periods of times, with varying degrees of intensity. Among these, language regionalism with the ethnicity have recently arisen in both developed and developing countries of the world. In some cases, the very existence of countries might be at stake (Charlier, 1971 :
In India too, some of the tribes have already reached at fairly high level of consciousness while some others getting ready for such a leap. Those who are comparatively backward tribes, have not yet started on the road. But any genuine programme of tribal welfare and development will inevitably provide an impetus to the process. With material prosperity and political and cultural upsurge in the tribal inhabited areas, many unknown nationalities each with its own language and its own distinctive culture will emerge. (Burdhan, 1973 : 53).

4.1 DEMAND FOR TRIBAL LINGUISTIC TERRITORY

The Scheduled tribes of India have been claiming for their right of having some territorial and language delimitation that was done for their more developed neighbours. In this connection mention should be made of the Santal movement for the formation of a state of Jharkhand or Santalistan which has a long history. It is chiefly linked with ethno-linguistic motives and with wish to achieve administrative autonomy for the people of a substantial number. Along with the Santals, other tribes such as the Mundas, Oraons, Bhumij, Kharias, etc. also joined in this movement and claiming 21 districts spread over the state of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. The other
regions witnessed for struggle of separate tribal state are western, central and north-eastern India. In the early twentieth century the Bhils attempted to start a movement for a Bhil raj but quickly subsided. In sixties, there were numerous mass movements by the Bhils. Finally, in 1969 again a demand was made to set up a separate state of Bhilistan or Bhil Pradesh. This demand is repeated from time to time and is acquiring more supporters. In the areas where Gonds live is known as Gondwanaland which includes roughly the districts of Bastar, Mandla, Chhindwara, Raigarh and Surguja. The region also witnesses the sign of development of national process but it has not gained much popularity because of the fact that the Gonds live in several states fragmented into several geographical pockets. At present it has not become a mass movement but in future, according to the researchers, it may be promising (Kluyev, 1981: 152).

The north-east region of India has a different history of its own nature because of the strategic location. The region has been prone to such struggles. The anti-India insurgents have given an armed liberation call for liberating the region which is subsisting statistically almost cent per cent on central fund. The north-east rebel see the central fund as rent. The separatists' contention is
that the north-east states, particularly Nagaland, were
never a part of India and existed throughout history as
distinct separate entities. The insurgency crisis is further
aggravated by the bloody boundary disputes between Assam on
one side and Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland
on the other, each claiming more territories (Hindustan
Times, December 14, 1989). Nagas secessionist movement,
Mizo, Manipuri, Khasi movements and presently the Bodo
movement in Assam, took a violent turn, have been known for
their demand for separate territory. The Hindustan Times,
Nov. 22, 1989 also reported that the Manipuri Demand
Coordinating Committee had called for a 24-hour Manipur
Bandh to draw the centre's attention for inclusion of
Manipuri language in VIII Schedule of the Constitution.

Besides the demand of separate territory for tribal
people in different parts of the country, there is a
struggle for the inclusion of their languages in the VIII
Schedule of the Constitution. The tribal people of India are
also demanding education in their own languages and
development of suitable script for their languages.

The above are some of few examples of language
regionalism and language consciousness among the tribal
people of India. In some cases the struggle is mild whereas in other it is violent but the demand is continued though efforts have been made to subside these struggles by the state as well as by the central government.

4.2 GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION OF LANGUAGE REGIONALISM

The geographical dimensions of the language regionalism bring to the fact that language regionalism unlike the non-tribal, is very much limited and restricted in the tribal areas in its nature and scope. It is confined mostly in the two regions of the country: the central and the north-eastern regions. The intensity of language regionalism is higher in the north-east due to mix of the ethnicity whereas in the central India the degree of language regionalism is comparatively of low order. Such variation of the language regionalism in these two regions is also due to the difference in the nature of geographical entity of these regions. The former is located in the strategic areas of the country whereas the latter is surrounded by the highly cultivated and advanced languages of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages. It is because of the above reasons the demand of separate administrative unit on the basis of language in the north-east region was fulfilled whereas the
same demand for the tribals living in central India and
eastern India was not found viable by the government.

The consciousness among the tribal people about their
languages is growing day by day and it is a long going
process. After the achievement of certain levels of socio-
economic upliftment, the demand for the right of each tribal
language will emerge out. It is to be noted here that till
today no scientific attention has been paid for the solution
to the tribal language regionalism as far as the major
central Indian tribal languages are concerned. Before the
situation aggravate, it is the time to adopt the solution
given by the CPI Mahasabha for the creation of council of
representation of minority linguistic groups which the CPM
government of West Bengal has adopted in the case of
Gorkhaland.

5. POLITICS AND CHOICE OF LANGUAGE IN THE STUDY AREA

5.1 LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

The choice of language has always been more political
than economic and social. The Census of India reveals the
above fact while dealing with the percentage of Hindi
and 1961 the people of Bihar dropped Hindi as mother-tongue by about 35 per cent whereas it was recorded 9 per cent reduction between 1961 and 1971 (Khubchandani, 1972: 432, and Kachru, 1977: 21). On the other hand, they declared one of the regional languages of the state. It is a clear indication of the politicization of the regional languages in Bihar. The statistical growth in the percentage of various languages such as Marawari, Konkani, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and some tribal languages of the country during the recent decades is merely a political consciousness about their language affiliation. Language has always been a victim of politics. Almost without exception, the multi-lingual nature of the third world countries has brought linguistic concerns into the foreground. To achieve the political goals, to focus on the issues of economic, political and national cultural development, language is used as an effective tool.

Thus, the study of language and politics which is socially relevant, theoretically interesting and useful for the language planners in the multi-lingual countries, has not been given proper attention as yet. The study of the relationship between language and politics is urgently needed in a country like us where there are multi-layers of
languages such as national, regional, local, groups and sub-groups are found at various levels of their development and their functions.

In India because of its multi-lingual nature, language has been considered a resource in political process and used as a tool to control, manipulate and achieve political ends. O'Barr rightly pointed out that "in India language and politics are in mutual interaction and feedback upon one another" (O'Barr, 1976: 10). The slogans on the basis of language find a quick response and pushing class and social conflicts to the background. On issues like economic, social, political having language affinity in background may surpass the caste and religion boundaries. Since language is a source of mass protest because people are emotionally attached to it, becomes an instrument of political struggle. With its help a particular social group can mobilize the public opinion to support a struggle to attain its goals which are not directly related to language and culture. It is therefore necessary to carefully analyse the movements behind language slogans in the examination of language problems.
5.2 CHOICE OF LANGUAGE

Flowing the idea of language consciousness from the non-tribal regions the tribals get inspired to demand the recognition of their language by the VIII Schedule of the Constitution. The major demands are raised from the north-east states and from the tribes of the Chotanagpur region. In most of the cases, these demands are the demand of elite class of people including students and teachers and workers living in urban centres. A large section of tribal population who are illiterate and not exposed to urban influence do not have anything to do with such slogans. This fact may be judged from the Korku tribes in East Nimar living in rural areas. They do not have consciousness for their traditional language. The Korkus living in Khandwa tahsil have forgotten their traditional tongue and adopted Nimadi, a regional language. Everywhere in schools they are being taught in Hindi medium. No one shows concern about the recognition of Korku as regional and national language.

There was a senior secondary school teacher belonging to the Koku tribe felt that teaching through the koku medium at the primary level will attract more children than that of Hindi medium. Contrary to this, a compounder of the same tribe highlighted the importance of Hindi and suggested that Hindi should continue the medium of instruction in schools. Those
Korkus who have completely changed to Nimadi do not want to go back to their korku language because they considered it a language of inferior people living in jungle. They opted Hindi for educational purpose and Nimadi for their domestic language.

The situation, more or less, is the same as far as the language affiliation among the Bhils of Banswara district is concerned. The Bhils living in rural areas do not show any concern for the recognition of their language but urban Bhils support the idea of keeping it as the community's language. None of them want that Bhili should be the medium of instruction. Hindi has been accepted as the medium of instruction in schools. Unlike Bhils and Korkus, Mundas and Santals are much conscious about their traditional language. These two important tribal groups of the Chotanagpur always remained on the forefront for the recognition of their language as regional as well as state language. Some of them also asserted that these languages are the oldest in India, and therefore, must be recognised at the national level. Linguistic consciousness has played a vital role for bringing unity among the tribes in the Chotanagpur region and they insist that education must be imparted in their own mother-tongue up to the higher level.
The choice of Hindi among the Bhils and Korkus is basically social and economic. The zeal to feel into the main stream of national culture, the Bhils of Banswara and Korkus of East Nimar opted for Hindi while the Mundas and the Santals have different idea altogether and looked this phenomenon as a sign of vanishing their language and culture. They feel proud of their culture and language and do not want to lose them. In fact they want to preserve them at any cost.

REFERENCES


