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WELCOME NEW YEAR 2009

ASECA CHANNEL & ALL INDIA ASECA WISH HAPPINESS, PEACE, PROSPERITY AND QUALITY LIFE ON THE EVE OF NEW YEAR TO SUBSCRIBERS, WELL WISHERS, CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

Editorial

The invention of Ol Chiki has been regarded as a milestone in the Santal society for being a tool to keep the society together. Our forefathers' have accepted it since its inception and continuously endeavoured for its promotion, propagation and use. The main issue which dominated during the language movement for the demand of enlisting Santali language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution was the recognition of Ol Chiki along with the language. The demand of language recognition was not made in isolation rather Ol Chiki was the fulcrum of collective resolve and the same spirit is and will be continuing also.

There is not an iota of doubt in the minds of the people who follow, love and admire this language about the presence and importance of Ol Chiki. The Santals (including the persons who claim to be Santals) can be grouped into 1. Those who do not pursue it but are of the opinion that the language should have this unique script – Ol Chiki, 2. A majority section who actually follow and pursue this language and script and are of the opinion that this unique script will only be helpful in ameliorating status, can elevate social status from an ignorant society to an enlightened society, 3. This section who have the opinion that language is important than the script and as long as the language is preserved, emphasis should not be given on script. This last section though are very minuscule in number can create havoc during implementation of the language education or use of language in any forum. These sections who are not vocal in the open are seen as creating trouble for this language on every single available opportunity to them.

The present understanding and belief is that once Santali language is recognized as an Indian language, everything is hale and hearty and intervention of general

public is minimal, or irrelevant. But ground reality is otherwise. This development (on being recognized) has thrown open new areas of challenges i.e. in streamlining the energies available with the people or the society; in coming face to face with the regional languages with the patronage of the ruling class; a sense of emancipation with an ever increasing responsibility; to share the clout with the recalcitrant class who refuse to share; a fear of alienation from the mainstream which has hitherto promoted only the regional language; the required or desired confidence in meeting the standards of literary creations and values and an inherent doubt whether to develop through this model.

The confusions are many and the number of solution seekers are also many. Interesting part in this issue is that the solution seekers actually are the solution givers. But they have limited their roles in seeking explanation or raising doubts only. They are yet to come out with a proper explanation on what is being done and what ought to be done. In the absence of a proper explanation or a road map from them they are naturally be expected to follow the ongoing path accepted by the majority. When solution givers are reduced to behave as solution seekers due to factors known or unknown to them, the situation and facts can really be imagined. The energies which are used negatively or inconsistently need to be transformed as positive energies and channelized in the proper direction so that the implementation of language promotion schemes can be a smooth affair. There is solution to every problem when solution is sought keeping in mind the significance and merit of the issue. One needs to remember that time has come to act fast as time does not wait for anybody. An opportunity missed now is missed for ever. There needs to develop an understanding keeping in mind the goal and ambition of the society and people at large.

Unicode of Ol Chiki

It was a pleasant surprise to discover that one Mr. Michael Everson has submitted a **proposal dated 29th January 1999 for encoding the Ol Cemet' script in the Basic Multilingual Plane (BMP) of the Universal Character Set (UCS) in the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO)**. As a layman, one can understand that it is a standardization process of the Ol Chiki for its use in the field of Information Technology.

According to ISO, standardization is the process of formulating and applying rules for an orderly approach to a specific activity for the benefit and cooperation of all concerned, and in particular for the promotion of the over all economy, considering due safety requirements.

As computers deal with numbers, letters and other characters are stored by assigning a unique number to each one. This codification (Unicode) provides a unique number for every character, which facilitates working irrespective of platform, programme or language. The Unicode Standards are being adopted by major IT industry leaders for application.

The proposal for encoding Ol Chiki was revised subsequently and submitted as revised proposal dated 3rd November 2002 and 21st September 2005. During the period, the members of an internet group "wesanthals" chipped in to provide help and material to the original proposer. In this phase, Prof. R. C. Hansdah and Er. N. C. Murmu on behalf of this group established communication with the proposer. In this phase also, it was not a smooth sailing affair as some group chose to lodge their protest to the concerned authority against its encoding. This move was turned down equally by the Santals in general and the ISO authority in particular. The concerned Secretariat wrote back to the protesters explaining the reasons and policy of the Institution in undertaking encoding of different scripts of the World.

Finally, the concerned Committee of the ISO in 24th April 2008 approved encoding of Ol Chiki Script and assigned unique code for each character.

In the meantime, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Department of Information Technology, Govt. of India convened a meeting at Delhi to finalize recommendations to be sent to Unicode for representation of four languages i.e. Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali. The meeting was convened on 18.11.2006 by inviting respective language experts and representatives from other related Institutions like Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Secretaries of IT Departments of Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal and Orissa and representatives from National Book Trust and Kendriya Hindi Sansthan. Shri N. C.

Murmu and Shri P. C. Hembram represented Santali. It may be mentioned that Devanagari script is being used for Bodo, Dogri and Maithili languages. When Santali came up for discussion, it was revealed that the existing Devanagari Code page will be extended for Santali also by finalizing some additional language specific characters. The members representing Santali explained the development of Ol Chiki Unicode and also expressed their reservation in adopting Devanagari code page. The excerpts of the minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2008 pertaining to Santhali issued by Department of Information Technology (DIT) is reproduced as follows: "the experts attending the meeting for proposal for encoding Ol Chiki script which is the major requirement of Santhali speaking people was submitted by them. Using Devanagari for writing Santhali, the experts could not off hand tell any specific requirement, however they informed that they will discuss this in Santali Writers' forthcoming meeting scheduled on November 11th and 12th, 2006 at Ghatsila, Jharkhand and revert back with the recommendation."

The resolution adopted at the above stated Conference "The Central Ministry of Information & Technology should accept only Ol Chiki script for Santali language" was forwarded to the Ministry as per the requirement in the 18th October 2008 meeting.

Thereafter, DIT has circulated Unicode document for Ol Chiki (Santhali) script for review vide its letter dated 4th July 2007. It was understood that DIT is also pursuing the matter of encoding Ol Chiki. However, DIT again vide its letter dated 21st April 2008 had convened a meeting on 29th April 2008 to finalise the recommendation for Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali languages for their submission to Unicode Technical Committee for its consideration. Shri P. C. Hembram from All India ASECA attended the meeting and to his surprise it was revealed that DIT is again pursuing the Devanagari script for Santali language. When asked about the desirability of extending Devanagari code page (read Devanagari will be used as script for Santali language) to Santali language on the background that Ol Chiki has already been unicoded, DIT informed that they are again pursuing the case on the request of the concerned Department of Ranchi University. The discussion could not be progressed further as it was argued and submitted that Devanagari would not be accepted as the script of Santali language "Ol Chiki" has been unanimously accepted by the people. It is understood that DIT has now solicited the assistance of All India Santali Writers' Association in finalizing the document. There is a proposal to write protest letter to DIT.

It is important to note that there is a need to talk to the people who are placing demand to the DIT for an amicable solution in addition to writing letters to DIT.

Scheduled Communities: A social Development profile of SC/STs (Bihar, Jharkhand & W.B)

(Source: Planning Commission)

{Continued from December 2008 issue}

Jharkhand

In Jharkhand, the average monthly expenditure on food items is 69 percent, and on non- food items it is 31 percent.

Table 4.49 : Food and non-food expenditure among the Scheduled Castes in Jharkhand (Monthly household expenditure in Rupees) (Not reproduced)

- The percentage of expenditure on food items is 65.6 for the Chamar and quite high for the Dom at 70.2 percent.

West Bengal

The average monthly expenditure on food items is 68.1 percent and on non-food items it is 31.9 percent.

Table 4.50 : Food and non-food expenditure among the Scheduled Castes in West Bengal (Monthly household expenditure in Rupees)(Not reproduced)

- The expenditure on food items is over 70 percent among the Dom (75.6), Bauri (74.1), Konai (73.6), Bhuiyan (72.8), Bagdi (71.3) and Kami (70.3).
- It is lowest among the Mal with 60 percent.

Scheduled Tribes

Jharkhand

Among the tribal communities in Jharkhand the overall percentage of monthly expenditure on food items 67.7, and on non-food items it is 32.3 percent.

Table 4.51 : Food and non-food expenditure among the Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand (Monthly household expenditure in Rupees) (Not reproduced)

- The percentage of monthly expenditure on food items is very high among Ho (77.4%), Mahali (75.4%) and Lohara (72.1%).

- It is about 62 percent among the Santhal and 56 percent each among the Munda and Oraon.
- Munda and Oraon are urban-based and their expenditure on non- food items is higher.
- However this is not the case with Lohara, more than 80 percent of whom are in our urban sample population.

West Bengal

In West Bengal, the average monthly expenditure on food items for the Scheduled Tribes is 67.9 percent. The rest, 32.1 percent is spent on non- food items. This is very similar to that of the Scheduled Castes in West Bengal and Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand.

Table 4.52 : Food and non-food expenditure among the Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal (Monthly household expenditure in Rupees) (Not reproduced)

- The average monthly expenditure on food items exceed 70 percent for the Munda (74.4%), Mahali (73.8%) and Oraon (71.7%) tribes.
- The percentage of expenditure on food items is less than the overall State average for the Santhal (66.6) and Bhumij (64.4). Among the Lodha it is very close to overall average of 68 percent.

In conclusion, the significant observation to be made is with regard to the Dhobi in Bihar who spend 60 percent on non-food items. For the urban-based Oraon and Munda in Jharkhand too this is quite high at around 44 percent.

Quality of Life : Housing and Health. **Housing**

Housing is one of the most fundamental needs of human existence. It not only has to do with security of existence, providing shelter against rain, sun and wild life, but also is a cultural product and an indicator of

quality of life. The quality of housing amenities available and enjoyed, reflect the social and economic status of its occupant. It is for this reason that state intervention in providing housing to socially and economically deprived groups forms a major part of policy for the well-being of its people.

With a view to assessing the nature and quality of housing enjoyed by the Scheduled Castes and Tribes of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, we have sought to find out a few things.

We wished to know the status of housing of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in terms of their dependence on their masters/employers and their independence from them as owners/renters. To what extent have they been beneficiaries of State policies. Are their houses katcha or pucca? Do they have amenities such as drinking water, latrine/bathing facilities, cooking arrangement etc, available within their houses?

Scheduled Caste

Bihar

In Bihar, 64.3 percent of the houses belonging to SCs are self-constructed and owned; 21.9 percent were constructed under Indira Awas Yojana (IAY); and 13.7 percent are offered by maliks. Of the total houses, 52 percent are katcha and 48.0 percent are pucca/semi-pucca.

Table: 5.1 Housing : Ownership Status(Bihar SCs) (Not reproduced)

- The Dusadh, next only to the Dhobi, are the most reliant with 89.4 percent houses self owned and self constructed. However, most of these are kutcha (61.4%). The support from IAY is to the extent of 8 percent. Malik-dependant housing is very low (2.6%).

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- Among the Chamar, 66.0 percent houses are self constructed and owned, 28.3 percent were constructed under IAY and as many as 5.6 percent housing are provided by Maliks. More than half the housing is katcha (53.5%).

- The best beneficiary of the IAY is the Musahar (46.4%). As many as 52.2 percent housing is self-constructed and owned, of which only one is pucca.

Their dependence on the Malik is insignificant (1.4%).

- The caste almost entirely dependent on the Malik is the Chaupal (96.6%). Of these, 67.8 percent are pucca. Strikingly, no housing has been provided under IAY.

Only the Dhobi is cent percent self reliant in housing, almost all of which is pucca. As noted earlier, this is consistent with their uniformly high position among the SCs in the various livelihood parameters.

What needs to be noted is that whilst a good majority of households are selfowned and self-constructed, a significant percentage of households (21.9%) pucca/semi pucca have come through the State intervention of Indira Awas Yojana. The ownership of these too vest with the beneficiary occupants.

Hence, in as many as 86.2 percent households, the right of ownership lies with the occupant. Further, nearly half the houses are pucca/semi pucca (48.0%) .

The conspicuous finding that 13.7 percent of houses provided by Maliks, are almost exclusively concentrated among the Chaupal, possibly indicate some form of persistence of semi- feudal attachment in agrarian relations among them.

(To be continued...)