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Editorial

Celebration is part of life and in fact it gives a direction and dimension to think big and better. Adivasi community is also commemorating the birth as well as other important days of its leaders and heroes. The past is being remembered through the birth or other important days. This burgeoning trend is being noticed all across the country which gives a message that there is a sense of euphoria and an occasion to come together and think something important and immortal. The trend setters are the people with a desire and determination to do something better for the community and the country as a whole. Some section may not agree with the proposition that through these events necessary awareness is being spread and people can see the matter/issues through some renewed vision and vigour. According to these sections this kind of celebration is seldom used for introspection and interpretation. Rather the occasion is being taken as an alibi to merry making and to have fun under the pretext of celebration of the birthdays or other important dates pertaining to Adivasi life.

Recently, birth anniversary of Pandit Raghunath Murmu was being celebrated all across the country and the participation and performance is no less when compared to other celebrities of India for whom official celebrations are being organised and performed. Going by the attendance and voluntary participation of people one sees the bright future at least in the field of literature and language. But the ground reality is something otherwise. None of the Santali literature magazines is regular in publication and are not sustainable due to lack of desired patronage and propagation. The persons who start the venture learn in a very short period of time the hard reality that this venture is not sustainable leave aside the economical viability. The efforts are made in the initial years and later on the spirit dwindles due to absence of patronage and participation.

The reality can be corroborated by the observation of an editor who has recently put on hold publication of a very well organised monthly Santali magazine. According to him, the publication of Santali magazine, books cannot be thought of in the line of

business venture. Till now it is being continued through personal contribution and subsidy. As there is no formidable group to extend support to such venture, all the efforts are going down the drain and in the long run will have very negative and depressing feeling to pursue such objective and initiate such activities. But at the same time it may be mentioned that during the cultural celebration part of the birth anniversary of Guru Gomke, a large number of people gather to grace the occasion. It runs into thousands and if someone sees the level of participation one sure becomes hopeful. But there is a contrast in the sense that out of thousands the sale of any magazine does not cross hundreds. So there is a mismatch between the fact and reality. The fact reveals something whereas the reality is otherwise.

A bare minimum sale is the requirement for any magazine or any literature books to continue and then only regeneration process could take place. In the absence of such scope and possibility it becomes indeed very difficult to take any process to a further step. The hiatus is there and should it continue to be there is the paramount question. If it persists then there will be no outstanding outcome and the hope of achieving tangible as well as intangible benefits will remain as a distant dream. The occasion, therefore, needs to be utilised as a platform for introspection and interaction. Going by the present trend, only quantitative aspects are being achieved whereas the qualitative aspects takes a back seat which is required to be set right. The aspiration is there, emotional belongingness is there, and only requirement is the integration of sense of belongingness and the aspiration scale. The over or only emphasis on the cultural festivity should be limited and planning policy, evolving strategy, pulling together resources etc. should be the paramount aspects. The much needed future courses of actions should be chalked out during such occasions and regular review processes would be helpful in bringing a literary movement in a situation when gradually passivity in this area is creeping in the minds of the general OI Chiki literature loving people.

THE LOGIC OF OL CHIKI

A Tribute to Guru Gomke Pandit Raghunath Murmu

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Sometime during the mid 80s my friend Ms. Kaveri Dutt was joining her husband at Rairangpur. She asked me what she can do in such a remote place. I said why, the best thing you can do is to visit Pandit Raghunath Murmu and write down his memoirs. She went and visited his house. His son came out and said sadly "How would you know? After all no newspaper published the news of his death, let alone an obituary. He died last month".

I have never met Pandit Raghunath Murmu or read his biography. I hope a good biography does exist by now. But I knew him by his works and by legends about him. He was known for his knowledge of a large number of languages. He certainly knew Santhali, Ho, Mundari, Oriya, Bengali, Sadan and Hindi. Possibly he knew many more. He has certainly given a lot of thought to the problem of scripts. He was confronted with Santhali being written in Bengali, Oriya, Devnagari and Roman scripts. He found none of them satisfactory for his language. And so he invented a new script for Santhali called OL Chiki. He cut his letters in wood himself and printed them on his own press at Rairangpur. He printed several books to help Santhali people to learn to read their own language. I have met one very tall and handsome Santhali person travelling all over Jharkhand and propagating OL Chiki. He was dressed in green and had a white strip across his shoulder on which OL Chiki letters were printed. He used to sing beautifully "Bono Jangalo Bhora Amaro Jharkhanda".

OL Chiki was recognised by the West Bengal govt. in 1978 for the instruction of Santhal children at the primary stage. When Guru Gomke (the 'Great Teacher' - the title of Pandit Raghunath Murmu) was reportedly asked by the former Maharaja of Mayurbhanj, to cease propagating the script because it was divisive, the Guru was said to have replied that he would gladly do so if the Maharaja would see to that the Oriya script was also abandoned!

I don't know the reasons and logic Pt. Murmu had for the invention of his script. I can only tell how I came to appreciate his efforts. I believe this may throw some light on the vexed question of scripts in India. India is a home of 10 syllaberies (scripts) that are used by dominant national groups. These are:

Devnagari (Hindi, Marathi, Nepali & Sanskrit and as link script officially for the whole country), Assamese, Bengali, Oriya, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujrati and Panjabi.

Apart from these syllaberies we also have two alphabetic scripts: Perso-Arabic: Urdu, Sindhi, Kashmiri and Panjabi. (Panjabi-mainly before partition and in Pakistan). Roman: English, many adivasi languages, particularly in the North -East, but also in Jharkhand. It is also often used as a link script for Indian languages in the form of postal addresses, telephone directories, vehicle numbers and so on.

For more than hundred years some voices have been heard for a common script in India. Apart from Devnagari and Roman, several attempts have been made to modify them or even invent new scripts as a common script for India. All these attempts have failed miserably. There is also a lot of energy for imposing Devnagari script on scriptless languages, that is, mainly Adivasi languages. They have usually been using Roman script mainly due to the efforts of Christian missionaries in the field of education among Adivasis. For Santhali, it was P. O. Boddington a missionary, who introduced the Roman script as a common script for Santhali spoken in different states. It is however worth remembering that Christian missionaries have also taken a lead in standardising many Indian scripts, preparing and publishing their grammars and dictionaries.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu invented and printed in his own script more than 30 years ago. Recently I have even seen a new script for Ho language. I also understand that they have developed software for using these scripts on a computer. Since they are all alphabetic scripts, it is easy to design software for them.

Will the Adivasi use these new scripts or will they use one of the existing scripts? It is for them to decide. Different historical conditions will probably evolve a different solution for each language and region. Below I will describe how I came to appreciate Pt. Raghunath Murmu's position.

I belong to the dominant/ powerful national groups in India. However being Kannadiga, I belong to a somewhat middle position. Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Marathi & English etc. are more powerful groups. So I ended up learning the languages of the dominant groups viz. English, Hindi, Marathi and Bengali. My knowledge of my own language, Kannada is poorest.

I began, like many others, to think that India should have one common script either Roman or Devnagari. The arguments for either of them are quite powerful and many good people who are interested in the subject have taken one or the other position.

Then I came across "Nagari Lipi Parishad" and their journal "Nagari Sangam". I became a life member

and so for the last 10 years I have been reading their views which mainly support Nagari as a link script in India. Most of the articles try to prove the superiority of the Nagari script, many authors advocate adoption of Nagari as common script for India and some even voice for Vishwa Nagari for the whole world, since, in their opinion it is the best script !

As I read the journal, I began to think that if the Nagari script is all that great why don't all the Indian nationalities (like Maharashtrians) adopt it? Over time the reasons became clear to me. They cannot undo their written and especially the printed history. They have much to lose and little to gain. That is how B. C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of W. Bengal put it - "If the whole country wants to adopt Bengali script, I have no objection" meaning to say that we Bengalis will never change our script. The irony is that it was a Bengali, Justice Mitra, who in 1898 first began the Ek Lipi Parishad proposing a common script for India. It is also poignantly brought out by Sindhi Sahitya Parishad which repeatedly rejected Devnagari script and retained their Perso-Arabic script. Their logic was that Sindhi Hindus today are a land less people and if they lose their script also they will lose their cultural heritage of the great Sufi saints.

Contrast this with the tragedy of Panjabi. The Indian Panjabis changed their script from Perso-Arabic to Gurumukhi. Now many important Panjabi writers have stopped writing in Panjabi and are writing in Hindi. They have been cut off from their own literary tradition of Bulle Shah and other Sufi saints. They are also cut off from their Pakistani brothers and sisters who continue to write Panjabi in Perso-Arabic. Only the T. V. with its shallow culture gives them a bridge.

On the other hand Bengali did not suffer due to partition. Both sides continued to use the same script and hence there was an unbroken continuity. In fact after the formation of Bangladesh it got strengthened since the border is fairly porous.

The story of Outer Mongolia is also very instructive. When they joined the Soviet Union, they changed their ideogrammatic script to Cyrillic (Russian) alphabetic script. After the break of the Soviet Union, they have gone back to their original script. They have got a UNESCO grant to transliterate important literary efforts during the soviet period into their original ideogrammatical script. However, recent reports suggest that they have again gone back to the Russian alphabet.

Closer at home we have the case of Metei in Manipur. Metei Community had a script called Metei Mayek. More than 270 years ago, Bengali replaced the indigenous script on a decree by the then king Pamheiba, who burnt all scriptures and other books written in Metei script. The king's action was influenced by Santidas Gosain, a Bengali missionary, who came from Sylhet, now in Bangladesh, to spread Vaishnavite culture. In the year 2005 there was an agitation to bring back Metei Mayek. Demonstrators burnt down Manipur's oldest library containing lakhs of Manipuri textbooks written in Bengali script. Finally on May 14, the chief minister Okram Ibodi Singh had to agree to their demands. Meteis live on the plains and form half the population of Manipur. The government also decided to use the Roman script for the tribals living in the hills. Thus the Bengali script died in the only place outside Bengal.

{To be continued...}

Folklore of the Santal Parganas

Translated by **Cecil Henry Bompas** of the Indian Civil Service, 1909

{ASECA CHANNEL intends to publish the stories in order to familiarize the stories among the general public for their better appreciation}

{Continued from June 2014 issue}

XII. The Changed Calf.

There was once a cowherd named Sona who saved a few rupees and he decided to buy a calf so as to have something to show for his labours; and he went to a distant village and bought a bull calf and on the way home he was benighted. So he turned into a Hindu village and went to an oilman's house and asked to be allowed to sleep there. When the oilman saw such a fine calf he coveted it and he told Sona to put it in the stable along with his own bullock and he gave him some supper and let him sleep in the verandah. But in the middle of the night the oilman got up and moistened some oil cake and plastered it over the calf; he then untied

his own bullock and made it lick the oil cake off the calf, and as the bullock was accustomed to eat oil cake it licked it greedily; then the oilman raised a cry, "The bullock that turns the oil mill has given birth to a calf." And all the villagers collected, and saw the bullock licking the calf and they believed the oilman. Sona did not wake up and knew nothing of all this, the next morning he got up and went to untie his calf and drive it away, but the oilman would not let him and claimed the calf as his own. Then Sona called the villagers to come and decide the matter: but they said that they had seen him bring no calf to the village and he had not called any of them to witness it, but they *had* seen the bullock licking the calf; why should the bullock lick any but

its own calf? No one ever saw a bullock lick a strange bullock or cow and so they awarded the calf to the oilman. Then Sona said that he would call someone to argue the matter and he went away meaning to get some men from the next village: but he lost his way in the jungle and as he went along a night-jar flew up from under his feet; he called out to it to stay as he was in great distress, and the bird alighted and asked what was the matter, and Sona told it his trouble. Then the night-jar said that it would argue the matter for him but it must have a colleague and it told Sona to go on and ask the first living being he met to help; so he went on and met a jackal and the jackal agreed to help the night-jar, and they told him to call the villagers to the edge of the jungle and not to let them bring any dogs with them. So Sona brought all the villagers to the jungle and the night-jar and jackal sat side by side on a stone.

Then Sona asked the villagers whether they would let him take away the calf or no, and they persisted in their previous opinion. At last one man said, "What are your advocates doing? it seems to me that they are asleep." And at this the two woke up with a start and looked about them, and the night-jar said "I have been asleep and dreamed a dream: will you men please hear it and explain its meaning?"

And the jackal said, "I too have had a dream, please explain it for me. If you can explain the meaning you shall keep the calf and, if not, the boy shall have it." The villagers told them to speak and the night-jar said, "I saw two night-jar's eggs and one egg was sitting on the other; no mother bird was sitting on them, tell me what this means." And the jackal said, "I saw that the sea was on fire and the fishes were all being burnt up, and I was busy eating them and that was why I did not wake up, what is the meaning of this dream?" And the villagers said. "The two dreams are both alike: neither has any meaning; an egg cannot sit on an egg, and the sea cannot catch fire." The jackal said, "Why cannot it be? If you won't believe that water can catch fire why do you say that a bullock gave birth to a calf? Have you ever seen such a thing? Speak," And they admitted that they had never seen a bullock have a calf, but only cows. "Then," said the jackal, "explain why you have given the oilman a decree." And they admitted that they were wrong and awarded the calf to Sona and fined the oilman five rupees for having deceived them.

XIII. The Koeri and the Barber.

There was a well-to-do man of the Koeri (cultivating) caste and opposite his house lived a barber who was very poor; and the barber thought that if he carried on his cultivation just as the Koeri did he might get better results; so every day he made some pretext to visit the Koeri's house and hear what work he was going to do the next day, and with the same object he would listen outside his house at night; and he exactly imitated the Koeri: he yoked his cattle and unyoked them, he ploughed and sowed and transplanted just when the Koeri did and the result was good, for that year he got a very fine crop. But he was not content with this and resolved to continue to copy the Koeri; the Koeri suspected what the barber was doing and did not like it. So he resolved to put the matter to the test and at the same time teach the barber to mind his own business. In January they both planted sugar cane, and one day when the crop was half grown the barber was sitting at the Koeri's house and the Koeri gave orders to his servants to put the leveller over the crop the next day and break it down; this was only a pretence of the Koeri's, but the barber went away and the next day crushed his sugar cane crop with the leveller, the whole village laughed to see what he had done; but it turned out that each root of the barber's sugar cane sent up a number of shoots and in the end he had a much heavier crop than the Koeri.

Another day the Koeri announced that he was going to sow *but* (pulse) and therefore ordered his servants to bring out the seed and roast it well, that it might germinate quickly; and the barber hearing this went off and had his seed *but* roasted and the next day he sowed it, but only a very few seeds germinated, while the crop of the Koeri which had not really been roasted sprouted finely. The barber asked the Koeri why his crop had not come up well, and the Koeri told him that it must be because he had not roasted the seed enough; the few seeds that had come up must have been those which had been roasted most. But in the end the laugh was against the Koeri, for the few seeds of the barber's which germinated, produced such fine plants that when he came to thresh them out he had more grain than the Koeri, and so in 3 or 4 years the barber became the richer man of the two.

{To be continued....}

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