

## An Attempt for Language Development : The Adi Experience

Tamo Mibang

The Adis are the prominent tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Adi is a common name consisting of a number of sub-tribes like Bori, Bokars, Ramos, Pailibos, Galos, Minyongs, Padams, Pasis, Milangs, Panggis, Komkars, Shimongs, Karkos and Ashings. They have different tongue at their homes and as such there are ten dialects,<sup>1</sup> yet they are Adis and they belong to one linguistic group. They have no script of their own. One of their myths tells that they had their script. Their script and laws were written on deer skin. But due to their constant movement, they became hungry and out of temptation they roasted and ate it. Thus they lost their script. The Mimats (the Tibetans) got their script written on stone and so they could retain the art of writing, and the Mipaks (the Plain people) on Kolung Anne i.e. the leaf of wild banana and they kept on copying.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian Missionaries and the British Administration tried to introduce the Roman script in the Adi area. J. F. Needham the first Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya learned the Adi language as well as the Miris, and he prepared an "Outline Grammar of Shaiyang Miri Language" in 1885.<sup>3</sup> J. H. Lorrain undertook in compiling the 'Dictionary of the Miri-Abor Language'<sup>4</sup> which made its appearance in 1907. The Christian Missionaries also translated the Bible into Miri-Adi language and prepared the Padam-Abor primer in Roman script, which are later on called the 'Padam Akhar'<sup>5</sup>. In 1946-47 some books written in Adi language in Roman script were introduced in the schools of Sadiya. Okep Tayeng was the first Adi to write and publish book in Roman script and he is still popular for his writings in Padam Akhar. But his efforts could not be sustained because of the poor response and encouragement both from the people and the Government.

After the independence of the country, the most sensitive question of script and language in the whole scheme of educational development was finally initiated by the Administration. It was

originally decided that the local language should be used as the medium of instruction in the schools of NEFA. Text-books prepared in local languages since 1951 were in Devanagari script. In a directive issued on 30.5.58, we read as follows :

*The mother tongue of the children (tribal language written in Devanagari script) should be the medium of instruction throughout the primary stage. Hindi should also start as a compulsory subject from class 1 onwards (i. e. third schooling year). After the student have appeared in the L. P. Examination through Hindi medium (till such time as Hindi is replaced by the language text-books), they should be brought to a school being run through the Hindi medium.*<sup>6</sup>

The feeling of the average Indians was that under British Rule in tribal India the language has been lost, the culture of the people has decayed. Now their language must be developed ; it should grow as other languages have grown and become richer, more flexible and more exact instrument for conveying their thought.

Adi primers were written ; books of short stories and songs were being prepared by some senior Adi students like Oshong Ering and Talom Rukbo at Shillong in order to give the people a written literature of their own, and were introduced in the primary schools in the Adi speaking area in 1958-59. It was a good beginning. 'One cannot forget one's mother. One of the great contributions of the mother to the growing child is the tongue. Language steps in to give expression to the affinity between the mother and the issue. Mother tongue does instinctively become the tongue of the mother. This is the case not only with the human, but with all beings in whom sound plays its part in giving expression to the surges within. The heritage that is to last life-long is the mother tongue. Mother and mother tongue are interveined. In the initial stage, love of the language of the mother has to be cultivated as exclusively as the love of the mother herself. It is natural, one cannot change one's parentage, try however much one may, and even so one cannot go in for a substitute to the mother tongue for any expediency what so ever.'

Padam-Minyong language was taken as a lease for developing Adi language. Suddenly within a year, misunderstandings cropped up among the Adi students, even some influential public leaders joined hands with the students. In fact, some students of some sub-tribes thought that the NEFA Administration was attempting to impose the language of Padam-Minyong on them. This maiden effort was misinterpreted to the people. The NEFA Admini-

stration was put in dilemma. It manifestly appeared that the language issue was going to create a problem for the innocent people of NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh. Thus parochial outlook and misunderstanding among the college students and Adi leaders had nipped this marvellous effort in the bud. It may also be admitted that there was none to mediate the issue, to tell the truth and to rectify their attitude. Since then the Adis remain dumb. However, from a linguistic point of view, there is no difference between language and dialect. Each dialect is as good as any other dialect and is capable of expressing anything pertaining to its own culture and heritage. But it is also true that some dialects gain importance over the other owing to some reasons and it is chosen as a norm and gain additional prestige of a standard language. Late Tamik Dabi, one of the influential members, who spent his youthful days as area Superintendent with all sections of the Adis said, "Pasighat language must be accepted as a common lingua-franca of the Adis and NEFA, because it is simple, refine and lucid and is known and spoken by a large group of people in NEFA."<sup>8</sup> We have seen some instances that for developing Assamese language Sib-sagar language was taken as base, and likewise Hindi from Meerut and consequently a refine Assamese or Hindi language was developed. Colloquial language is everywhere till now, but we human being are to care for the growth of our language and literature.

It is pertinent to state that though the Adis call themselves as Padams, Galos, Minyongs or Boris in different names, they are Adis; their physique, manner, habit and their tradition, culture and religion are the same. In fact they speak the same dialect with a little variation in pronunciation. 'Although there are dialectical variations between the sub-tribes of the Adis; these are negligible if one has to acquaintance with the dialects of both the Padam-Minyong and the Galos. Most of the root-words of all sections of the Adis are the same'<sup>9</sup> As for instance, donam--to eat, anam--to come, kanam--to see, lanam- to take and ngo—I, no-you, bi- he or she, bulu—they etc. are the same.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) demanded for the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in the schools of Arunachal Pradesh and the Roman script for their local languages. The Government of India accepted the demand and consequently English was introduced as first language and Hindi as second language in 1970 71. But no interest was shown towards local language. However, people also did not insist on it. In 1972-73, the citizens of Pasighat again adopted

the Padam Akhar of 1946-47 with partial modifications, and a monthly magazine "Ngargo" was published in Adi language.<sup>11</sup> It was considered to be the mouthpiece of the Adis. This effort was also given up in 1976-77 for financial constraints. Neither donation from the people nor grants-in-aid from the Government was coming forth for such literary activities.

The Adis have never lost their heart. They continued to proceed slowly and steadily. Finally in 1982 'ADI AGOM KEBANG' (Adi Sahitya Sobha) was formed at Pasighat under the guidance of Talom Rukbo. At least some intellectuals joined hands with Rukbo. This organisation has voluntarily come forward to develop the Adi language as one of the major languages, with the status of school language at primary level. This Kebang has prepared an acceptable script taking the Roman script for the Adis. The Memorandum of the Adi Agom Kebang 1982, reads :

- A. *The Adi Agom Kebang (Adi Sahitya Sobha) herein after referred to as Kebang is purely a socio-cultural and literary voluntary welfare organisation of the Adis for the development of their traditional indigenous socio-religio cultural literature and to guide its promotion and preservation*
- B. *It aims at setting up an Agom Kebang for all the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh for the development of their language and literature through seminars, discussions and publication of literature books to educate the mass people with their own tongue ; to assist and guide the existing periodicals, magazines published by various educational institutions of the district particularly in respect of Adi section of the periodicals for their improvement and progress in future, and to conduct literary activities through competitions among the talents through indigeneous language and literature for future development improvement and promotion of Adi Agom Kebang.*<sup>12</sup>

In this year they published the 'Adi Agom Luponane' (Adi language primer). This Adi primer has 28 alphabets.<sup>13</sup> Thus the problem of the script has been solved. In the fourth annual conference of the Kebang at Bolung village on 26th and 27th April, 1985, the following important resolutions were adopted :

1. *The dialect spoken in foot hill areas of East Siang, Dibang Valley of the Adis should be adopted as the base of the written language of the Adis and words from Upper area*

of East Siang, West Siang and then the Galos, Bori and Bokars should also be encouraged to be used by the writers.

2. The term *Adi Agom Kebang* should continue for the time being but consultation for having a common name 'Tani Agom, for all Tani group should be done with other members of Tani group for which representatives from other communities of Tani group should also be invited to *Adi Agom Kebang* annual conference in future.
3. The *Adi* language should be introduced in L. P. schools of *Adi* speaking area. In Night schools also *Adi* classes should be introduced with immediate effect.<sup>14</sup>

Talom Rukbo, General Secretary and the guiding spirit of the *Agom Kebang* fervently appeals to all, 'We invite all the intellectual group of the *Adis* and other members of Tani Group to participate in the next conference of *Adi Agom Kebang* with a view to bringing an atmosphere to create a closure understanding among the people of Tani Group through literature and culture in the near future to build a strong society and country.'<sup>15</sup> In 1987-88, a magazine, '*Ngargo Lupo*' i.e. morning talk was published by the *Kebang*.

As a matter of fact, the *Adi Agom Kebang* has been approaching the Government of Arunachal Pradesh to introduce the *Adi* language in the primary level in the *Adi* speaking area since 1982-83 but without any results so far. Reasons are not known but it is tacitly concluded that there is a fear in certain circles. Since language issue has always been a vexed problem in the country today, probably the State Government views that in a state where there are a number of tribes and sub-tribes with a variety of dialects, *Adi* language cannot be introduced even in the primary level at this stage, which is likely to create problem even among the *Aids*. But the *Adi Agom Kebang*'s demand is very logistic that their language should be introduced in the *Padam-Minyong* speaking area and the Government is ought to take this into account. The *Adis* cannot remain dumb for years to come. To-day, they want to justify their existence through own language and literature. It is true that educational experts in the country to-day are unanimous in advocating education in the mother tongue at least upto high School level. This has been applied in many states in letter and spirit but the same principle is not applied to other states. It is pity that Arunachal Pradesh, the biggest state in the North-East inhabited by 26 major tribes and a number of sub-tribes with a population of 6,31,839,<sup>16</sup> with rich culture and tradition is without a written language.

In this connection, it can be stated that the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission set up by the Government of India 1960 under the Article 339 of the Constitution severely criticised the reluctance of the state Governments to satisfy the tribal's demands for primary education in their own languages. Under Article - 350A of the Constitution, every state must endeavour to provide children of minority groups with adequate facilities for instruction in their mother tongue at the primary state of education but the Commission pointed out that some of the states had taken this matter very casually and failed to provide text-books even in the major tribal languages.<sup>17</sup> Thus it appears that the prospects for the future of tribal languages are far from encouraging. However, it may be admitted that because of growth of political consciousness, to-day people are trying to evaluate their identity by way of reviving their language. In North-Eastern India the Khasis, the Nagas, the Mizos and the Miris have developed their language as literary language suitable for as medium of instruction. The Adis have now realised the importance of other languages like English, Hindi, Assamese and Bengali etc. and so to have wider communication possible by developing their language, they, trying to get recognition of it as a medium of instruction in the schools of Adi speaking area particularly in East Siang District and a part of West Siang and Dibang Valley. When people are conscious, interested and really working for language development, due incentive and encouragement must be given to voluntary organisations like Adi Agom Kebang. It is imperative that both the Central and state Government should try to appreciate and develop the interest of the people with special attention in the case of linguistic situation. The Adis are trying hard to strengthen and develop their language into one of the accepted languages of the country.

#### Notes & References :

1. It is from my own knowledge and observation.
2. This is according to Adi myth prevalent among the Adis till now.
3. T. Nyori : "The problem of the script and some of the characteristics of the Adi language' (A seminar paper).
4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.
6. *Important Directives on Administration of NEFA*, p. 165.
7. Swami Chidbhavananda · *The Indian National Education*, p.—287.
8. T. Mibang, *Quest for Common Lingua-Franca in Arunachal Pradesh* (A seminar paper).
9. T. Nyori Referred to as Problem of Script.
10. This from my own knowledge and information.
11. From the record of Adi Cultural and Literary Society, Pasighat.
12. This is from the text of the *Memorandum Of Adi Agom Kebang* 1982.
13. AAK · *Adi Agom Luponane*. p.-1.
14. *Resolutions of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Adi Agom Kebang*, 1985.
15. AAK · *Ngargo Lupo*, p. 3.
16. Census of India 1981, Arunachal Pradesh.
17. *A Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the year 1962-63* (New Delhi), p.271.

II

The Rajbanshi Khatiya family (1910), a central organisation of the Rajbanshi community - was essentially a social organisation. But from the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century they began to change their outlook and decided to take part in National politics also. As a result of this change, the Khatiya family had fielded candidates in the Council Elections between 1920 and 1932 and the Assembly Elections of 1937 and 1946. The