

## **The Significance of Sadri Language in the Socio-Cultural Context of the Oraons in Bangladesh**

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### **Abstract**

*Ethnic languages are in danger throughout the world, which causes various effects on the socio-economic aspects of the concerned people and communities. The current article focuses on issues related to the Oraons ethnic community living in Bangladesh. To get insights into the problem, this paper takes the participants' subjective opinions to comprehend the present situation of their mother tongue in the socio-economic context they live in. The present study indicates that the use of Sadri, the native language of the Oraons, has significantly decreased over time in every sphere of their life, including schooling, social interactions, workplace communications, etc. Even in the family environment, its downward trend is also noticeable. The dominance of the mainstream language, the absence of the written scripts and linguistics practices, and the reluctant attitude of the young generation towards their mother tongue are some of the visible facets of such language decay. Besides, the lack of an ethnic-language-based education policy hinders the transmission of the Sadri language from the present generation to the next.*

**Keywords** Oraons · Sadri · Mother tongue · Indigenous language · Bangladesh

### **1. Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rhetoric, language diversity or the language ecology has been and is one of the most burning issues in the academic sphere and the policy dialogue (Chrosniak, 2010). The world authorities, at one end of the spectrum, are very empathetic concerning the revitalisation of the extinct languages

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(Penfield & Tucker, 2011) as well as the preservation of the endangered tongues (Tulloch, 2006). On the other end, the expansion of neoliberalism as the main force of globalisation imposes severe challenges for the socio-cultural diversities in the world, hence, for the language ecology too (Sharma & Phyak, 2017). As a consequence of the corporate intervention, the role of the nation-states as the main endeavour for securing socio-cultural diversities has been weakened visibly (Hodos, 2002). Unfortunately, the small ethnic communities worldwide are becoming the severe victim of the worldwide trend of monolithic cultural aggression (Precious, 2010). Consequently, the romanticism of language diversity or language ecology has become a utopia for different indigenous groups and their languages; as the extinction and erosion of minority languages continues. Previous studies reveal that in the case of indigenous languages, their assimilation into a predominant language is one of the primary reasons for the extinction of many such languages, thus the erosion of language ecology in the world (Chrosniak, 2010).

The estimated number of languages found in the world is 7,000, which most linguists would agree with (Bhuiyan, 2016; Pereltsvaig, 2012). Currently, many languages have lost their speakers as only 4% of existing languages are spoken and used by 96% of people worldwide (Crystal, 2003). However, earlier, Crystal (2003) speculated that a quarter of the world's language would be extinct within a century. Currently, around 3000 languages are labelled as endangered due to the lack of speakers, whilst about 230 languages have been completely extinct since 1950 (UNESCO, 2010). Existing studies show that globalisation, population displacement, and cross-cultural marriages are the visible reasons for this phenomenon (Faridy & Syaodih, 2017). However, many speakers of the minority languages often shift to the dominant languages, which is often regarded as a more viable option socially and economically (Isern & Fort, 2014; McMahan, 1994). Irrespective of the language's extinction, indigenous languages are probably the first to perish. Currently, the indigenous people correspond to only 6 per cent of the world's population, with over 4000 languages. One such language dies every two weeks (United Nations & Assembly, 2019). The extinction of indigenous languages undoubtedly brings irreparable loss to human society. These languages are not only the mode of communication but a preserver of knowledge, culture, and heritage that took thousands of years to flourish (United Nations & Assembly, 2019). In such a notion, this study tried to focus on the Oraon indigenous people living in Bangladesh and particularly on their language to understand the current situation of their mother tongue in the socio-economic context they inhabited.

## **2. Background of the Study**

The indigenous languages across the world are at stake. On the one hand, different agencies and actors are influenced by the constant compulsion to ingest minority languages. On the other hand, substantial academic and policy endeavours are in place to resurgence dead languages and prevent endangered tongues' decay. These

endeavours, first and foremost, search for the relevant factors or forces that cause survival adversity for the indigenous languages. Considering that, the current study aims to investigate the use and significance of the ‘Sadri’, one of the indigenous endangered languages spoken by the Oraons. They live in the Mukdadpur Village of Bangladesh. Hence, the study’s key research question is: What factors *influence the declining use of Sadri? An additional question is: How do they sense the enduring importance of their mother tongue in their life?*

As the current study stresses the Oraons and their native language (s), a brief presentation on them is essential to comprehend their ethnic origin. The debate lies on the racial and linguistic origin of the Oraons. Some anthropological studies have claimed them Austric is a race, and linguistically they are Dravidians (Taru, 2007). The Oraons first originated in the Indus Valley, dated back to 3500 BCE, and over time they have moved into different parts of the Indian subcontinent (Taru, 2007). The present habitat of the Oraons includes; Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Assam, Andaman and Nicobar, Tripura and Orissa, Paschim Bangla (Wes Bengal) in India (Giménez, 2017; Taru, 2007). However, there is no concrete data regarding the arrival of the Oraons in Bangladesh. Still, during the 1765-1947 period, there had been an Oraon influx from India to Bangladesh that most scholars in the field agree with (Barakat et al., 2009). The present population of Oraons in Bangladesh believes to be around 85,041. They live mainly in the Varendra Region of Bangladesh, whilst the highest number of Oraons reside in the Naogaon district (Taru, 2007); the researchers choose Mukdadpur Village as the field of the study. As to the senior Oraons in Mukdadpur, their ancestors migrated to the current location from India but could not tell exactly when the movement occurred. Although, few speculated that it might have happened before the end of the British period.

Distinctively, the Oraons call themselves Kurkhar (Tirkey, 2015), and their native languages are known as ‘Kurukh’ and ‘Sadri’ (Islam, 2014). Kurukh is categorised as the Dravidian language (Tirkey, 2015), while Sadri is classified as the descendent of Indo-Iranian languages, a blend of Kurukh, ‘Farsi,’ Urdu, and Bengali. Sadri is conceptually considered a mixed language by linguists (Islam, 2014). However, most Oraons live in the Varendra region, and the research set up for this study only speaks Sadri, though the influence of Bengali on them is enormous.

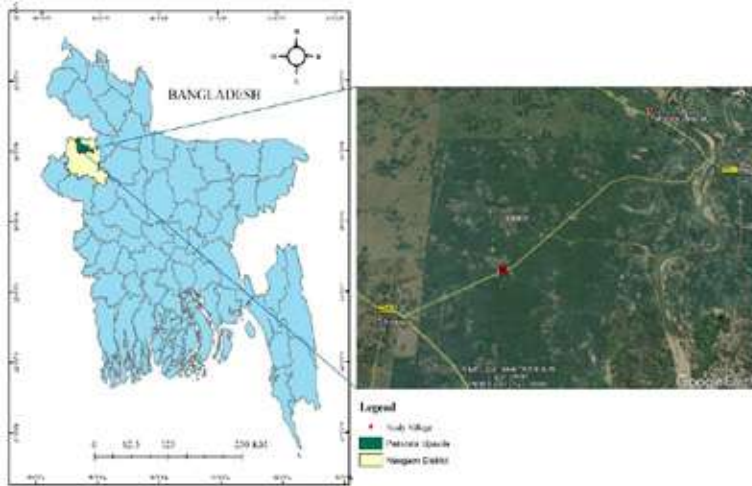
Various factors affect the sustainability of a language in general. Similarly, there are several domains by which a language and its general practices can be maintained for a language to survive. These domains include; family, school, neighbourhood, friend circle, workplace, and religion (Mirvahedi & Jafari, 2021). Once a language loses its use within these domains, it falls into a peril to survive. The practitioners of many minority languages nowadays need to compromise with the use of native tongues, as its use in many respects cannot cope with the existing socio-economic context of the surroundings. The current study has an explicit

submission to this fact. In line with some other studies, for instances; (McMahon, 1994; Isern & Fort, 2014; Setiawan, 2020; Mirvahedi & Jafari, 2021), the current research reveals that the overwhelming domination of the mainstream language threatens the coexistence of Sadri; the mother tongue of the Oraons in Mukdadpur.

### 3. Methodology and Fieldwork

From a methodological point of view, this is a qualitative study based on observation and in-depth interviews. The data for this empirical study was collected from Mukdadpur Village, situated in the Patnitala Upazila of Naogaon District, one of the Varendra districts in Bangladesh (*Figure 1*). Observation and interviews have been used for this study as they are the major components of qualitative research and are widely used in different field-based studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Observation is usually a cover-all for much of what is sensed in the field. In the current study, observation helped to witness the demographic composition of the studied village on the one hand and its economic structure. It has been observed that most of the inhabitants in Mukdadpur are Oraons, followed by a few Bengali Muslim families who own most of the assets, power, and prestige. Besides, observation interviews also played a crucial role in this current study as interviews are the primary research tools that channel the opportunity to know things that the researchers could not know otherwise (Holy & Stuchlik, 1983). More distinctively, an interview allows the interviewer to immerse themselves intimately in the life of the people who are the subject of an inquiry. Everyday experiences and their expressions concerning the question are the goal of a researcher to attain through interviewing people (Skinner, 2012). As the present study aimed at investigating the current status of the Oraons' language and its daily uses in the socio-economic structure of Mukdadpur, interviewing them has been found as an effective tool to comprehend the subject matter precisely, thus come up with the relevant findings. A total of 30 males and females were interviewed using semi-structured questions and were selected purposively. The data's nature is in-depth and relies on the conversational style rather than the face-to-face encounters manner (Skinner, 2012). The average duration of each interview was roughly an hour and fifteen minutes, and the data gathered through interviews were written on the paper. The interview data have been analysed, interpreted, and evaluated narratively, taking the respondents' subjective viewpoints. Relevant verbatim taken from field notes were quoted while deemed appropriate in the data analysis process. Recall error was minimised by using the culturally appropriate local language.

Figure 1: Study Area



The fieldwork of the study was held in two periods. The first phase, which lasted from 26 October to 3 November 2020, was devoted to selecting the study village, followed by seven pretests. And the second part, which lasted from 1 to 17 January 2021, stressed observation and interview. In this study, the name of the participants and the case village has been kept anonymous. The interlocutors were told about the purpose of the study before the beginning of the interview, and those who wanted to participate willingly were incorporated into the study. Considering the ongoing pandemic, necessary safety measures were maintained to avoid health risks.

The researchers had to use a connection to conduct the fieldwork, limiting the chance of an open inquiry. Nevertheless, this form the guaranty of not being hassled as a stranger in an unknown place. If the study could include more villages rather than one, whether that would have influenced the findings of the study or not, but previous research suggests that commonness in the rural villages of Bangladesh exists in all aspects (Toufique & Turton, 2002), incorporating more villages, per se, probably would not have affected the study. Taking the interviews other than the participants' mother tongue would have seemed questionable. However, the connection who accompanied the researchers to the field was an Oraon and fluent in both languages (i.e., Bengali and Sadri). If needed, he could play the role of an interpreter. However, none of the interviewees had a problem communicating in Bengali.

#### 4. Findings of the Study

##### 4.1 Socio-demographic Information of the Studied People

As shown in table-1, a total of 30 Oraons were selected for this study; 21 males and nine females. Most respondents were married and lived in joint families consisting of 5 or more members. Hinduism currently dominates their religious beliefs, whilst

an increasing number of the villagers are converted to Christianity. More than a half (53.3%) of the respondents are literate. In contrast, a moderate number (16.7%) remain illiterate; the rest can only sign their names. The male interviewees mainly earn their livelihood through peasantry and agricultural labour. The female primarily works in household chores, but working as agricultural labourers is also common. The monthly income of most respondents' (46.7%) and their families range from 5000-10000 BDT, while a considerable number of interlocutors' (36.7%) family incomes are less than 5000 BDT.

*Table 1: Socio-demographic data of the respondents*

Variables	Categories	Number
Sex	Male	21
	Female	9
Age	≤ 18 years	4
	19-49 years	16
	50 and above	10
Marital status	Married	24
	Unmarried	6
Number of Family Members	3	6
	4	11
	≥5	13
Religion	Hindu	25
	Christian	5
Education	Literate	16
	Can sign only	9
	Illiterate	5
Monthly income of the family	<5000	11
	5000-10000	14
	11000-20000	4
	Do not Know	1
Profession	Peasant + Agri labor	16
	Housewife + Agri labor	6
	Public representative (UP member)/Politics	1
	Student	6
	Missing	1

#### ***4.2 Language (s) of the Oraons in Mukdadpur***

The Oraons living in Mukdadpur are mostly bilingual. All the interlocutors of this study found equally commendable with both in their mother tongue (Sadri) and Bengali. Sadri is widely used to interact with the same ethnic people daily. Although Sadri is the native language for the Oraons living in the village; however, many failed to mention its name when they were asked about their mother tongue. Some called it 'Oraon language' while others said it 'Adivasi Bhasha' and 'Banua'. It is worth mentioning that out of the 30 interviewees, the majority (10 interlocutors) mentioned it as 'Oraon language' followed by 'Adivasi Bhasha' (6 interlocutors) and 'Banua' (2 interlocutors).

In contrast, only eight interviewees rightly mentioned the name of their mother tongue as ‘Sadri’, and the remaining (4 interlocutors) did not know its name. Unlike the name, most of the respondents agreed about the absence of any specific alphabets for their language, whilst several interviewees did not know whether they had any particular alphabets. It was found that the Oraons use Bengali alphabets for their written communications.

### **4.3 The use of Sadri in Different Social Domains**

The findings revealed that the daily use of the Sadri among the Oraons in Mukdadpur is confined only to the family and own community. In contrast, the use of their mother tongue is unattainable or quite limited at school, within the friend circle, among neighbours, at workplaces, and in religious practices. As to the interview data, none of the educated participants was fortunate to practice their languages at schools as Bengali was the only medium of education which has been illustrated by a 17-year-old respondent, who said:

*“Although there were several Oraon children at school, in my class, I was the only student from my community while attending the primary and high school. At the school, I had to keep speaking in Bengali the whole day to interact with the cohort. Once I returned home, I got puzzled about whether to speak in Bengali or Sadri. Sometimes, I felt the urge to use Bengali in the home environment to develop my Bengali language skills, as I believed knowing Bengali well would help me a great deal to cope with the school environment. Now, I am a college student, and my Bengali language skills have improved over time compared to my school days. Consequently, the space for practising Sadri has become even narrower, and nowadays, I am more habituated to communicating in Bengali than in the earlier days. However, people can still make the difference between the native speakers of Bengali and me, as my accent is rather different from theirs.”*

The villagers having school-going kids mentioned that their offspring have become reluctant to speak Sadri even in their home environment. They perceived Sadri as an inferior language when compared to Bengali. A 30-year-old Oraon man from Mukdadpur takes this issue forward, who claimed:

*“My son is in primary school, and he spends a long hour there every day. Once returned home, he completely avoids using Sadri and gets angry if we try to speak with him in it. His attitudes often compelled the others in the family to keep speaking Bengali with him.”*

Most studied Oraons in Mukdadpur village are small peasants and agricultural labourers. They mainly work in their own village or the neighbouring villages to earn ends meet. Few graduates also seek a job in the government or private sectors and are willing to stay outside their village. In extreme cases, such as during the lean seasons, these people are forced to manage their livelihood through ‘rickshaw-van pulling’. However, the Oraons must work under or with the Bengali-speaking people in all cases. The situations compelled them to avoid speaking their mother

tongue for a considerable time at work. Two respondents give hints about it. For instance, a 40-year-old respondent explained:

*“Most of the year, I work as an agriculture labourer. The employers (Girosto) I work for are mostly Muslims and speak Bengali. Being illiterate, I did not go to school and have learned to speak Bengali through working for employers. Since childhood, I have realised that I must learn to speak Bengali to manage my living.”*

While conducting the fieldwork, a 27-year-old female university graduate from Mukdadpur added:

*“I am a university graduate living in an extended family that includes my husband, an underaged son, parents-in-law and a mentally challenged sister-in-law. After graduation, I tried to find a respectable job in the government and non-government sectors. Still, all my endeavours were unsuccessful due to my lack of proper knowledge and skills in Bengali. Currently, I work as agricultural labour to support my family. All through my life, I have regretted not learning Bengali well. To avoid this mistake, I have kept my eyes on my son to learn Bengali like a native. Thus, I always talk with him in Bengali and encourage all the family members to do the same. I wish my son would not have to face the same fate as me and live a better life.”*

Bengali neighbours mainly inhabit the Oraons in Mukdadpur. Nevertheless, the neighbouring villages also have Santal, Rajbangsi and Pahan communities. People belonging to all these ethnic groups including the Oraons need to interact with each other for their daily life and leisure. During social interactions, they use Bengali as a common language to communicate and hardly use Sadri. An expression of a 52-year-old interviewee can be cited here as an instance:

*“For leisure, I often go to the nearby bazaar, where I meet friends from different ethnic communities besides Oraons. If I keep speaking my mother tongue, then only the other Oraons would understand, not those from other language communities. Therefore, I have no option other than speaking Bengali.”*

Although the women in Mukdadpur seldom go out of their village for leisure, having friends and neighbours from other ethnic groups is not rare. These interethnic friendships give them the pleasure of amity against a stereotyped social life. In such situations, the most convenient way of communicating in Bengali, as illustrated by a 35-year-old woman who mentioned:

*“I have several friends and neighbors from other ethnic communities who resided both in our village and the neighbouring villages, whom I mostly met during my school and college days. We still keep in touch and often meet each other during our leisure time. We generally chat in Bengali while having such interactions.”*

Religion is one of the most important social institutions that is often viewed as a significant source of social solidarity. The most common traditional religious activities of the Oraons are; ‘Karam Puja’, ‘Sharul fest’, ‘Goyal Puja’ etc. Traditionally, these celebrations, specifically the recitation of such religious



verses, were conducted in the Sadri language. However, these celebrations are constantly reducing their distinctions over time and to the glory of the Sadri language. In addition, most participants of this study currently believe and practice Hinduism. They mainly use ‘Sanskrit’ and ‘Bengali’ in their religious practices. A few remaining participants practice Christianity and use Bengali along with English for their spiritual engagement. Two cases can be heard concerning this. For instance, a 16-year-old boy illustrated:

*“Although most of the inhabitants in our village are the believers of Hinduism; however, many traditional religious practices still exist. For instance, Karam Puja has been and is observed by everyone, while some also practice Sharul fest and Goyal Puja. Nonetheless, these trends are declining gradually due to the influence of Hinduism and Christianity. As the practitioners of Hinduism, during the religious happenings, most of us sit and attend the priest’s recitation (a Brahmin). A priest usually uses Sanskrit and partly Bengali while conducting the religious events.”*

Another Oraon of 20-year-old from Mukdadpur said:

*“The Oraons who practice Christianity in the village, including me, are the converted Christian. All the religious rituals and happenings here are maintained and administered by a ‘father’ who is not an Oraon. Besides, in most cases, the father speaks in English or Bengali for all the recitations. Sadri is never used in any sequence of such religious happenings.”*

#### **4.4 The Significance of Sadri among the Oraons**

The data from the studied village shows that Sadri is more used by the individuals who spend most of their time within the community than the outgoing individuals. Hence, the Oraon women and the elderly Oraons have a greater chance to use their mother tongue than the others. A 47-year-old Oraon woman in the study village illustrates it, who mentioned:

*“Nowadays, I spend most of my time in the village as my husband and sons can manage our livelihoods without my participation in the economy. I manage household activities and mostly interact with other women in the village. However, earlier I used to work in day labour and had to interact with Bengali communities as all my employers were Bengali. Therefore, the chance to practice language was limited to the family environment only.”*

The finding explicitly indicates that all interviewed Oraons felt more comfortable speaking in their mother tongue than Bengali. They find it difficult to express their emotions and feelings in Bengali and also struggle to learn its suitable accent. Two individuals mentioned below illustrate their internal conflict of language use. For an example, a 23-year-old Oraon said:

*“I have always struggled to learn Bengali as a second language. I knew I had to learn Bengali to sustain and get a respectable life; thus, I started learning it during my school days. Still, sometimes I lose control over Bengali and start mumbling when expressing my feelings. If I had the opportunity to speak Sadri in all the social spheres, that would make my life much easier.”*

The expression of a 50-year-old Oraon woman can be added here as another instance:

*“I am always concerned about the correctness of the language. In earlier days, when speaking Bengali, I always remained conscious of whether I was speaking it correctly. Hence, I spend more time constructing the sentences. Usually, I think in our language first and then give the verbal expression in Bengali. Fortunately, I do not have to stress too much about the Bengali language as I am getting older and spending most of my time within my community. Nowadays, I feel more relaxed and comfortable not speaking any language other than my own.”*

It was found that any prominent literary publications did not use Sadri. The Oraons do not have any particular literature or books that can be presented as artefacts of their language and ethnicity. Few Oraons mentioned a couple of pamphlets regarding their ancient religion and Sadri words that they claim as the only written materials. The oral version of Sadri mythologies and stories are practised by the older men and women in the community through performing poems, rhymes, and songs occasionally. However, these practices are also getting less and less important among the new generations, as hinted by the number of interviewees. Expressions of two Oraon villagers from Mukdadpur are given here for clarifications. For example, a 19-year-old girl mentioned:

*“I go to school and can read and write Bengali fluently. In school, I read many novels, poems, etc., written in Bengali. However, I do not get any literary works written in Sadri. I think we must produce written volumes of our mythologies and folklores in our own language.”*

Reversibly, a 57-year-old man gave his opinion from a different angle, who illustrated:

*“The young generation of Oraons nowadays spends a lot of time outside of their own community and pursue various alternative sources of recreation. Many spend a significant duration with mobile and digital technologies. They have little interest in Oraons’ mythologies or other sorts of folklore that has been passed from generation to generation through oral communication. However, the written form of the Sadri language could have helped the young generation practice their culture and heritage. Still, the youths should not ignore taking care of the Oral form completely, as it is aligned with our identity.”*

## 5. Discussion

The Oraons living in different parts of the country speak ‘Sadri’ and ‘Kurukh’ as their native languages (Taru, 2007). Nevertheless, the studied Oraons only speak ‘Sadri’ as their mother tongue and cannot talk or communicate in ‘Kurukh’. In the quest to understand the general linguistic use of Sadri in the Oraons’ life, this study invests a significant amount of time with the studied participants to explore different phenomena of language use. For instance, the use of ‘Sadri’ in education,

the workplace, religious events, and socialisation was under careful examination. Moreover, specific importance has been given to exploring the use of native language in their home and family environment. The significance of 'Sadri' among the Oraons and the literary practices based on the language were also under the scope of this study.

Although school is an effective place for children to learn and practice their mother tongue (Panda, 2012); however, the studied Oraons children are deprived of such privilege. For instance, the Oraons' children were compelled to receive education in the mainstream language other than their native language, i.e., Bengali. Not only among the studied population but globally same scenario exists as around 40 per cent of ethnic children do not get an education in their native languages (UNESCO, 2016). In different Oraons inhabited localities in India, such as the central and eastern part of that country, the minority children are compelled to get their education in 'Hindi', 'English' or other state languages rather than their own language (Froerer, 2011; Xalxo, 2018). It is evident from the current study that the Oraons children must undergo bilingualism to get a proper education. Bilingualism is a process that involves two language acquisitions in children by the parents or the environment (Iriani, 2018). Bilingual education is quite common but debatable. Some speculate it will hamper the child's first language, the school dropout rate will increase, and the school failure and so on (Madarova, 2020).

In contrast, a recent systematic review paper on the domain reports favours bilingualism when considering cognitive control. According to the article, more than 50 per cent argued in favour of bilingualism on cognitive control task issues; over a quarter showed mixed intention toward such a claim and little over 17 per cent denied this (van den Noort *et al.*, 2019). A study in Spain illustrates the higher the level of bilingualism, the greater the creativity is and vice versa (Sampedro & Peña, 2019). However, many researchers believe that bilingual instructions alone are not enough to foster better classroom performance, creativity, or cognitive control; instead require a holistic approach, where parents, teachers, and the environment has to play their part (Djahimo & Indahri, 2018; Hopp *et al.*, 2019). In such a scenario, the Oraons school-going kids in Mukdadpur spend a significant amount of time in a monolingual environment without practising their own language, along with the anxiety of the mainstream language. The quality of the education and support in the school they get is also not out of the question. They are also conscious of using the Bengali language properly, explicitly emphasising the accent. Thus, they spend more time practicing this language, sometimes even in their home environment. Therefore, it could be speculated that these kids are slowly isolated from their language ecosystems and could become more conscious of adopting the state language per se, 'Bengali'.

The study finding indicates that the Oraons use Sadri in their home environment with some demographic variations. For instance, the younger generation is less engaged in using Sadri in their home than the older generation.

A study conducted in Indonesia also identified a similar trend as the younger generation is more towards adapting state language and somewhat reluctant to their ethnic language. However, the older generation still respects their heritage language (Setiawan, 2020). In the context of our study, the older generation is also more respectful concerning the use of the mother tongue than the younger counterpart. However, some parents these days encourage their offspring to speak Bengali more, even in their home environment. The most visible reason for such practice is the belief that mainstream language learning will improve their socio-economic condition and open more windows of opportunities in every sphere of life, including education, job, finance and social life. Such a belief is not unique among the Oraon indigenous people in Bangladesh. As a recent study based on the city of Zanjan in Iran highlights, the Azerbaijani-speaking population has a deep attachment to their ethnic language. However, they still promote the state language, 'Farsi', in their home to get various institutional and social support (Mirvahedi & Jafari, 2021).

Most of the males who studied Oraons in this study earn their livelihood through peasantry and agricultural labour. Besides homemaking, the Oraon women also work as day labourers in the farm field. The findings reveal that the Oraons work under the Bengali households and require maintaining communication exclusively in Bengali during work. It is unknown from this study regarding workplace discrimination among the indigenous Oraons in terms of wages, employability, etc. However, a broad spectrum of research suggests worldwide ethnic inequality exists in the labour market (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Quillian *et al.*, 2019). Although previous studies did not find any association between ethnic language and workplace discrimination (Thijssen, Coenders & Lancee, 2021), this particular study found some association between ethnic language and workplace discrimination. For instance, one of the educated female interviewees claimed that despite having a master's degree, she could not get any respectable jobs due to her lack of proper skills in the mainstream language, Bengali.

In the case of socialisation, Oraons encounter their communities and other adjacent small minorities and Bengali people. In such situations, they speak Bengali as most people in that area can understand and speak it. The evidence from the current studies indicates the Oraons accent of Bengali language varies in different degrees when compared with the local Bengali origins. It sometimes could make them inferior to compare with the native speakers. These variations in language skills, along with the distinctive culture of the Oraons, could play a role in the general socialisation practices. However, in socialisation, whether the small minorities, including the Oraons, possess an asymmetrical power relationship with the mainstream Bengali-speaking people or not is a question of further research.

Besides work and education, Sadri is not widely used even during religious practices. Most of the Oraons are believers of Hinduism, followed by Christianity. It is evident that during different religious ceremonies, 'Sadri' as a language is

entirely disregarded. A similar trend can be traced in various studies. For instance, one of the minority groups in Iraq uses the mainstream language rather than their ethnic language during worship (Dweik, Nofal & Al-Obaidi, 2019).

Most interviewees show deep respect and love for their language and culture and want to preserve and practice their language. However, the absence of literary forms of Sadri language makes things complicated and their urge to preserve it more difficult. Besides, literature is a powerful tool that preserves culture and traditions. A scarcity of literary works in specific ethnic languages might threaten the associated groups to lose their inherent values, culture and traditions, precisely the case of many African languages (Sunday Bagu, 2021) and the case of Mukdadpur, where they merely have any written literary works.

## **6. Conclusion**

The indigenous Oraons discussed in the current study have lived in Mukdadpur for generations with distinctive cultural values, livelihood patterns, and linguistic identities. Over time, their integration into the broader society has given birth to various challenges for their survival as a self-determining ethnic group. There is no doubt. However, in many respects, that particularly their economic survival compelled them to compromise with their distinct cultural values. In this study, such a ‘tradeoff’ has become a reality for the Oraons in Mukdadpur. Consequently, using their mother tongue has observed a paradigm shift, and Bengali has become an integral part of their linguistic practice.

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