Bengali Dialect with Advanced Technology: Empowering Women Artists in *Kumartuli*, Kolkata

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Abstract

Empowerment, particularly in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights, is described as becoming stronger, more confident which depends on the backgrounds, situations, aspirations, dreams and has several distinct meanings for different people. For women, self-esteem, and also for communities, empowerment is necessary. Women can be entitled to equal involvement in education, culture, economy, and politics to choose their faith, language, job and many other things to participate in society. But language, especially local dialect can hinder women's empowerment. A language is typically written as well as spoken, while a dialect is only spoken before it is usually promoted for political purposes to elite status. The term dialect refers to a variety of languages that are typical of a specific community of speakers of the language.

In the paper, we mainly focus on how the language and dialect hinder the work of artisans (mainly woman artisans) of *Kumartuli*, a famous potter's quarter in

Kolkata. Since the place of potters is patriarchal, there are many problems for female artists, one of which is language. The potters of *Kumartuli* have their own language of communication, which is described in the paper. The paper also highlights the difficulties women artisans face in running the business as they do not have any traditional education in this profession, no one is highly educated or came to this business due to the dire needs of the family. There are many problems in selling their idols especially for not knowing any language other than Bengali. Thus, when someone from another state or abroad is coming/requisition to buy idols, they face problems selling and promoting the product, which affects globalization and the marketization of this industry. Advance technology (e-commerce, cloud computing) helps promote products worldwide, but most artisans are not familiar with modern technology or require inter mediators that increase business costs.

Keywords: Empowerment; Bengali dialect; *Kumartuli* woman artisan; Advance technology; Globalization.

Introduction

Empowerment is a structure shared by many fields and arenas, including community growth, psychology, education, economics, and social movement and organizational studies. The significance of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined in recent empowerment literature. Rappaport (1984) noted that empowerment by its absence is easy to define but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different individuals and contexts (Rappaport 1984, 3, 1–7). Zimmerman (1984) has claimed that attempts to accomplish it formulaic or prescription-like may be made by asserting a single meaning of empowerment, contradicting the very idea of empowerment (Zimmerman 1984). Interpretation of empowerment specifically within projects and services depends on individual people and context involved, according to Bailey (1992). However, as of general concept, empowerment is a multi-dimensional social mechanism that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a mechanism that fosters power (i.e. the capacity to implement) in individuals, by acting on issues that define as

essential, for use in their own lives, societies (Bailey 1992).

The process of empowering women is women's empowerment. Women's empowerment means embracing and inviting individuals (women) who are outside of the decision-making process into it. For the overall development of a nation, women's empowerment is the most critical point to be noted. It is a long-term and revolutionary protest against sex and gender-based discrimination. Empowering women refers to educating women and helping them to establish their own identities. Women are forced to mold themselves in our patriarchal society. They are not permitted to have an individual opinion or an independent identity. Empowering women means empowering them to be autonomous financially, culturally, and socially (Evans 1989). A woman must have the right to do what she loves and grow into a fully functional person. It is important to nurture and recognize her uniqueness. The empowerment of women has led millions of women around the world to follow their dreams. With strong determination, respect, and confidence, they are continuously moving forward in life.

However, we must remember that despite the efforts being made to uplift women, most of them still struggle under patriarchy and suppression. In countries like India, domestic violence is extremely common. Society has always attempted to limit woman's independence because it is afraid of strong and independent women (Kreisberg 1992). We need to identify and strive to eradicate the inherent sexism in our culture. For instance, we need to teach both girls and boys to value each other. Women fall victim to atrocities because men believe they have the birthright to claim their power and authority over women (Griscom 1992).

Language is one of the primary sources of a person's ethnic identity. For now, the Indian constitution accepts 22 official Indian languages. But, almost every one of these 22 languages has various dialects or language variants. Most of the primary Indian languages have various dialects and variants, often very different from each other. There are over ten variants in Hindi. The Hindi spoken in Rajasthan differs from the Hindi spoken in Himachal Pradesh or Bihar. Sometimes with their literature, the distinct variants of a language are known as separate languages. *Maithali* is one of the dialects of Hindi spoken in

eastern India and many speakers of *Maithali* consider their language as a separate language from Hindi. *Rajasthani* is also often considered a separate language from Rajasthan and not Hindi. But, in truth, *Rajasthani* is just not one language, but numerous tribal languages spoken by the people of Rajasthan, and they all call their languages after their region's name. *Konkani*, spoken in Goa, and called as such because of the Konkan coast, is another language named after its location. The central government officially recognizes 18 languages, but various mother tongues are included in each language. There are over 200 different mother tongues reported in the Indian census (Aharon 1999). Despite the numerous languages and dialects, most speakers of official languages have formed a language-speaking pattern that has become the accepted style of speech for that language.

The language, the dialect, is an obstacle to the work of the artisans (mainly female artisans) of *Kumartuli*, the famous potter's community in Kolkata. Since the place of potters is patriarchal, there are several challenges for women artists, one of which is the problem of language. Modern technology helps women artisans to sell goods around the world, but new technology is not common to most artisans.

The organization of the rest of article is structured as follows: objectives are described in Section II. Section III described methodology where as the conclusion appeared in section IV.

Objective

The objective of the paper is summarized below:

- In the paper, we focus primarily on how the language dialect, hampers the work of *Kumartuli* artisans. There are many problems for women artists, one of which is the problem of language. The potters of *Kumartuli* have their own language of interaction, which the paper explains.

- The paper also highlights the problems women artisans face in running the business because they do not have any traditional education for this industry, no one is highly educated or they come to this business because of the dire needs of

the family. There are many challenges selling the artifacts, especially because of not understanding any language other than Bengali.

- Woman artisans face the challenge of selling, promoting the product that affects globalization, and marketing of business.
- The paper also focuses on how advanced technology allows worldwide to promote products, but most artisans are unaware of modern technology.

The next section discusses the details of methodology.

Methodology

In this section, we have discussed the area of study and different observations in detail.

1. *Area of study*

In the paper, we mainly focus on artisans (mainly woman artisans) of *Kumartuli*, a place of famous potter's quarter in northern Kolkata. The city is renowned for its sculpting prowess, which creates clay idols for different festivals and exports them regularly. The workshops of *Kumartuli* are clustered around Banamali Sarkar Street and run by families for generations who have been in idol making and pottery for last few decades. They recruit extra hands from across Bengal during the *Puja* season because it is a grand affair to make the idols of Goddess *Durga*. This industry, which is also spread in various parts of the city and the state of West Bengal, continues to be an area almost entirely dominated by men.

2. Observations and Discussion

In the entire period of our fieldwork, we saw on average, about two-three visitors in a week, roaming about in the lanes of Kumartuli, some Indians and mostly people of foreign origin who are either interviewing or capturing the area through the lenses of the camera. In this section we will discuss the following aspect briefly:

(i) How dialect creates empowerment problems for Kumartuli's woman artisans.

(ii) How potters of Kumartuli communicate in their own language when they are engaged in their work.

(iii) How women artesian works despite a lot of difficulties.

(iv) How advanced technology help to promote business worldwide.

- ***Bengali language dialect***: *Bangali* is a Bengali language dialect cluster that is spoken in parts of Bangladesh and includes most of the varieties in the country's eastern subgroup of Bengali-Assamese languages spoken by Bengalis classified by Sukumar Sen (Sukumar Sen 1993). It was further divided into "*Vanga* Dialects" and "Western and S. W. *Vanga*". Suniti Kumar Chatterji identifying the cluster as "Eastern and S.E. Vanga". *Sylheti* and *Chittagonian* dialects (some considered independent languages) are part of the *Vanga* group, while the Western and S. W. *Vanga*are in Bangladesh and the Indian state of Tripura. S.W. *Vanga* community is spoken throughout the Mymensingh, Dhaka, Comilla, Barisal and Khulna Divisions (excluding the Satkhira district) (Suniti Kumar Chatterji 1926).

- ***Women artisans and empowerment:*** Women, born or married into potters/artisans' families, are not encouraged to enter the trade. In some families, girls and young women are discouraged from becoming idol makers only because they are women. So, at most, dozen women in *Kumartuli* who have broken all the obstacles to become idol makers and through bravery, conviction, and dedication have also flourished in the business. Three or four of these, fewer than a dozen women artisans, have gained popularity through the media, while the majority remains invisible to the rest of the world. The media highlight has only started since 2011, but some of them have been crafting beautiful idols of the Mother Goddess and her kin for about two decades. The male artisans employ additional hands from across Bengal during the *Puja* season, since making the idols of Goddess *Durga* is a great affair. The three women to have broken the male monopoly among *Kumartuli* idol makers may be considered to be Mala Pal, China Pal and Kakoli Pal. Among the few colleagues they have, they are the most influential. They had to be more hard-working than their male peers

and it took them within their fold a lot of time for their male colleagues to recognize them.

- ***Artisan's dialect***: The artists of *Kumartuli* have some languages of their own. In the month of *Poush* (পৌষ মাস) (winter season), artisans start "*banabadha*" (ব্যানা বাঁধা) in the light and darkness of the narrow road factory of *Kumartuli*. In the paper, we introduced the artist's handwork and Bengali oral language of artisans. The followings are Bengali dialect in *Kumartuli*:

- The factories (workshop) of *Kumatuli* are called *karkhana* (কারখানা), some are called studios (স্টুডিয়ো) and some are called *Atur* (আঁতুড়).
- The idol is called *Thakur* (ঠাকুর) and those whose idols are made with *Durga*, *Ganesha*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Kartik* etc. are called site dolls (সাইট পুতুল). Again some *patua* (artisan) says *panchputul* (পাঁচ পুতুল).
- Side has been the site (সাইট).*Thakur* (idol) has become a doll (পুতুল). The combined form of bamboo wood straw is the structure and artists call them *katham* (কাঠাম).
- The initial formation of straw is called *flood barrier* (ব্যানা বাঁধা). The name of the straw is *bichali* (বিচালি) and the tied rope is (সুতলি) and stick made of bamboo, called a *charaie* (চেয়ারই) (Agnihotri, 2001). The name of the raw soil on which the stain is cut is *kaim soil* (কায়িম মাটি).

- ***Women artisans engagement:*** When the women artisan are busy to make the sculpture in the workshop we found some bengali dialect such as:

- The hand drill machine (হাত ড্রিল মেশিন) is called *agar* (আগর).
- The wooden frame in *Kumartuli's* artist's language is *takchar* (টাকচার). There is no counting how many English words have merged with Bengali in the language of the artist such as "*Oh, craftsmen, there will be leaks in the texture,*

give me the drill machine" ("ওহে কারিকর, টাকচার ফুটো হবে , আঁকর (আগর) টা দাঁও তো").

- *Karikor* (কারিকর), this word comes from craftsman.
- The work of muddying the soil is called Mati Channa (মাটি ছানা). The soil is also called by various names, *etel*soil is called *chit* soil (চিট মাটি), sand soil is called *bele* soil (বেলে মাটি), and a mixture of two soils is called *doash*soil (দোআঁশ মাটি). Kachan soil (কাচান মাটি) is a mixture of sand and chit soil.
- The mold (ছাঁচ) in the language of these *Kumartuli* artists is mold (ছাঁচ) or dice (ডাইস).
- Plaster of Paris (প্লাস্টার অফ প্যারিস) has become Paris plaster (প্যারিস প্লাসটা).This change in the artist's facial language is due to mixing with different people, or so to speak, with different people. This is how hybrid words mixed with English and Bengali are emerging. That is why the crown (মুকুট) of the idol is called Motuk (মটুক).Shining satin *sari* is called *shatting* (শাতিং).
- The hair of idol *Kartik* is called *crepe* hair (ক্রেপ চুল বা ঢেউ খেলানো), lion's hair is called *facho* hair or jute hair (ফেঁসো চুল বা পাট চুল).
- The evolution of the idol in various forms has been going on for the last fifty years and its various names have become popular, as a result of which the Durga of Ajanta Art (অজন্তা আর্ট), *Bangla Durga* (বাংলা দুর্গা), or Nataraja Durga (নটরাজ দুর্গা) has been mentioned. Bengali *Durga* (বাংলা দুর্গা) is of form as *ekchala* (একচালা), big drawn eyes (বড়ো টানা চোখ), *patalchera* eyes (পটল চেরা চোখ) in the language of the artist.
- Some other dialects are *chalchitra* (চালচিত্র) changes as a *chali* (চালি),*aath-Bangla* (আট বাংলা), *dakgoyna* (ডাকের গয়না), *bulen jewelry* (বুলেন গয়না).

Oral language changes over time, English words merge with Bengali language to form new words in *Kumartuli* area.

- ***Effect of Globalization:*** The Information and Communication Technology Revolution has reached in *Kumartuli* where some artisans have their own websites where they can display their works and conveniently get online orders. The success of their works plays a major role in social networking sites and media and they quickly hit the world stage that attracts lots of international tourists. Lots of foreign tourists came to get the look of *Kumartuli* almost every day and buy small clay works occasionally, and it is becoming part of the tourism industry. Thus *Kumartuli's* artists are a very small part of the global economic market (Sudeshna Banerjee 2006). The livelihood of artists is not of interest to the younger generation, and instead they are heading to different kinds of other smart jobs where they can earn more. Since raw materials are very expensive with the opening up of economy and for big tax reforms such as GST and others. But under the pressure of globalization, artisans are still their traditional sector. In order to export further exploration of this sector to the international market, the government and NGO should take big initiatives. The performers can earn more from them, or they can get some international work.

- ***Advanced technology and business promotion***: Nowadays, e-selling of idols is doing business via the worldwide network. Earlier, businesses of artisans are performing personally or contact through relatives or intermediaries. But through the website now, artisans easily market their goods to customers settled abroad by just logging into the website, seeing the catalogue posted there, and via e-mail. The deliveries of items are placed of buyer's choice. Thus the middleman is replaced when customers directly approach them. This makes artisans more autonomous and provides them with a stronger margin. With the Bengali community residing in various parts of the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and South-East Asia, local craftsmen leave no stone unturned on the Internet for cash. The cyber world has been helping to develop new markets for them.

- Ecommerce offers business a whole range of opportunities, from marketing opportunities to increasing products ranges to generating more sales and

with an optimized and well developed website. Artisans can achieve goals through convenient service; provide customers with user-friendly tools that will enliven the shopping experience, operate 24/7, expand global reach, keep more profits and finally maximize the marketing.

- Businesses using cloud computing to access information anywhere with any compatible device. Rather than storing information on computer or server, cloud computing stores data on the internet.

Conclusion

The Bengali dialect of *Kumatuli* artisans is discussed in the article, highlighting the problems women artisans face during business due to the Bengali dialect, the difficulties face due to globalization, and the effects of new technologies technology on artisans' e-business. Finally, we concluded on the basis of the survey and study that there is a scarcity of supporting services, government policies and development/renewal programs carried out for the *Kumartuli* artisans.

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