

SK: Could you please tell us about your research work?

MKM: I developed my research vision from my own land, Sinapali and Boden block of erstwhile Kalahandi. I started my career as a school teacher. Also being associated with my teacher Prafula Rath (dramatist), Kishen Patnaik, and Kapil Tiwari, I developed people's perception to democracy. Not being able to study in colleges, I studied while working as a teacher, and completed my MA in Odia, and a PhD in Kalahandi culture. My perception of socio-cultural research, emerged from the study of folklore and cultural anthropology. I was involved with many national and international organizations to improve my vision. I thought that, if Dr. Verrier Elwin can come from Europe and study our people, why not I, being from the same society.

SK: How would you explain the broader significance of your research to a lay person from western Odisha?

MKM: Western Odisha is a land of forest and agriculture. Industrialization has not affected the people so far. Any lay man is the store house of his own experience in the space he live and for his worldview. The significance of ecology and culture of western Odisha is shaped with the norm of "man-nature-spirit" relationship. Even the cultural significance of western Odisha is much richer than the civilized urbanites who are western educated. People from western Odisha are straight forward, and have no double dealing compared to other parts of Odisha. Also, there is a common bond of language that binds the rich with the poor. A human bond of affection is found among the people of western Odisha. My research is drawn from the people's practices with purpose, context, and meaning. I have learnt many things from the activities of the common man.

SK: Do you know about the work done by Kosal ratna late pandit Prayag Dutta Joshi? Can you describe it briefly?

MKM: I know Pandit Joshi as he was my mother's maternal uncle. That way I was learning and sharing facts with him since 1982 till his last breath (1996). He was a true pandit well-versed in Panini's grammatical rules. He was instrumental in exploring the Koshali Prakrit. He was the one who coined the word "Koshali". I provided him the evidences from the works of famous linguist Pt. Suniti Kumar Chaterjee, historian Krishna Chandra Panigrahi, and linguist Prof. Khagesar Mohapatra. These famous scholars have shown in their research that Koshali Prakrit has a space in the linguistic map of Ardha Magadhi language family. Following this, Pandit Joshi established the fact. Joshi wrote most of his seminal papers between 1980-1996. His writings were strong enough to establish that historically western Odisha was a part of South Koshala, and half of the people of South Koshala have identified themselves with Chhattisgarhi; whereas, rest of the people remained Koshali. He studied the structure, nature and functions of the Koshali language, and found that it is different from the rest of the Indo-Aryan languages. He studied the etymology of all the words that is used in Koshali language. Dr. Prafulla Tripathy has borrowed thousands of words from Pt Joshi's work when he wrote Samblapuri Sabdakosh published by Odisha Sahitya Academy.

Pt Joshi's idea behind the naming of language as "Koshali" is inspired from historical and heritage point of view drawing quotes from Kapila Samhita, Sarala Mahabharata, Suniti Chaterjee, KC Panigrahi, and Prof. Khageswar Mahapatra. Prof Khageswar Mahapatra- an

unbiased linguist from Viswa Bhrati invited Pt Joshi to a national seminar; where, Pt Joshi proved the uniqueness of Koshali Bhasha. In the People's linguistics Survey of India, as the volume editor of Odia, I have included the complete book "Koshali Bhasha Ra Samkhipta Parichaya" published by Dr Dolagobinda Bishi.

SK: What is your philosophy of teaching in Kosli language at school level?

MKM: No language is inferior or superior. It is the literary power that decide the status of the language. Koshali as an independent language has its own merit as the medium of instruction in the school education. A child sees her world in the mother tongue. The cognitive development is possible when a child is offered education in the early stage. So, there is no doubt that Koshali should be introduced in school education. But, it should be studied in the university as well. As per the Ethnologue, Koshali is spoken by 1. 8 crores people of western Odisha.

I was in charge of Multilingual Education in Odisha, and have introduced 21 tribal languages in school curriculum. The state has initiated to prepare Koshali primer for class I and II through Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority. But since 2013, I don't see any progress in this regard. Perhaps the proposal is in cold storage now. Chief Minster should be reminded about this by the media and several organisations engaged in this movement.

SK: What is the most significant piece of Kosli book that you have read in the last few years? Please tell us about it.

MKM: Haladhar Granthavali, Ram Raha by Hemchanda Acharya, Ramayan by Kapila Mahapatra, Luklukani, Jan Man Chalisha by Prafulla Tripathy, poetry compilation by Poet Sashanka Panda, and many other stories and modern poetry published in Beni magazine. I keep track of the literature development of Koshali. Mr Nataraj Mahapatra has written a seminal essay on the development of Koshali language and shown how Odia script was enriched with Kosalotkala Kutila Lipi. Besides, many writers are engaged in creative writing. Dr Pramod Padhi, Dr Ashok Das, and Dr Dolagobind Bishi are actively engaged in writing Koshali grammar.

I have researched on Koshali folklore. My books are analytical essays on Koshali culture and oral tradition. My work include Oral epics of Kalahandi, 2007; Visioning Folklore (essays on western Odishan folklore), 2002; Oral poetry of Kalahandi, 2008, and currently editing the Koshali Ramkatha by poet Haldhar Nag.

SK: People from western Odisha are demanding inclusion of Kosli language in the 8th schedule. Do you think it is possible?

MKM: Yes, the Odisha government has recommended the inclusion of Koshali language in the VIII schedule of the constitution of India. I was one of members of this committee set up by the Odisha government under Chairperson Sri Rajendra Kishore Panda, including Prafulla Tripathy. There are 38 languages waiting for the recognition from the government of India. It is not clear when this will be approved by the government of India. It is possible, if all the people of western Odisha will claim their mother tongue as Koshali. The conflict between Sambalpuri and Koshali is a problem with-in western Odisha. This can be resolved. Unity of

these two groups is highly essential. In my view, Koshali is a well-accepted word, since it contains the historical and geographical significance. Sambalpuri is automatically immersed in Koshali.

SK: What do you think about the future of Kosli language?

MKM: A large number of written literatures are coming up. Many writers are engaged in this movement. But, we should show our broadness and generosity to other languages and cultures. India is a multilingual country, and the strength of multilingualism is found in almost all walks of life. Koshali should not be limited to Koshal only. There is no reason why I should not write in Odia, Hindi, English or Bangla, since, I am a believer of Koshali.

Another important aspect, the tribal languages of Koshal region should also be preserved. Study should be made to understand how the tribal languages (Austro Asiatic and Dravidian languages) have substantially contributed to Koshali language.

SK: Do young people today have a sense of Kosli language and culture?

MKM: I don't think so. The urge to learn one's mother tongue is seriously affected. This is because of the media and TV languages. The heritage language of Koshal region is different from everyday Koshali language spoken by young generation. Merely use of Koshali in popular songs will not enrich the written and spoken Koshali. Koshali orality will continue to be there, and there is no threat to this, since people use it as the language of communication. The gradual awareness will make Koshali popular among youths. But their number is not encouraging. There should be an inheritance of Koshali literature and language from the elders to younger. Unless the young inherit from the elders, and those who worked for the language are respected this cannot be achieved. The discord between old and younger generations may harm the language.

SK: Is there anything you would like others to know that we have not included here?

MKM: My only concern is that, without waiting for anybody, we should start a Koshal academy of language and culture in western Odisha by taking the representatives from 10 districts including adjoining Raigarh district and Sareipali region of Chhattisgarh. Language movement should continue. We should learn from the Santali people how they respect the Santali language and their Guru Pundit Raghunath Murmu.

Suggestions:

- Set up a Koshali academy and its regional centers in 10 districts.
- Organize seminars on language, culture, education and folklore.
- Political will to improve the language.
- Documenting folklore and making it popular by cost-effective publications. So that, the villagers can buy these books.
- Movement for 2021 census of India where all the teachers, students and public need to write Koshali as their mother tongue.

SK: Thank you very much.

MKM: Thanks.