



The Sociolinguistic Distinctiveness of the Bhois

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Abstract

There is a strong association between the sociolinguistic elements and the identity of an individual or a community. This research work follows the same path and shows the effort of a small community (Bhoi) to keep their sociolinguistic uniqueness alive. It describes the sociolinguistic threat from the Pawra and Bhil communities which are the major as well as the dominant groups in the West Khandesh region of Maharashtra state of India. This research work also tries to investigate how the lifestyle of the majority residents (Pawra and Bhil) imposes sociolinguistic elements upon the lifestyle of this community. The paper focuses on the challenges faced by this small community in saving their identity while they are living in the multilingual and multicultural neighborhood with the Pawras and the Bhils in the resettled villages of the internally displaced populations of the Narmada Valley. This research work finds that this minor community is very strict as well as alert concerning its sociolinguistic practices and identity. The displaced population (who were displaced by the rehabilitation programme) studied in this paper is from the different talukas of Nandurbar district (a part of West Khandesh) of Maharashtra.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic practices, a minor community, displaced population, Bhoi, West Khandesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research work attempts to measure the psychological effort made by a community (numerically small - about two to five families in a village) to keep their sociolinguistic uniqueness alive. It seeks to examine the linguistic and sociolinguistic inclination in different domains / with specific interlocutors and sociolinguistic attitudes among the displaced tribals (the Pawras and the Bhils) and non-tribal (the Bhois). This non-tribal minor group (Bhoi) was displaced along with the two other communities (Pawra and Bhil - numerically bigger and socially dominant communities) from Satpura mountain range to Nandurbar

district of Maharashtra state of India due to dam construction activities. The Bhois are recognized primarily as small shopkeepers who used to have the same occupation (having very small shops) in their old villages (on Satpura mountain range) also. As their home language, this minor community speaks Ahirani language among their family members (both the sexes, all age groups and all educational groups). It is natural that we human beings love our native language and desire to see its use all around. Unluckily, this community remains unsuccessful to use their mother tongue in any other domains (not even among their neighbors). This is true with their socio-cultural practices too as they find themselves alone at this point too. They are enclosed by the tribal neighbors (closed communities - Non-Ahirani speakers) who exercise completely different sociolinguistic practices. But, this 'status of minority' fails to make them psychologically weak or despondent. Such a sociolinguistic setting makes this study remarkable from the different points of view (discussed in section four)! This tribal population (their neighbors) has been well described by Abbi (1997) "Firstly, they fell back on Nature, the forest for shelter and sustenance. Secondly, they reaffirmed their allegiance to their 'tongue', correctly recognizing their language as the basic mark of their identity as a people". Pawra, Bhil and Bhoi (the displaced populations) characterize the three different sociolinguistic lifestyles as these three groups have completely diverse identities.

1.1 Background of the Study

'Khandesh' was one of the districts of Maharashtra (a state of India) during the British rule in India. The name 'Khandesh' comes from the 'Khandava Forest' of Mahabharat. According to the other sources, the name 'Khandesh' is derived from the word '*Khan*'. Dhule, Jalgaon, Nandurbar and a portion of Nashik district were the parts of this district during the British rule. This district was divided into East Khandesh and West Khandesh in 1906 with their capitals at Jalgaon and Dhule respectively. The southern portion of the district was detached in 1869 to form Nashik district. East Khandesh was later renamed as 'Jalgaon district' and West Khandesh as 'Dhule district'. Dhule district was further divided in 1998 to form Dhule and Nandurbar districts. Kumar (2016) Nandurbar district is associated with one of the well known movements of India, i.e. the '*Narmada Bachao Andolan*' (Save Narmada Movement). These resettled villages are in Taloda, Shahada and Akkalkuwa talukas of this district. This research site is on the border of three Indian states; i.e. Maharashtra (Marathi is the dominant language), Gujarat (Gujarati is the dominant language) and Madhya Pradesh (Hindi is the dominant language).

They speak Pawri, Bhili and Ahirani respectively as their home language. One can easily distinguish on the basis of their discrete sociolinguistic practices. Kumar (2016) The male Pawras use white *Gandhi topi* (the most essential outfit in public gatherings) and white *kurta* (not as important as *Gandhi topi*). Some members (male) also put one or two earrings. They (the Pawras) have a privileged societal position than the Bhils (not the Bhois). Their style of living is considered to be superior by the host population (in comparison to that of the Bhils. The Bhils speak the Bhili language or its dialects (Noiri - the most common dialect of the resettled villages). The male members generally keep a *pheta* or *muratha* 'turban' on their head. Their clothing includes *kurta* and white *lungi*.

The language 'Ahirani' is spoken in the resettled villages only by the Bhois in their homes only. The Pawras, the Bhils and the Bhois have a good relation as they all have been in touch from their original villages (on Satpura mountain range). The 'Ahirani language' is seen close to Marathi language by the host population. All these three communities have their own culture. Numerically the three communities of the resettled villages can be separated into two groups: i) major group (Pawra and Bhil) and the ii) minor group (Bhoi). Kumar (2016)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schmidt-Rohr (1932) incorporates family, playground, school, church, literature, press, army, court room and administration as the domains of language use. He was the first linguist to give the notion of the 'domains of language use'. According to Haberland (2005), the objective of Schmidt-Rohr was to discover the different areas of language use in multilingual societies which are significant for language choice. Cartrite (2003) argues that the "Reflections on the nature of ethnic groups are twofold: a. What characteristics are markers of ethnic groups, and b. Whether those characteristics are relatively fixed, i.e. primordial or subject to human agency, i.e. constructed". In the fields of Anthropology, Political Science, and Sociology, ethnicity has been theorized for decades. Cartrite (2003) has mentioned a list of characteristic markers of an ethnic group which he calls 'The Components of Ethnicity' in a organized manner. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) have argued that none of the characteristic markers is vital for an ethnic group as none of them is common to all the ethnic groups. Priya (2016) says that the community people often reside at one place to show their togetherness and harmony. In relation to the five domains (family, friendship, education, relationship, and transition), Valentino et al. (2013) interviewed the students of the English Language Education Program of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta through random sampling. These students were from diverse speech communities and socio-cultural backgrounds. The way of speaking based on the preferred domains were recorded and studied.

3. METHODOLOGY

A well planned questionnaire was used to collect the information from the three communities regarding the various sociolinguistic practices exercised in the different domains. The respondents were selected for the collection of data from Rewanagar - a Pawra dominated village; Narmadanagar - a Bhil dominated village; Senior College, Taloda, Nandurbar and Adiwasi Hostel, Taloda, Nandurbar. The data from students (educated respondents) were collected from the college and the hostel (Senior College, Taloda, Nandurbar and Adiwasi Hostel, Taloda, Nandurbar) and the data from uneducated respondents were collected from the villages. Supplementary information was gathered through interaction as well as observation of the students and villagers.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *The Sociolinguistic Practices:*

The Bhois speak Ahirani, a language close to Marathi only in their home domain (not in neighborhood, farms or any other domains). Being multilingual, they switch to Pawri language or the dialects of the Bhili language for communication with their neighbors. They use Ahirani language only to communicate with their family members and relatives. The Pawras speak the Pawri language and the Bhils speak the dialects of the Bhili language in their homes, neighborhood, in farms and even in marketplace. The educated younger age group (Pawra and Bhil) does not show much admiration for their culture. The lifestyle of the Bhois and other non-tribals attract these educated younger age group. However, the old and the middle age groups (Pawra and Bhil) show attachment towards their culture and tradition. The Bhois of all the age groups and educational levels show deep respect, attachment and have positive attitude towards their culture and tradition. The preparation and consumption of the usual home made *daru* 'wine' are an integral part of the culture of the Pawras and the Bhils. Consumption of the meat of goats, hens and other animals are an integral part of the culture of these two majority groups. But sacrifice of the goats and hens is not a part of the culture of the Bhois. They are mostly vegetarian. The Pawras and the Bhils celebrate Indal and other Adiwasi festivals with full spirit. But, it is not celebrated by the Bhois. They only take part as guests. The Bhois celebrate the Hindu festivals like Holi, Diwali and other festivals with full spirit. The Pawras as well as the Bhils of old and middle age groups show trust on their traditional way of medical treatment. However, the younger age group prefers the government hospitals for their medical treatment. The Bhois' dress and food habits are like any educated semi-urban Indian citizens. The dress and food habits of the Pawras and the Bhils reveal the Adiwasi culture and tradition. The Bhois don't show attachment with their traditional music, songs and dances. But, the dances, music and songs are an integral part of the culture of the Pawras and the Bhils. They (the Pawras and the Bhils) show strong interest in farming and animal husbandry for their livelihood. But, the Bhois don't show interest in farming as their occupation. They prefer to sell domestic goods in small general stores. The female Pawras and the Bhils don't intermingle with outsiders. But, the Bhois (even female members) normally welcome strangers and are ready to interact with them.

4.2 *Presentation of the Data*

1. What is / are the language / languages used among the family members in the home domain?

Age Group: 3 age groups (15 years to 25 years, 26 years to 44 years, and 45 years and above)

Use of different languages in home domain (Age Group - 1)
 Total Number of Informants = 24

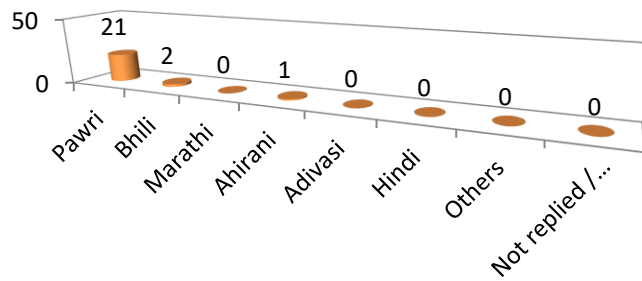


Chart 1 (A Pawra dominated village - Rewanagar Village)

Use of different languages in home domain (Age Group - 1)
 Total Number of Informants = 20

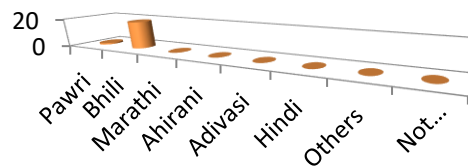


Chart 1a (A Bhil dominated village - Narmadanagar Village)

Use of different languages in home domain (Age Group - 2)
 Total Number of Informants = 10

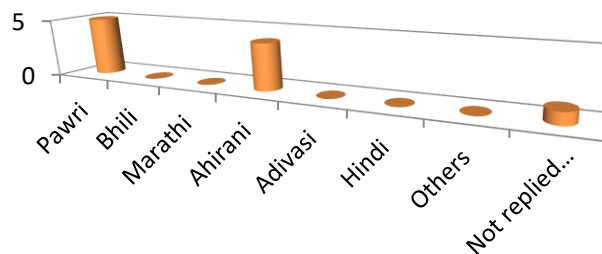


Chart 2 (A Pawra dominated village - Rewanagar Village)

Use of different languages in home domain (Age Group - 2)
Total Number of Informants = 13

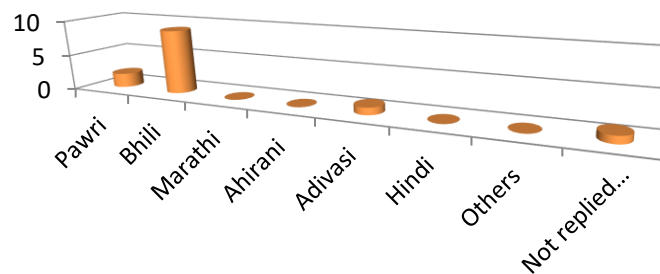


Chart 2a (A Bhil dominated village - Narmadanagar Village)

In Home Domain (Age Group - 3)
Total Number of Informants = 13

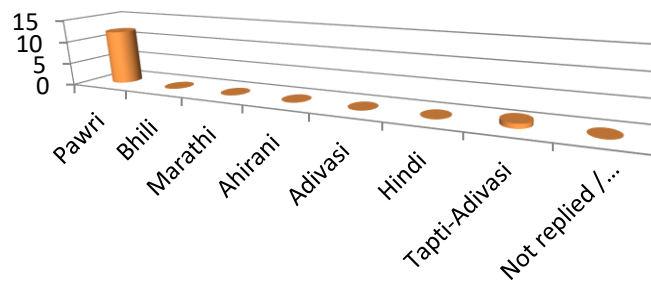


Chart 3 (Rewanagar Village - a Pawra dominated village)

In Home Domain (Age Group - 3)
Total Number of Informants = 10

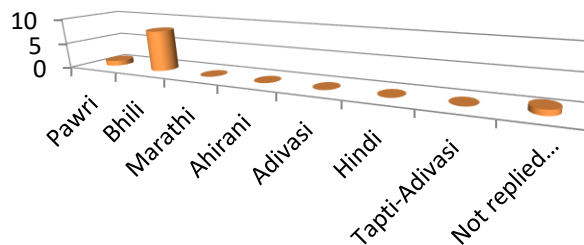


Chart 3a (A Bhil dominated village - Narmadanagar Village)

2. What is / are the language(s) used in public domains?

Age Group: 3 groups of age (15 years to 25 years, 26 years to 44 years and 45 years and above)

A. Age Group:

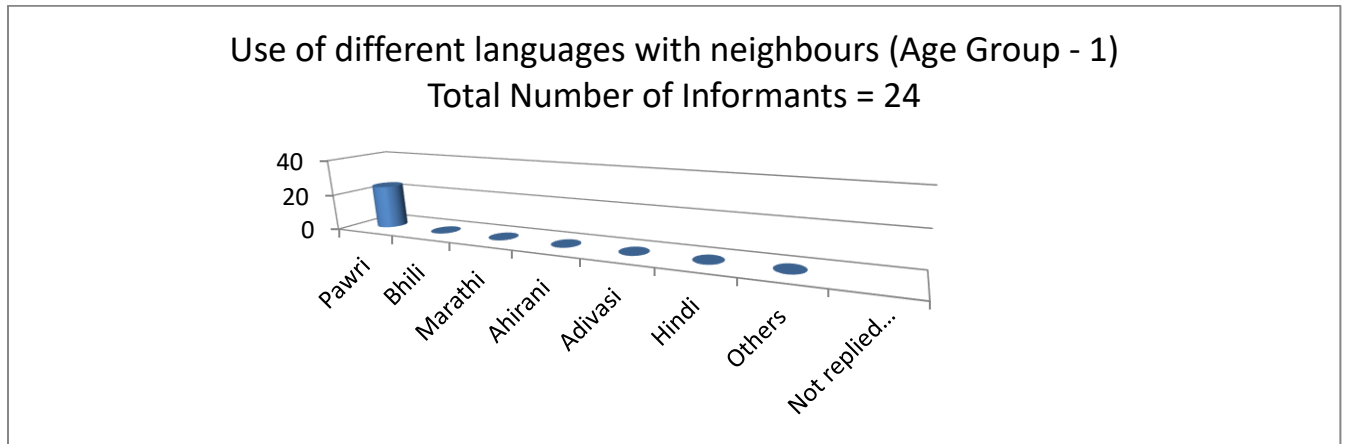


Chart 4 (Rewanagar Village)

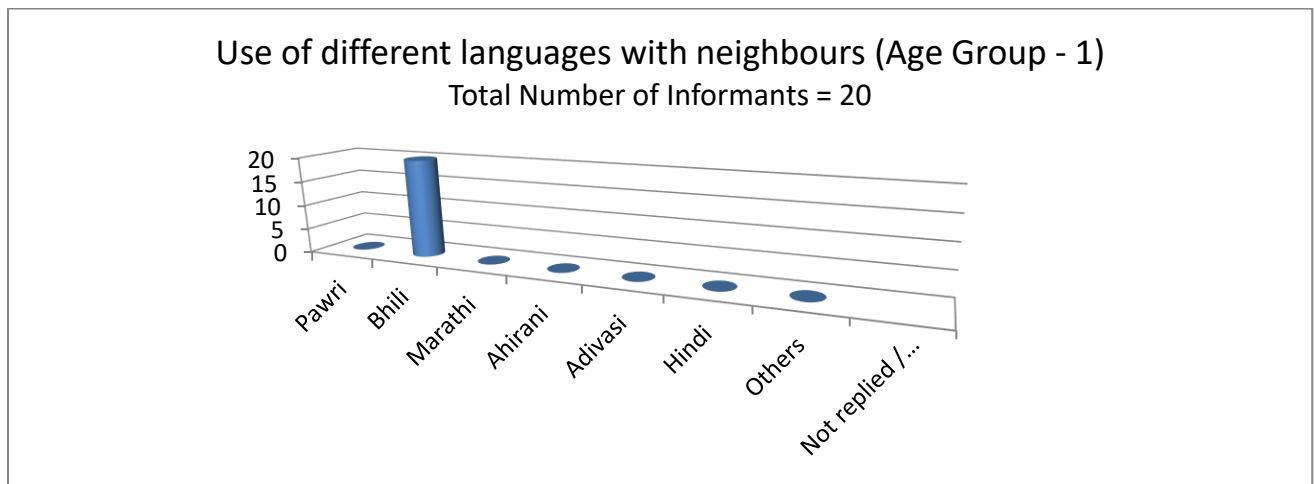


Chart 4a (Narmadanagar Village)

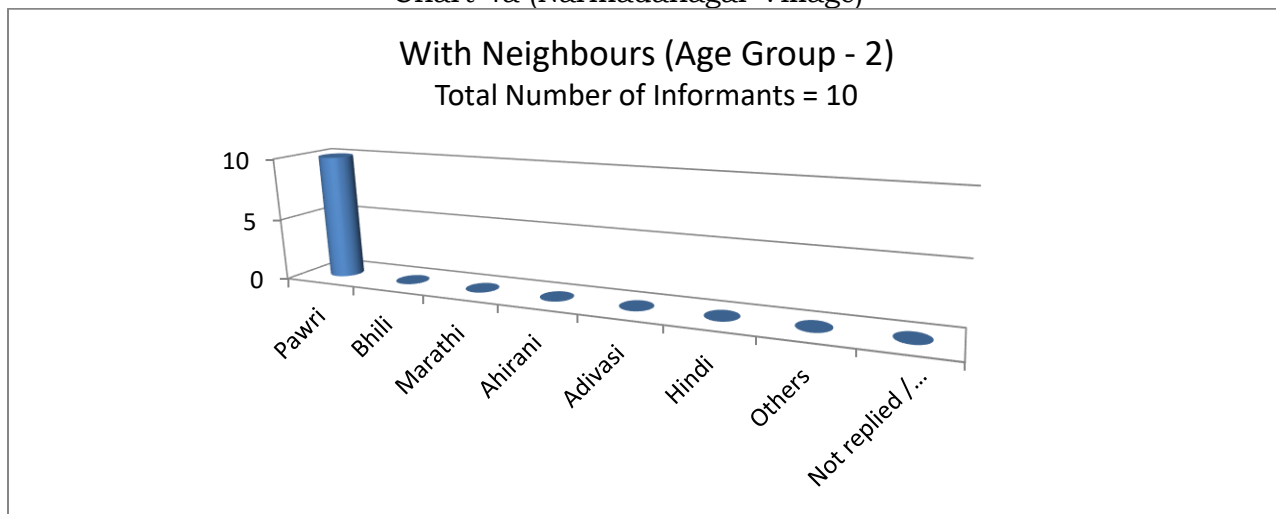


Chart 5 (Rewanagar Village)

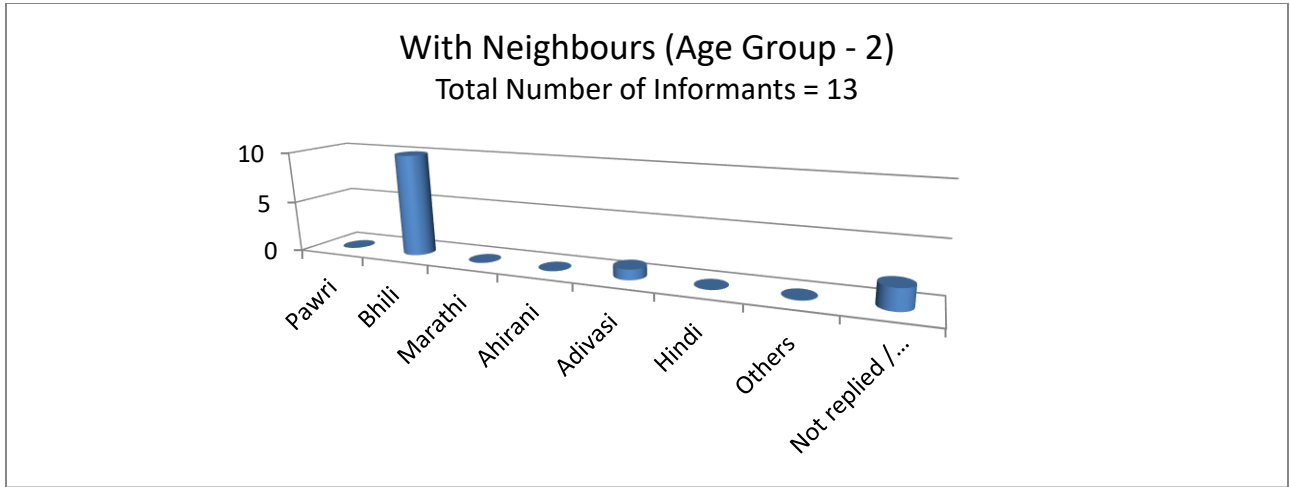


Chart 5a (Narmadanagar Village)

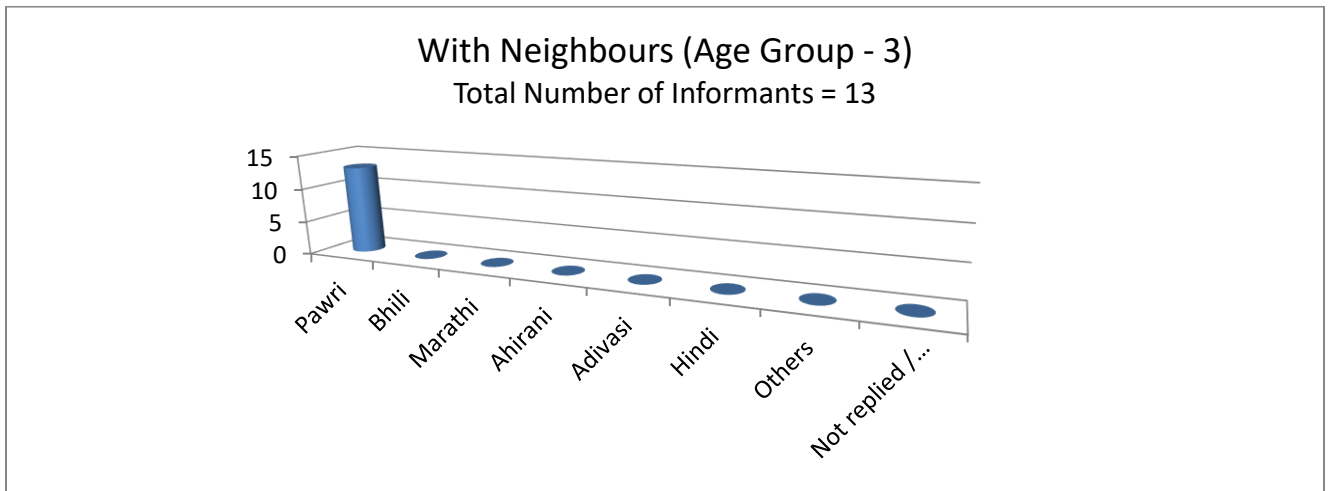


Chart 6 (Rewanagar Village)

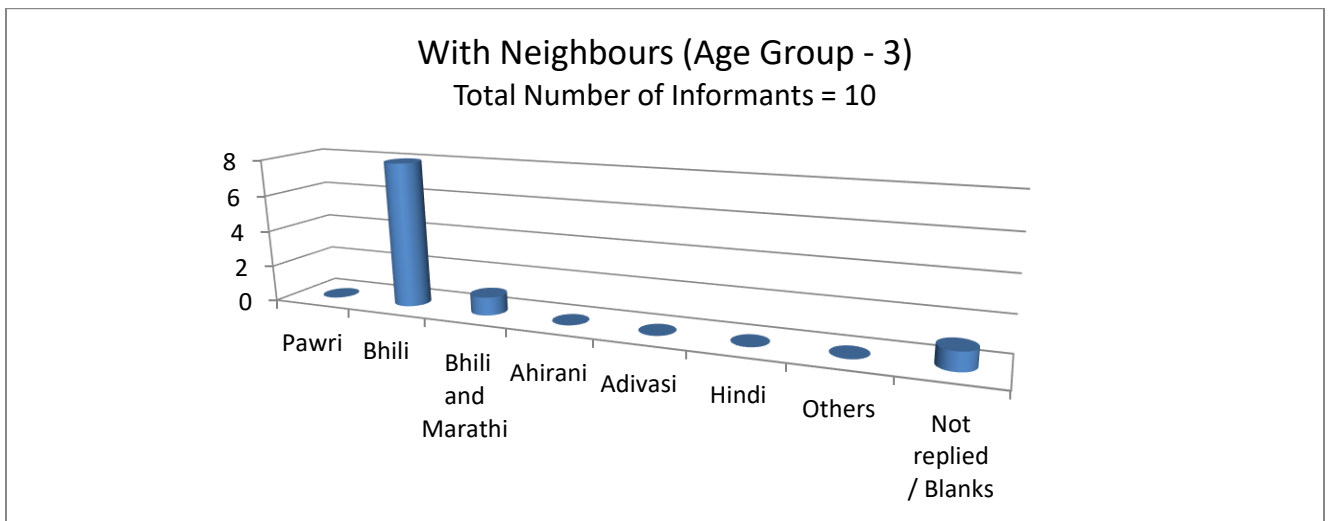


Chart 6a (Narmadanagar Village)

B. Education Group:

With Neighbours (Edu Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 16

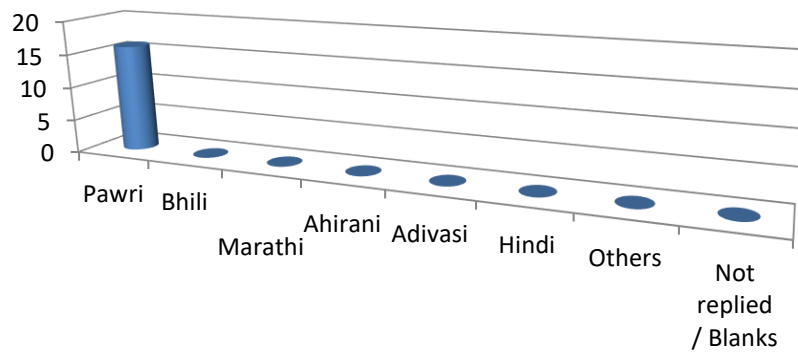


Chart 7 (Rewanagar Village)

With Neighbours (Edu Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 18

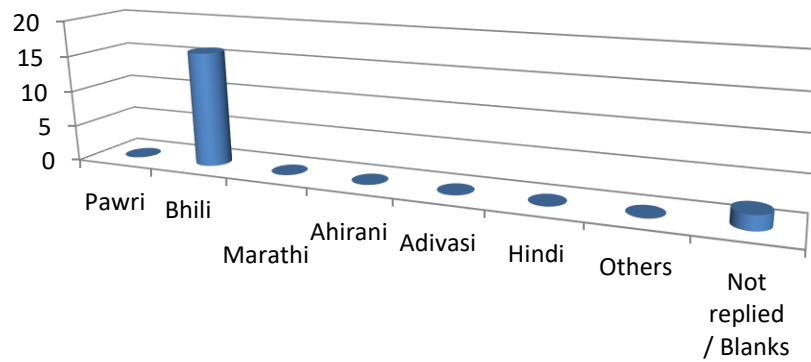


Chart 7a (Narmadanagar Village)

With Neighbours (Edu Group - 2)

Total Number of Informants = 8

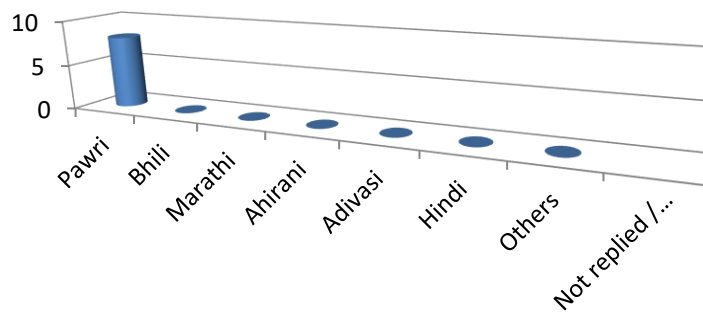


Chart 8 (Rewanagar Village)

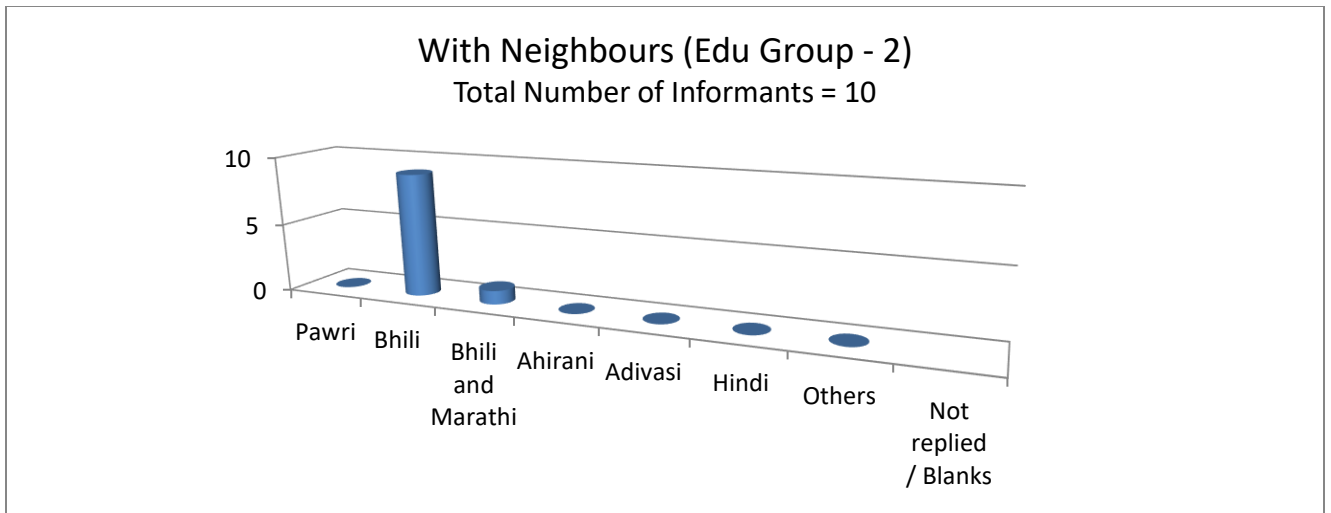


Chart 8a (Narmadanagar Village)

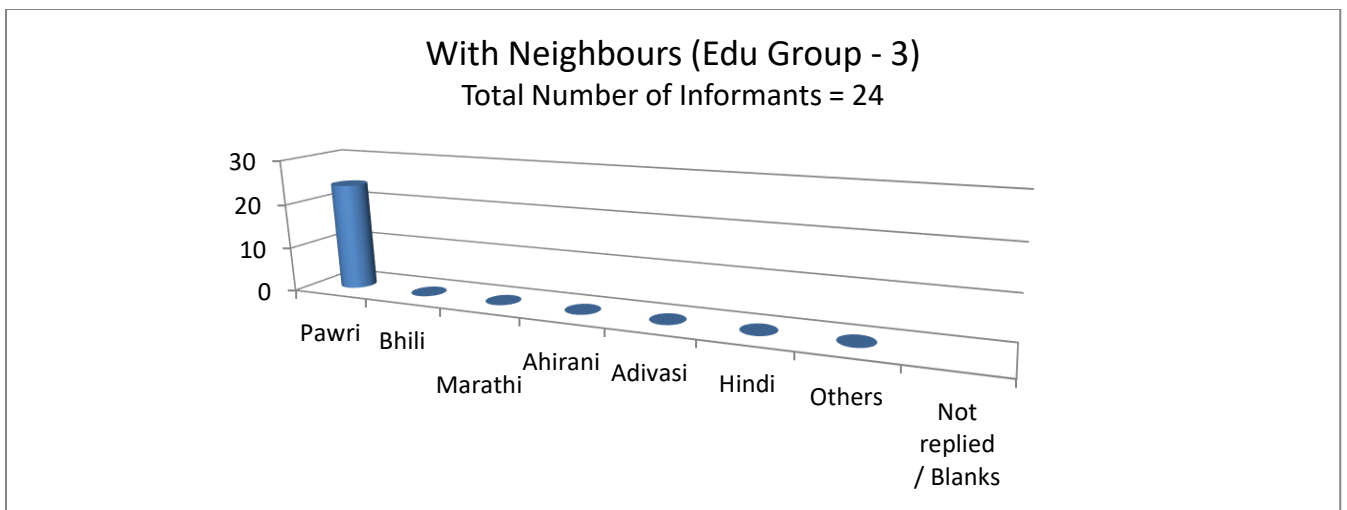


Chart 9 (Rewanagar Village)

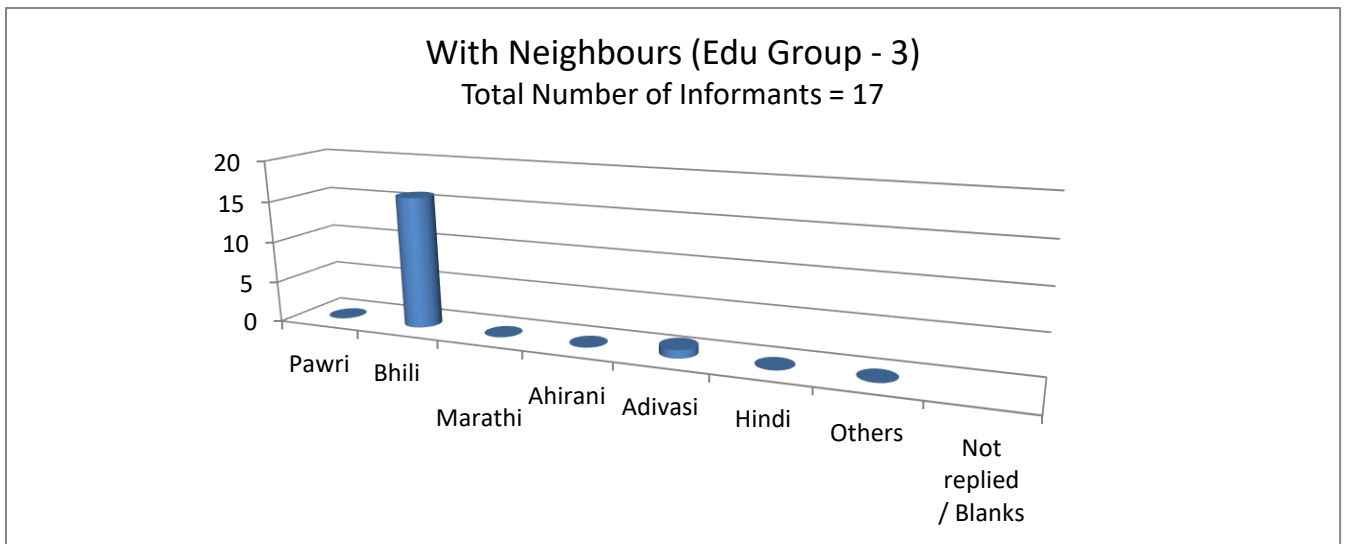


Chart 9a (Narmadanagar Village)

C. Gender Group:

With Neighbours (Gender Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 36

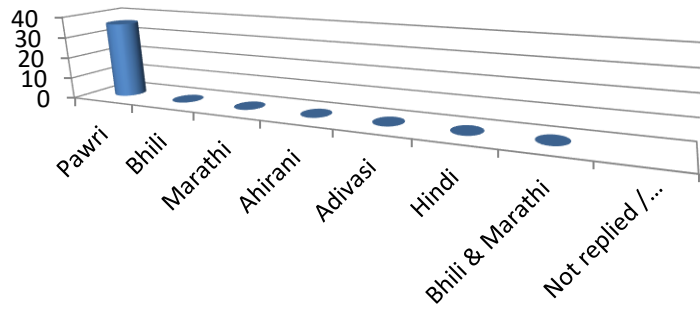


Chart 10 (Rewanagar Village)

With Neighbours (Gender Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 31

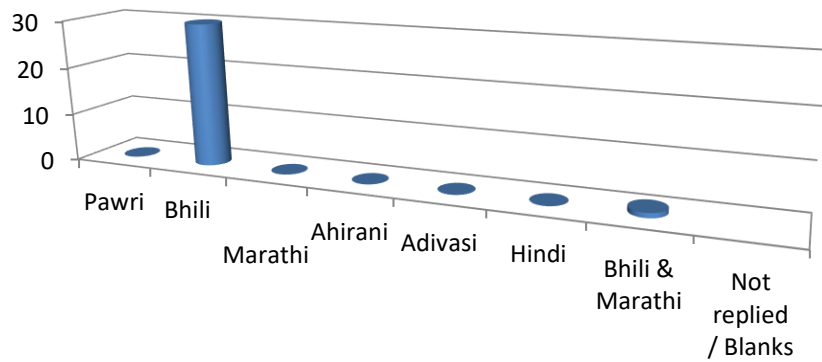


Chart 10a (Narmadanagar Village)

With Neighbours (Gender Group - 2)

Total Number of Informants = 11

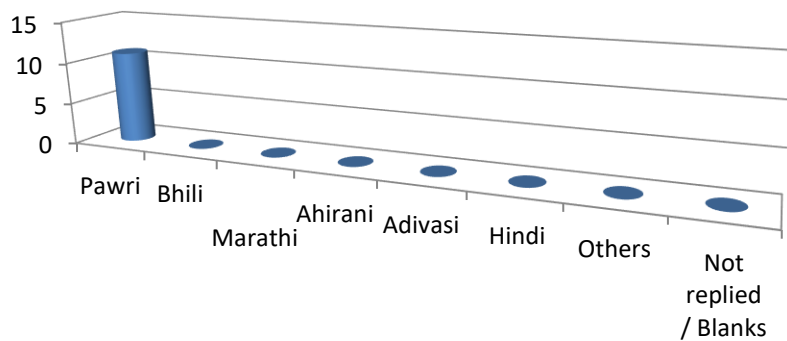


Chart 11 (Rewanagar Village)

With Neighbours (Gender Group - 2)

Total Number of Informants = 11

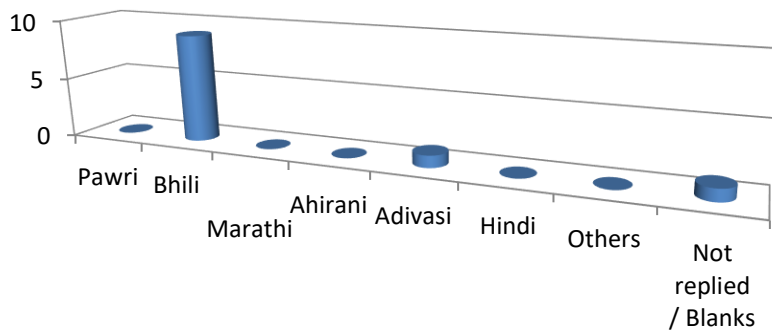


Chart 11a (Narmadanagar Village)

Use of different languages in market-place (Age Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 24

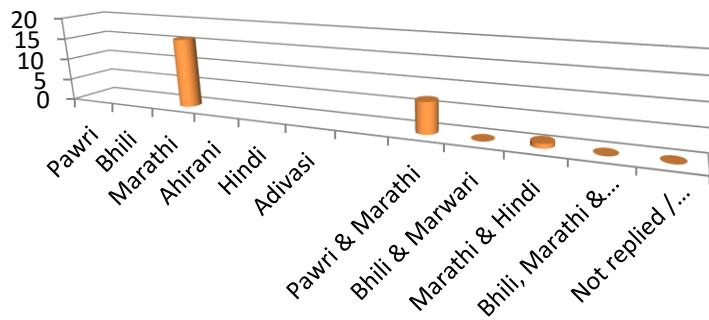


Chart 12 (Rewanagar Village)

Use of different languages in market-place (Age Group - 1)

Total Number of Informants = 20

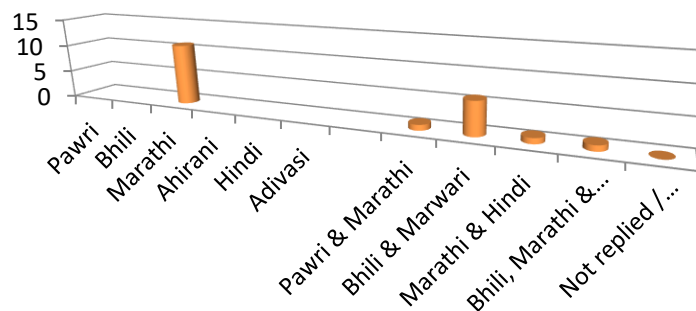


Chart 12a (Narmadanagar Village)

In Market-place (Age Group - 2)
Total Number of Informants = 10

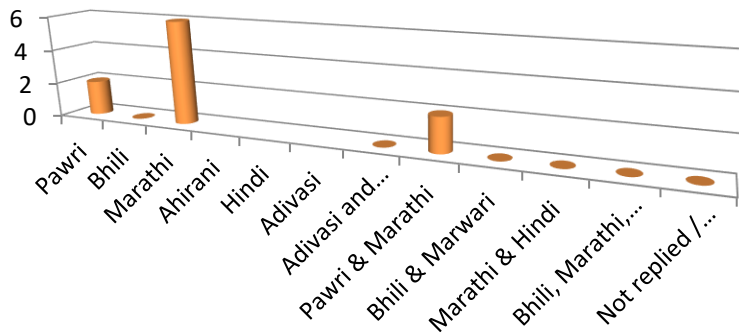


Chart 13 (Rewanagar Village)

In Market-place (Age Group - 2)
Total Number of Informants = 13

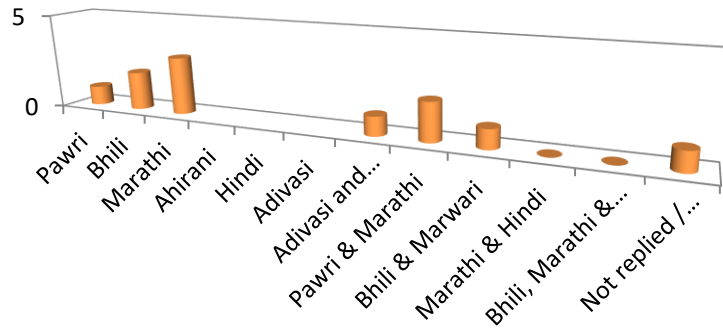


Chart 13a (Narmadanagar Village)

In Market-place (Age Group - 3)
Total Number of Informants = 13

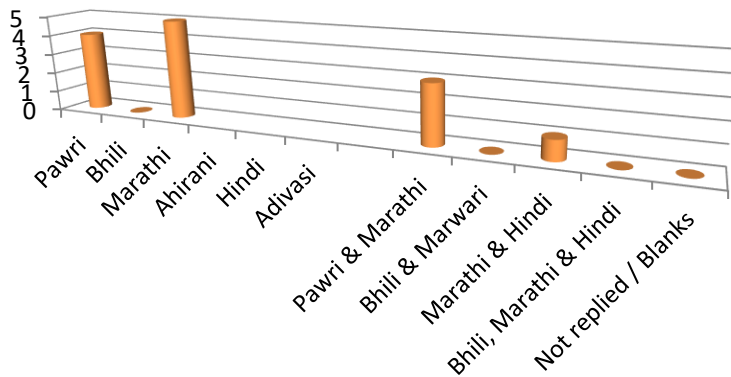


Chart 14 (Rewanagar Village)

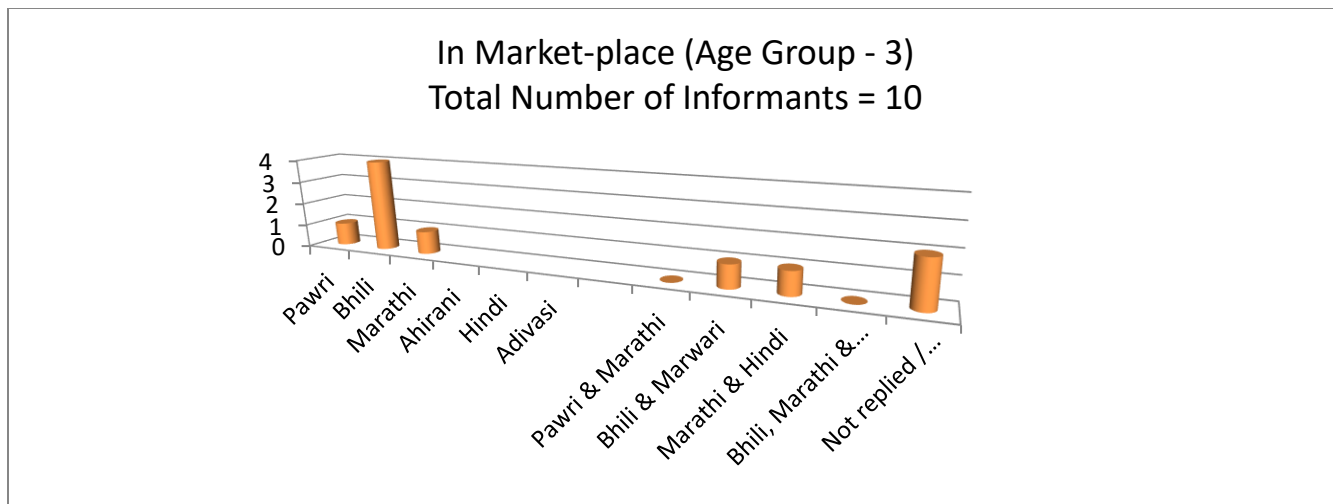


Chart 14a (Narmadanagar Village)

5. CONCLUSION

Kumar (2019) has considered the ‘home domain’ the safest place for a mother tongue to survive. It has a strong connection with an individual’s values, family-relations, personality, caste and even religion. Charts 1 to 3a undoubtedly confirm that there is a strong association between the language(s) used in a family and the community of a language user. This is valid with the informants of both the sexes, all age groups and among all the three communities (see quantitative data). The Bhois are enclosed by the two tribal communities (Non-Ahirani speakers). Despite the fact that the Pawras, Bhils and Bhois speak Pawri, Bhili and Ahirani respectively in their families, this minor group fails to retain its mother tongue (Ahirani) in any public domain. They can’t use Ahirani even in their neighborhood. This results in the form of frequent Code Switching which is very usual among the Bhois in their daily communication. They need to switch to Pawri or the dialects of Bhili as soon as they step out from their thresholds. They (about two to five families in each resettled village) are capable of speaking almost all the languages / dialects spoken in this area. However, they can’t use Ahirani outside of their family as they are enclosed by the Non-Ahirani speaking population. Therefore, they obviously need to switch to the language of their neighbourhood (the Pawras and the Bhils). But, these majority groups (members of closed communities) are not required to do so for their communication. However, this multilingual environment around them has made them multilingual (added new languages to their life: Pawri, Bhili, Marathi and Hindi). Kumar et. al. (2014) has found the market-place (Taloda Market, Nandurbar) a multilingual space. It is a domain where Marathi, Pawri, Marwari, the different Bhili dialects and even Hindi are spoken (Charts 12 to 14a).

Section four of this paper (on the basis of qualitative study) makes a comparison between the chief sociolinguistic practices of the three communities. The tough multi-sociolinguistic setting (as discussed in section four) has not done much on the sociolinguistic life of this small community. They carry out their sociolinguistic practices (see section four) with full of liveness. They use their mother tongue among their family members and

relatives with strong passion. The qualitative study also suggests that they can be considered outwardly oriented and economically successful. Hence, this small community proves that the Bhois are capable of facing this challenge successfully! The overall result suggests that the resettled villages are in the state of transition where progress is in growth. Certainly, this change is being brought about and energized by this small group. Schools, colleges, hospitals, roads, activists, social workers, radio are also acting as motivational power. Kumar (2016) The younger male Pawras and even some Bhils are seen motivated and have moved on following the examples of this progressive minor group. The male youths of these two closed communities are following their footsteps. After all, who does not want to get educated and enter into newer professions? May we call it - local globalization?

COLOPHON

The field work from which data reported in this paper is funded by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India for its Major Research Project (Internally Displaced Populations and Multilingual Spaces). The project examines patterns of continuity and change in the sociolinguistic practices among Bhil and Pawra tribes displaced by the rehabilitation programme in the Narmada valley, Nandurbar district, Maharashtra. The roles of Ms. Jayashree Bharambe as a project fellow, Mr. Satish Bangar, the *Karyakarta* (local social workers), Village *Sarpanch* and *Police Patil* of the three resettled villages, the students and teachers of Senior College, Taloda and the villagers are significant in the field work.

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