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PIDGINS AMONG SETTLERS IN THE TITAGARH INDUSTRIAL ZONE

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**Abstract**

Sprawling across the vast area stretching from Kolkata to Halisahar, breathing its final gasps lie the industrial region of West Bengal along the banks of the mighty Hugli river which flows on, unaffected by the plight of man. In this region lies the historical town of Titagarh. The town holds utmost importance in the history of industrialization of India. Titagarh had previously had been a village which had been fortified by an infamous pirate. The word 'garh' means 'fort'. Hence the name Titagarh indicated the fortified village. However, nothing remains of the village and its fortification as they have been reduced to dust by the onslaught of time. It was one of the places in Bengal which the British modernized to suit their colonial ventures. They stationed a large part of their military force here. The abundance of water from the Hugli, coupled with the abundance of raw materials from the surrounding rural areas gave them the idea of industrializing the region. Here, as in many other places in India, raw materials, cost of production and labour cost was cheap. Between the years 1870-1915, many

large industries sprung up in this region. These comprised chiefly of jute mills and a single paper mill.

Colonization proved to be both a blessing as well as a curse for the Titagarh region. While the area became one of the most technically advanced places in the contemporary times, being equipped with a railway station and freight corridors for individual industries, the peasants and local artisans were greatly impoverished. The peasants were forced by the colonizers to largely cultivate those crops which provided raw materials for the industries. The products made by local artisans and craftsmen failed to put up a competition with the machine-made high end products produced in the factories. While the peasants somehow managed to eke out a living, the local handcraft industry gradually died out.

The establishment of the jute industry soon turned Kolkata into the sole industrial hub in British India. As Titagarh was one of the prime industrial zones in colonized West Bengal, dreams of securing fair wages and

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a square meal each day drew a multitude of people from various states and religious communities to this industrial zone. As a result of this, huge slums sprung up on the outskirts of the industrial belts where people, who migrated from the dying village economies from various states in India, lived and worked, chiefly as labourers in the industries. In the initial days, they were able to fulfil their dreams and the Colonial masters too got the cheap work-force which they desired. However, post-independence, as the jute industry started incurring heavy losses, these labourers languished in poverty- a situation that is prevalent even to this day. As a result of the convergence of a multitude of cultures into a small geographical location, the entire Titagarh region developed a cultural diversity of its own. The convergence of immigrants of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chennai (Madras) and rural Bengal has left its mark on the socio-cultural dimensions of the industrial zone by the Hugli. Among all other aspects, the impact of cultural exchange can be vividly seen in the dialectical aspects of the people from various regions. This has given birth to a variety of pidgins<sup>1</sup> in the region.

In linguistic terms, pidgins are simplified languages that develop as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. However, there may be structural similarities between the mother-tongue

languages of both the groups. Pidgins are the result of convergence of multiple ethnic groups in a given geographical area, chiefly for the purpose of working. So, very often, pidgins have come into existence around the world because of trade, plantation systems and maritime activities. Most often, they are found to exist in areas which had previously been colonial industrial zones and plantations.

In this paper, we have tried to document the variety of pidgins existent in the Titagarh industrial zone in the post-colonial era and explore the possibility of the creation of new ones in the region.

**Keywords:** colonization, pidgins, chutnification, migrant labourers, cultural convergence, jute industry, Titagarh, regionalism

**Introduction**

The concept of ‘Chutnification<sup>2</sup> of English’ was coined by Salman Rushdie in his novel ‘Midnight’s Children’. In the novel, it indicates the transformation of English wherein the language used in the novel is more flavorsome, tangy and exciting. This transformation was brought about by combining Indian words with English to lend an original flavour to the text. This was the first time when an Indian writer was using ‘Hinglish’<sup>3</sup> as opposed to ‘English’ in his writing. In the industrial zones established by the British, we come

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to observe the ‘Chutnification’ of various Indian languages and dialects.

Very often, language is seen to serve as an instrument of control to establish a power hierarchy, with the native speakers of one language suppressing the native tongues of the others. This has been observed time and again during the colonial as well as the post-colonial era in India. In Bengal, majority of the inhabitants speak in Bengali. So, one may presume that the industrial zone in Titagarh too will be largely dominated by the Bengali tongue. However, contrary to popular belief, this is not the case with this area. In parts of this area, very often than not, the Bhojpuri tongue emerges as dominant, seconded by Hindi. However, this conclusion cannot be rounded off easily as Bengali looms over the backdrop of the linguistic sphere in these areas.



*A glimpse of a portion of the Titagarh industrial zone from across the Hugli River at Mahesh.*

The neglected and impoverished coolie-lines which lie by the mills – home to the mill labourers, are often sharply divided on

regional lines. This can be vividly observed via the nomenclature of the lanes in the coolie-lines. Names like ‘Bihari-patti’<sup>4</sup>, ‘Bangali-patti’, ‘Allahabad-patti’, ‘Odiya-patti’ and ‘Madrasi-patti’ demarcate the regions which the residents come from.



*Image of the coolie-lines by the largely-defunct industrial rail siding in Titagarh Bazar.*

Most of the migrant labourers from Bihar hail from the Western part of the state where Bhojpuri is the commonly used language. Migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh hail from Allahabad, where Hindi is the predominant language. The Bengali labourers mostly hail from the rural parts of West Bengal. Their commonly used dialect is colloquial Bengali. Immigrants from Odisha converse amongst themselves in a rural version of the Odishi language. Those from Chennai have Madras bhasai<sup>5</sup> (a regional form of Tamil) as their spoken language.

Though the people from each region fiercely maintain their distinct ethnicity, yet a harmony exists among them owing to their close working relations in the

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industries, coupled by the common demons that they regularly fight together-- poverty and exploitation. So these people have figured out a way over the years about how to communicate with each other. While people from Bihar and Allahabad speak Bengali laced with intonations of their own languages, the Bengalis too have learnt to speak a kind of Bengali-intonated Bhojpuri and Hindi. In due course of time, over the span of a few generations, Bhojpuri and Hindi influence was seen in the Bengali speaking people of this area. Similarly people from Bihar and Allahabad residing in these areas often throw in a Bengali word or two into their own conversations. In contrast, the laborers from Odisha have picked up Bengali owing to the similarities between the Bengali and Odishi languages. Migrants from Chennai have learnt Bengali, Bhojpuri and Hindi owing to spending generations with their counterparts from the other regions. However, they have their own nasal intonation while speaking in these languages. Quite often, people converse by juxtaposing two or more languages into a unique combination. Over time, these small changes in the dialects of people from various regions have led to the birth of new 'Chutnified' languages (pidgins) in the area with their own unorthodox set of vocabularies, dialects and intonations. Dialect and intonation is oft seen to vary from person to person depending on the region from which an individual hails. However, these pidgins

have been unofficially accepted as a standard for communication purposes by all people living in the industrial zone by the Hugli, irrespective of the barriers of regionalism.

**Methods:**

To find out about the impact of the convergence of various dialects of the migrant labourers, a two day study was conducted in the premises of the Loomtex Jute Mills (formerly known as Titagarh Jute Mills No 2) and along the coolie-lines of the Loomtex Jute Mills. The study was conducted on the eve and the day of the auspicious occasion of the Biswakarma Puja on September, 2019. Lord Biswakarma is regarded as the 'engineer God' in the industrial areas of Bengal. On this day, the workers in the industries arrange for festivities in the premises. During this time, the labourers remain relatively relaxed, making it easier to interact with them. This is the only day of the year when people from outside are allowed inside the industries to offer their prayers before the deity as well as to have a look inside the premises of the factories.



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*Idol of Lord Biswakarma, inside the premises of the Loomtex Jute Mills.*

The Loomtex Jute Mills is one of the few surviving British jute mills post the industrial slump which hit the Titagarh-Halisahar industrial zone in the 1990s. The mill operates three-shifts a day and is staffed by workers hailing from rural Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Chennai. Though the mill has now fallen into rough times, yet the workers struggle to maintain their existence. The wages paid at the mill are largely inadequate to fund even a square meal for the workers and their families. So many of the workers and their families are forced to make extra money in their off-duty hours by serving as helping hands in local grocery shops and domestic help in the middle-class residences around Titagarh. A few workers have also taken to selling street food like momo<sup>6</sup> and noodles in small makeshift stalls in the evening.



*The premises of the Loomtex Jute Mills on Bishwakarma Puja Day.*



The case study was conducted via interactions with labourers hailing from the aforementioned states. Copies of the following questionnaire were also filled up via interactions with random labourers of the Loomtex Jute Mills hailing from various regions.

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**SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Area-

Age Groups-

Knowledge of Languages-

Name	Language 1	Language 2	Language 3	Language 4

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgin	Languages Combined

Based on the observations made via the questionnaire through interaction with the labourers, it was found out that most of the people, though fiercely proud of their own regional and caste identities along with their own mother-tongues, have a very liberal view on the mother-tongues of their counterparts from other regions. Over the years due to living together for generations, as many of their forefathers had worked in the mill since British era, they have formed a close camaraderie with their brothers from other regions. Often they pride themselves on their ability to speak other languages, as much as they are proud of their own mother-tongues... something that is quite contrary to the spirit of alienation that now runs rampant over the world.

**Case Studies**

**1. The Odisha-patti**

In order to conduct a case study on the members of the Odiya community, we had to visit the Odisha-patti located in one of the alleys of the Titagarh Bazar.



*The slums in the Titagarh Bazar Area by the largely defunct industrial rail siding which connected many industries in the Titagarh industrial zone.*

Starting from the Titagarh station and stretching into one of the numerous dark alleys of the Titagarh bazar lies the almost defunct rail siding that used to connect the broad-gauge railway network in Titagarh to four industries, namely the Titagarh Jute Mills No 1, Loomtex Jute Mills (Titagarh Jute Mills No 2), Titagarh Paper Mills and the Khardah Jute Mills. Crossing the Barrackpore Trunk Road, as we follow this rail siding, we come across a series of makeshift shanties on the right. A couple of camp beds rest between the rails, giving evidence to the fact that this rail siding is scantily in use. Only once or twice every couple of months, the railway wagons manufactured at Titagarh Wagons, move down these tracks to the wagon yard by the

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Titagarh railway station. This is the Odisha-patti, as it has come to be known. Migrant workers from Odisha, working chiefly in the Loomtex Jute Mills reside here. Many of them have been staying there for several generations.

Mr Dasu Mishra, a security personnel working at Loomtex was enjoying a couple of hours off-duty on the verge of the Biswakarma Puja. He was kind enough to offer us the hospitality of his camp bed and a cup of tea as he told us the details about the migrant labourers from Odisha and the language in which they generally converse. In the course of the conversation, we were joined by his son, Vedant Mishra who had his own take on the matter. With Mr Mishra’s help and a few others whom he had summoned, we filled up the questionnaire.



*Mr Mishra, Security Personnel at the Loomtex Jute Mills.*

Observations

Area- Odisha-patti

Age Groups- 14-55 years

Knowledge of Languages-

Name	Hindi	Bhojpuri	Odi shi	Ben gali	Madr asi-bhasa i
D. Mishra	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
V. Mishra	Yes	Partly	Yes	Yes	No
H. Panda	Yes	Partly	Yes	Yes	No
G. Mahapatra	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgin	Languages Combined
Unnamed	Bengali+Odishi

Based on the answers obtained via the questionnaire, we made the following observations-

- Mostly the people of the Odiya community residing in the Titagarh industrial zone converse in their native tongue, Odishi.
- Due to certain linguistic similarities between Odishi and Bengali, the people of the community have taken to Bengali with a certain amount of ease and are comfortable conversing in this language. Their skill of conversing in this language may be regarded as advanced, even though sometimes, words from Odishi do crop up in the course of

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conversations in Bengali. For example, the word time is called 'somoj' in Bengali. However, the Odishi people still refer to it as 'tamayre'. So, it may be concluded that they converse in a 'Chutnified' form of Bengali, a pidgin born out of combining Bengali with Odishi. However, this pidgin may not appear largely visible when conversing with them.

- The elder generation can converse in heavily Odishi-intonated Hindi.
- The younger generation of this community can speak it fluently owing to interaction with their Hindi-speaking peers in the local schools where many of them study.
- The elder generation is largely unable to speak Bhojpuri and even erroneously consider it to be a different way of speaking Hindi instead of a language on its own.
- The younger generation is however picking up Bhojpuri steadily as a result of inter-mixing of the younger members of the Bihari community.
- In case of learning Bhojpuri, the language-learning barrier had cropped up as a result of the elder generation of Odishis refusing to mingle with the migrants of Bihar as they considered them to be somewhat disapprovingly different from them. However, the younger generation is more lenient and do

not abide much by the mental boundaries set by their parents and grandparents. Thus, there remains the actual probability of one or two more pidgins emerging in the future.

- Nobody from either the younger or elder generation knows how to converse in the Madrasi-bhasai. Even though the younger generation has peers among the Madrasi-patti, yet, in their opinion, the stark difference in the words, pronunciations and linguistic structure of Madrasi-bhasai has rendered it difficult for them to learn the language.

## 2. The Bihari-patti

Moving further along the forlorn-looking railway tracks, deeper into the alleys of Titagarh Bazar, the surroundings become more sordid. One can smell the stench of leftover organic matter which had been dumped in places along the railway track. At one point, one may come across the remnants of disemboweled hens from a local butcher shop. Dogs and crows fight tooth and nail over shares of the blood soaked mess. However, on the day of Biswakarma Puja, the surroundings are cleaner than usual. Crossing a small road which leads to the interiors of the Titagarh Bazar, we come across the campus of the Titagarh Wagons to the left, which had earlier been the Titagarh Paper Mills. On the right hand side, misshapen shanties jut



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out from the side of the tracks, stretching all the way into the market place. These shanties house the migrant labourers from the state of Bihar.

The condition of the labourers here is a bit different from that of the other settlements. In contrast to the others, many of the labourers from Bihar are seasonally employed in the neighbouring jute mills. This is because they work in the mills for six months and the rest of the year, they go home to attend to their hereditary farming, a tradition known as the ‘kheti’ practice.

It was here that we met Mr Naman Shaw who was enjoying his afternoon siesta, stretched out on his wooden camp bed, locally called ‘khatiya’. Although Mr Shaw is retired, he has spent close to five decades in the Titagarh industrial zone and had worked in both the Titagarh Jute Mills No 1 and Loomtex, which was previously known as Titagarh Jute Mills No 2. He provided us with a detailed insight about the cultural changes which the area had undergone in a span of five decades as well as how he and many of his contemporaries had picked up Bengali and Hindi and, to some extent, even a few words of Madras-bhasai.

Mr Shaw is lovingly regarded as a kind of head patriarch among some of the members of his community. With his help, we succeeded in getting the questionnaire filled up by some members of his community.

Observations

Area- Bihari-patti

Age Groups- 30-70 years

Knowledge of Languages-

Name	Hindi	Bhojpuri	Odishi	Bengali	Madras-bhasai
N. Shaw	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
S. Agrahari	Yes	Yes	Erroneous impression about the language	Yes	No
S. Yeasmin	Yes	Yes	Erroneous impression about the language	Yes	No
R. Tiwari	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgin	Languages Combined
1. Unnamed	Bengali+Bhojpuri
2. Unnamed	Hindi+Bhojpuri

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Based on the answers that we got, the following inferences were made-

- The people of Bihari-patti are well versed in Hindi and quite a few members had learnt it during their childhood years. This stems from the fact that they find certain structural similarities in the linguistic patterns of both languages. For example, the word 'going to' is spoken as 'jarahoon' in Hindi and in Bhojpuri, it is 'jatani'.
- The members of this community have learnt to speak in Bengali with a Bhojpuri-intonation. The elder generation of this community had picked it up from their Bengali speaking peers in the jute mills and the younger generation from their peers at school. However, it may be observed that both the generations have a similar ability of speaking the language and their skills may be said to be intermediate.
- Very often, in order, to communicate in a way that is understandable to their Hindi/Bengali-speaking peers, the members of this community juxtapose terms from all three languages into a unique pidgin which has no official name, but nevertheless, serves very well as a mode of communication, as long as conveyance of thoughts and ideas is

solely concerned. Thus here we can observe two new pidgins in vogue:

- a) A Bengali-Bhojpuri pidgin
- b) A Hindi- Bhojpuri pidgin

However, in the latter case, the 'Chutnification' is much less pronounced than the former and members of the community can speak the Hindi language almost flawlessly without much mother-tongue influence creeping in.

- However, very few people of this community have knowledge about the Madrasi-bhasai, oft shying away from it due to their perceived difficulty of speaking the language.
- A few members of the younger generation do know a few words in the Madrasi-bhasai owing to interaction with their Madrasi peers.
- Many of the inhabitants of the Bihari-patti are also unaware that Odishi is a different language on its own. They feel that Odiyas and Bengalis both speak in the same language. This stems from the fact that there are certain similarities between the languages. Also the fact that the Odiyas converse so well in Bengali might have given rise to this erroneous impression.

### 3. The Allahabad-patti

Taking the road to the left of the Titagarh Paper Mills Main Entrance, we move towards the Loomtex Jute Mills. Shops

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selling metal utensils lay huddled on either side of the lane. As we move on, we come across a four-way crossing. Here the Titagarh Bazar ends. A left turn takes us back to the Barrackpore Trunk Road, while a right takes us to the banks of the Hugli river. But as we move straight on, the roads suddenly give way to a shock of crumbling shanties on either side. On the backdrop of these buildings loom the abandoned remains of the once-mighty Titagarh Jute Mills No 1. The shock of shrubs atop both the silent towering red brick boilers, abandoned and decrepit empty godowns with crumbling roofs and walls and fragments of railway tracks peeking out from underneath the cracks of the concrete roads tell a story of despair, waste and political betrayal... unrelenting reminders of the murder of one of the greatest industrial zones in the history of India.



*Railroad tracks which connected the jute mills in Titagarh, fallen into disuse.*



*A glimpse of the abandoned premises of the Titagarh Jute Mills No 1.*



*One of the red-brick boilers of the Titagarh Jute Mills No 1. The shock of shrubs atop the boiler shows that it has long fallen out of use.*

At the end of the lane we approach the Rear Entrance of the Loomtex Jute Mills. The Loomtex Jute Mills was formerly known as the Titagarh Jute Mills No 2. It was the sister unit of the Titagarh Jute Mills No 1. Both the mills had been established by FW Heilgers & Co. Smaller in size to the other

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unit, it remains one of the few surviving British jute mills in the Titagarh-Halisahar industrial zone. Walking in through the gates, we come across a row of old buildings in the signature British red-brick style of architecture. However, looking at these buildings indicate that they have been converted into chawls where the workers of the mills live. Here the living conditions are a bit better than that outside the mill premises. There are four such buildings. Previously they had served as living quarters for the clerical staff in the mills. Now they house labourers from Allahabad and West Bengal and are simply known as Allahabad-patti and Bengali-patti respectively.

As we approached the Allahabad-patti, we could see a musical box at the entrance of the building playing popular tracks from recent Hindi blockbusters. Moving past the building, we came across a series of jute godowns where the humdrum of machinery could be heard. On our way, we passed the idol of Lord Biswakarma in the courtyard of the mill premises. At the gate of one of the jute godowns, we struck up a conversation with the security personnel, Mr HariPandey from Uttar Pradesh, who greeted us warmly and was more than happy to talk about the bygone days in the mills as well as the association of his people with it.

On our request, Mr Pandey summoned a few of his colleagues from Allahabad. With

their help, we were able to fill up the questionnaire.



*In conversation with Mr Pandey.*

Observation-

Area- Allahabad-patti, Loomtex Jute Mills premises

Age Groups- 40-55 years

Name	Hindi	Bhoj puri	Odishi	Bengali	Madras-bhasai
H. Pandey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
S. Joshi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
K.	Yes	Yes	Errone	Yes	No



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Singh	s		ous impression about the language		
H. Joshi	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Y. Verma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgin	Languages Combined
1. Unnamed	Hindi+Odishi
2. Unnamed	Hindi+Bengali

The following inferences can be drawn based on the data which we collected-

- The people of Allahabad still rigorously adhere to the rigid Hindu Caste system<sup>7</sup>. However, to the lament of the elder generation, the members of the younger generation no longer adhere to it as rigorously as their elders expect them to.
- Based on the data which we collected, the elder generation of migrants from Allahabad can fluently speak both Hindi and Bhojpuri and rarely juxtapose these two languages. However, the younger generation is a bit more

relaxed in this aspect and are willing to ‘Chutnify’ Hindi and Bhojpuri while conversing with their peers.

- However, there rarely arises any need to juxtapose the Hindi and Bhojpuri languages as the native speakers of both the languages in the region are well versed with each other’s languages owing to the structural similarities between them in linguistic terms.
- They also know how to speak Odishi and Bengali. While communicating with Bengali and Odiya people, they are quite willing to go out of their way to speak the languages or juxtapose a few Hindi words into their conversations in the aforementioned languages. Thus here we can observe the ‘Chutnification’ of Hindi and Odishi and Hindi and Bengali and can find two pidgins in vogue.
- The people from Uttar Pradesh have a sense of pride on Devnagri Hindi and are unwilling to juxtapose words from any other language into conversations in their mother tongue, if they can avoid it.
- In the opinion of the migrants of Uttar Pradesh, they are protective of their own mother tongue owing to the fact that they feel linguistically threatened in an alien land. This, according to them, was not the scenario back in the past when their

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forefathers had first come to reside in Titagarh. However, in recent times, a tug-of-war has ensued with the people from each region trying to establish their superiority over the others. In this aspect, they feel that adhering to their mother tongues may serve to protect and preserve their regional identity in a time where language is, in their opinion, being used as a mode of dominance.

**4. The Bengali-patti-**

Moving back towards the rear exit of the mills, past the lone red-brick boiler, we move towards the chawl that houses the Bengali labourers. As we approach the building, the smell of fried fish and boiled rice wafts out and reaches our olfactory glands. Rice and fish form the staple of Bengali diet and hence, it is no wonder that people from other communities refer to Bengali words as ‘Mach-bhat’, which means fish and rice. Bengalis really swear by the fish and rice menu. As we approached the building, we came across a man walking leisurely towards the mill courtyard. Sensing that he was not in a rush to go anywhere, we requested him to spare a few minutes for us. Being native speakers of Bengali ourselves, we had no problem in conversing with Mr RathinDutta. He most heartily joined us and told us about his life in the mills and about the languages which he had picked up as a result of staying in the industrial zone of Titagarh.

With the help of Mr Dutta and a few members of the Bengali-patti, we were able to fill up our questionnaire.

Observations-

Area- Bengali-patti, Loomtex Jute Mills premises

Age groups- 40-50 years

Knowledge of Languages-

Name	Hindi	Bhojpur	Odi shi	Bengali	Madras-bhasai
R. Dutta	Yes	Erroneous impression about the language	No	Yes	No
S. Mookhopadhyay	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
K.P. Das	Yes	Erroneous impression about the language	Yes	Yes	No

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgins	Languages Combined
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1. Unnamed	Bengali+Hindi
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Based on the answers that we got to our questions put down in the questionnaire, we arrived at the following set of conclusions-

- There are very few Bengalis who work in the mills now.
- Those who work are well versed in both Bengali and Hindi. They have picked up Hindi from their close working relations with their peers in the mills.
- However, in case of a few members in the Bengali community, the Hindi that they speak is heavily accented with touches of their mother tongue. Sometimes, some of the members are in the habit of juxtaposing large chunks of Bengali expressions into their Hindi. Thus, a peculiar kind of ‘Chutnification’ of the Hindi and Bengali languages may be found in use among some of the Bengali speakers of Hindi in the area. This may stand out to be a potential pidgin in its own right.
- Some members of this community know the Odishi language and can even converse in it with touches of their mother-tongue, Bengali.
- Most of the elder members of the Bengali community have very little knowledge about the Bhojpuri language. This ignorance largely stems from the fact that the Odiya and Bengali communities have a

tendency of looking down their collective noses at the Hindi and Bhojpuri speaking communities in the area.

- However, the younger generation has picked up the Bhojpuri language in bits and pieces, owing to their interaction with their peers from Bihar. This is owing to the fact that the children of the people working in the jute mills attend local schools together. Thus, there is the possibility of a new pidgin emerging in the near future.

### 5. The Madrasi Patti

Taking a left turn along the Barrackpore Trunk Road from the main entrance of the Loomtex Jute Mills, we arrive at the railroad crossing once again from where we began our journey. Moving on towards Barrackpore, we come across a temple located at a four-way crossing. The temple is painted white and has marble floors. This place is known as Brahma<sup>8</sup>Sthan, which is locally referred to as ‘BadaMastan’.



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*The white temple, which is the landmark of Brahma Sthan on the Barrackpore Trunk Road. Behind this stands the Madrasi-patti.*

Leaving the Barrack pore Trunk Road behind us, we take a left turn. As we do so, the abandoned campus of the Kinnison Jute Mills looms into view. Opposite the jute mills campus, are a lot of one and two storeyed puccahouses. This is the Madrasi-patti. Going by the appearance of the houses in the area, it can be deciphered that the residents of this area are financially better off than their peers from other regions.

Carrying out our survey in the Madrasi Patti turned out to be harder than we presumed, chiefly owing to the fact that we are not acquainted with their native tongue. However, we came across Mrs Laxmi Rao who owns a small eatery in the area serving South Indian dishes. As we took a quick snack at her eatery, she and her husband, Mr Durga Prasad Rao, were able to provide us with some insights about their community and the languages which they were conversant in. Mr Durga Prasad Rao had once worked in the Kinnison Jute Mills. With their help, we were able to fill up our questionnaire. However, since this study was conducted with a very narrow range of random sampling, namely two subjects, its validation may be subject to questioning.

Observation

Area- Madrasi-patti, Brahma Sthan

Age Groups- 55-65 years

Knowledge of Languages-

Na me	Hin di	Bhojp uri	Odishi	Beng ali	Madr as- bhasa i
D.P . Rao	Yes	Yes	Errone ous impres sion about the langua ge	Yes	Yes
L. Rao	Yes	No	Errone ous impres sion about the langua ge	Yes	Yes

Pidgins in the area (if any)-

Pidgin	Languages Combined
1. Unnamed	Bhojpuri+Hindi

*\* The above Second table requires further validation.*

Based on our interaction with Mr and Mrs Rao, we put forth the following conclusions:

- Since the slump of the 1990s, very few people from the Madrasi-patti



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now continue to work in the jute mills around the area. Most of them have taken up other professions and have, in a way, prospered as a result of that.

- Most of the people in this locality can speak in both Hindi and Bengali very fluently. However, the Bengali language may be spoken with a kind of nasal intonation, compared to Hindi which is spoken by the inhabitants almost with the fluency of native speakers of the language.
- From our conversation with the Rao couple, it appears that not many residents in the Madrasi community have any knowledge about the Odishi language. However, owing to some structural similarities between Odishi and Bengali, there is apparently a prevalent misconception that Odishi is just another form of Bengali with a varied dialect.
- Literacy rate is significantly higher in this community compared to that of the other communities. Owing to this, many residents of the younger generation attend English medium schools based in Barrackpore and are quite well-versed in English.
- The people of the elder generation too can speak English tolerably well. On a scale of proficiency, they may be marked at the 'Beginner'

level with respect to their English speaking skills.

- Many of the people from the elder generation know how to converse in Bhojpuri, intonated with Hindi. They had picked up the Bhojpuri language from the other residents in the area.
- It may be observed that the people from this community might have been making use of a pidgin amalgamated from the Bhojpuri and Hindi languages. However, this fact requires further validation to determine if this practice was widespread in the community or merely confined to a few individuals.

**Conclusion**

As a result of the conversion of migrants across various Indian states in the Titagarh industrial area, quite a few pidgins are found to be in vogue. The existing pidgins which we found out via our survey are as follow-

- In the Odisha-Patti, a pidgin crafted from combining Bengali and Odishi was observed.
- In the Bihari-Patti, two pidgins were found to be in existence. They are as follow:
  - a) A pidgin formed by combining the Bengali and Bhojpuri languages.

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- b) A pidgin formed via the amalgamation of the Hindi and Bhojpuri languages.
- The people from the Allahabad-patti make use of a couple of pidgins to adapt to their communication needs such as:
  - a) A Hindi-Odishi pidgin
  - b) A Hindi-Bengali pidgin
- In the Bengali patti, only a single pidgin crafted from a juxtaposition of Bengali words, phrases and intonations in Hindi sentences was found to be in vogue.
- In the Madrasi-patti, trace of a single pidgin was deciphered. This pidgin is probably the result of the amalgamation of Bhojpuri and Hindi languages, used by the inhabitants to communicate with their neighbours.

Thus it has been observed that the migrant settlers from all these regions have developed some form of pidgin or other by combining their mother-tongues with some other local language in order to craft an efficient way of communicating with their neighbours from other regions. Only the migrants hailing from Chennai (Madras) are exceptional as they have apparently not yet created a pidgin out of their own mother-tongue.

However, just like language has no boundary, creation of pidgins is a never ending process. In a cultural melting-

pot, new pidgins also continue to crop up. The process of creation of pidgins is often barred by misconceptions in the minds of neighbouring regional communities about each other. In the Titagarh industrial zone, the practice of caste, by certain communities had also proved to be barriers of communication between communities. However, there is an actual possibility of new pidgins coming into vogue, once the younger generation of residents in this area is able to move beyond the treacherous barriers of caste, regionalism and mutual mistrust

Footnotes

1. Pidgins- A grammatically simplified form of a language, some elements of which are taken from local languages, used for communication between people not sharing a common language.
2. Chutnification- In the novel 'Midnight's Children' by Salman Rushdie, the term indicates the transformation of English having an additional connotation of making the language used in the novel more flavorsome, tangy and exciting. This transformation was brought about by combining Indian words with English ones to lend an original flavour to the text.
3. Hinglish- A blend of Hindi and English, in particular a variety of English used by native speakers of

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Hindi, characterized by frequent use of Hindi vocabulary and phrases.

4. Patti- The word means lane in Hindi or Bhojpuri tongue. Speakers of the Bengali language too have incorporated the term into their conversations down the years.
5. Bhasai- It means 'language' in Chennai
6. Momo- locally used term for a food item that is known as 'dumpling'.
7. Hindu Caste System- According to the Vedic Caste System, the society was divided into four castes, viz Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas were at the top rungs of the hierarchical order, followed by the Vaishyas. The Sudras were at the lowest rung of the order and were considered 'Untouchables' during the Later Vedic Period. Initially formed according to division of labour during the early Vedic period, the caste system was gradually made hereditary in order to serve the interests of the upper castes.

8. Brahma- Brahma is the first God in the Hindu triumvirate, or trimurti. The triumvirate consists of three Gods who are responsible for the creation, upkeep and destruction of the world.

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