

THE SANTALI UNION VERSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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In an article entitled "Santali New Testament Revision" in *The Bible Translator* of April 1955 (p. 69), the Rev. Dr. W. Dempster has already written of the Santals,¹ their language and the special need for a new translation of the Santali New Testament in that there are at present two versions, one sponsored by the Anglican, one by the Lutheran Church in the area; he also told of the earlier work of the translation Committee, nominated by the Santal Christian Council and appointed by the Bible Society of India and Ceylon to undertake the work. That Committee has now completed its allotted task, and it may be of interest to others to know how it has met some of the problems with which it was faced.

The Translation Committee and its task

The Committee of six members, though four of them are Santals, represents three nationalities and four denominations of the Church, as well as different parts of the wide area in North-East India in which the Santals live. It is fortunate that there have been few changes in its personnel during the eight years of its existence. Throughout, the main task of drafting the new translation has been done by a young Santal, a B.D. of Serampore College with a good knowledge of Greek, and, as an ordained minister of the United Church of Northern India, a 'neutral' as between the existing versions. (Successive Conveners of the Committee have also been, in the same sense, 'neutral'). Dr. Dempster has already explained the difficulties peculiar to our task in that, in the existing versions, different Santali words have been used for many common concepts. Those accustomed from childhood to use certain words for 'sin', the 'Holy Spirit', and 'angel' were not easily convinced that alternative words were adequate, or even superior, to express these concepts. In the early stages, much time was spent in discussing the relative merits of words and phrases used in the existing versions; but, as time went on, we were able more and more to concentrate on presenting the original Greek in clear, simple, idiomatic Santali. The discussions became less and less a Lutheran-Anglican battle, with representatives of other denominations coming in on one side or the other, and more and more a 'free-for-all' on the exact meaning of various Greek or Santali words or phrases. While discussion remained keen and vigorous, it tended progressively to engender less heat and more light. Since there were few changes in its membership, the Committee could, and did, grow

¹ The Santals are the largest of the "aboriginal" tribes in N. E. India and number nearly three million.

alike in its perception of the real nature of the work it had to do and in its endeavours, as a unit, to do that work.

The problem of dual terms

Where two different Santali words had been used consistently to translate the same Greek original, it was sometimes possible to agree on a choice between them on linguistic grounds alone—sometimes by using a word belonging to the old, pure Santali rather than one borrowed from a Sanscritic or other source, sometimes by agreement that one was a better translation of the Greek. In other cases, it proved possible to use both, in different contexts. Let me give a few examples. In translating *pistis* (faith, belief), *biswas* was used as a noun, *patiau* in verbal contexts.

While there is little difference between the meaning and use of these two in everyday Santali, in which any word may be used as a verb, we felt that in this way we enriched the translation while making a useful distinction, roughly corresponding to that between "faith" and "to believe" in English. For "tribe", when this refers to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, we used the word *khut*, literally used to designate a sub-sept of one of the twelve Santal septs or tribes; *paris*, used for the tribe as a whole, could not be used since to Santals it would at once suggest one or other of their own tribes. On the other hand *gusti* was used where the meaning is more general (e.g. Mt. 24:30), as it normally is used in Santali. For *ekklêsia* (Church), we used *kalisia* (an adaptation of the Greek word) where the whole Church is indicated; and *mander* (literally, a circle or group) to indicate a local congregation, feeling that, not only in Bible reading, but also in everyday speech, it is useful to have two different words in this case. In Santali, as in most Indian languages, there are no separate words for *moicheia* (adultery) and *porneia* (fornication), but we decided to use *latghat* for the former and *lotghuti* for the latter, both different forms of the same word, with at present identical meanings, in the hope that they will ultimately acquire the different meanings indicated.

Special difficulties

The translation of *sarx* (flesh) proved, as always, a major difficulty. As far as possible, the literal translation, *jel*, was used, in spite of the fact that, in many contexts, it seems unnatural in Santali. But in Jn. 1:14 and Rom. 1:3 we have used *manwa-jat*—literally 'human-being' or 'human-race'—verbalized, as can be any word in Santali; and, in some cases, *hormo* (body).

Perhaps the greatest difficulty of all was to reach agreement on a translation for *charis* (grace). In one existing version, *daya* had been used; in the other, *sahai*. Neither, as used in everyday Santali, is adequate to render the original in its richness and depth of meaning.

(The same, of course, might be said of the English word 'grace'. What of 'with a graceful movement', 'goodness, gracious me!'). But that each, in the area where it was used, had, in its New Testament context, acquired this fulness in the course of years, was proved by the fact that no single protagonist on either side desired a change, each being satisfied with the word he knew, and therefore feeling that any alternative was inadequate. Of various other renderings suggested, all were unsatisfactory for one reason or another. In its difficulty, the Committee consulted the Translation Secretary of the Bible Society of India and Ceylon, who suggested the importation of the word *anugraha*, Sanscritic in origin, and used in this context in translations of the New Testament in many Sanscritic languages. There was much to be said for this. The word in itself comes nearer to the desired meaning than either of the Santali words so far used, and its adoption would avoid a decision on the controversy as between *daya* and *sahai*. The drafter of the Committee wrote articles on the whole matter for the Santali Christian periodical *Pera Hoꝛ* which circulates widely throughout the Santal country, asking for comments. The suggestion was submitted not only to the Santal Christian Council, but also to many Courts of the interested Churches, for their opinions. Hardly a voice, however, was raised in its favour, and many objected vigorously. The adopting of foreign words in any language is an unpredictable phenomenon, and the Committee felt it could not burden the translation with a word which most Santals felt to be an unpalatable importation. So the field was finally restricted to a choice between *daya* and *sahai*. On linguistic grounds, the merits of each more or less balance those of the other, *daya* was finally chosen on the grounds that it is at present in wider use among Santal Christians, as judged by the relative sales of existing versions of the New Testament.

In this, and in one or two other cases, it was agreed to print a note on the back of the title-page of the new version, stating the alternative words that might be used by those who wish—a temporary expedient, we hope.

Final revision

Each Gospel, when completed, had been printed and circulated by the Bible Society, and the new translation of Ephesians had been cyclostyled and circulated widely. Comments on these had been on the whole favourable, but one or two criticisms had also been received before the Committee had completed its first revision of the whole New Testament. For other reasons, too, we discovered the need then for a final assessment of the work as a whole. Some rules laid down in the translation of certain words, or in matters of grammar or construction, had, with growing experience, been altered as the work proceeded. In some parallel passages, especially in the

Synoptic Gospels and in Paul's letters, there were minor differences in our renderings. We had not always been consistent in translating certain key words and phrases in their various contexts. The New Testament was therefore divided into four sections: (1) the Synoptic Gospels; (2) the Johannine writings; (3) Paul's epistles; and (4) the remaining books. Each section was allotted to one member of the Committee, who was to review it carefully and submit proposals for final alterations, while the convener was responsible for reviewing certain important words and phrases throughout the New Testament. In the course of three meetings during the year 1959, the Committee then completed its final revision of the Santali New Testament, which will now be printed and published by the Bible Society of India and Ceylon. We hope and pray that it will be accepted and used by the Santal Churches, and thus remove one obstacle to the coming of the day when we can speak of the Santal Church.

TRANSLATION AND TRANSDUCTION

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It is very helpful to think of the communication of the Christian faith as involving both translation of the Bible and transduction of the gospel. The former is the primary means of the latter, but no end in itself. The dictionary defines *transducer* as "a device actuated by power from one system and supplying power to a second system". If we replace *system* by *culture*, and think of the Christian agent as the *device*, we have a fine description of the man who seeks to make the power of the gospel, first active in one culture, to become a source of power in a second culture. Thus we seek to be transducers. The Bible, however, as a specific document born in one (or two) cultures, cannot be transduced, only translated—it will always be a foreign document in the other cultures of the world. Let's face it. (You *have* to know Palestinian geography and the Hebrew culture to make full sense out of it, and at that point it is quite obviously a foreign book, even if skilfully translated.) It can nevertheless in translated form be a basic tool in the transduction of the gospel. Proper transduction of the gospel will produce in inspired preaching in the new culture something *parallel* to the New Testament. The distinction between the translation of the New Testament and the transduction of the gospel is very important, though commonly confused.

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