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Changing Socio – Cultural Patterns Of The Santhal Tribe: A Study In Bolpur – Santiniketan, Birbhum District

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Abstract

Tribe is a group of people who live together in an isolated particular geographical area. They live in a primitive style of life. Their relationship with nature is very close. They are not aware of the modern culture of the modern world. Tribal people are spread all over India, they are commonly known to us as Adivasis. In India, following the Bhil and Gond tribal communities, the Santhal tribe rank third in terms of population among the tribal communities. In the state of West Bengal, the Santhals constitute one of the most significant tribal groups, predominantly residing in the districts of Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum, and Bardhaman. Change is inevitable. Everything undergoes change; this is the reality. The present study seeks to analyse the patterns and processes of socio-cultural changes within the Santhal community, with particular reference to Banerpukur Danga, Goalpara, and Surul villages in Bolpur – Shantiniketan. The study examines various socio-cultural variables, including food habits, religious practices, dress, language, art and craft, housing pattern etc. It is based on both primary data collected through field surveys and secondary sources. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, and respondents were selected through random sampling technique. The findings suggest that the livelihood, social structure, and cultural practices of the Santhal community in Bolpur Shantiniketan are deeply rooted in nature and shaped by Santiniketan Ashram and Visva-Bharati University. However, globalization, modernization, tourism, and the Shantiniketan Ashram have brought noticeable changes in their lifestyle, occupation, and cultural practices. Despite these transformations, they continue to preserve their traditional identity through their indigenous practices, customs, festivals and arts forms.

Keywords: Santhal Tribe, Tribal Culture, modernization, Socio-cultural change, Birbhum District.

Introduction

Culture is a holistic combination of learned and shared beliefs, values and practices that create cohesion in a group and is the core concept within which anthropologist work. It is dynamic, evolving process on the needs of the people within it and as one culture comes into contact with another. Taylor (1871) defines culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, custom, any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of society. Culture is fundamental, dynamic and continuously evolving. Although change is inevitable, the past should be respected and preserved (Zimmermann, 2017). A tribe is a group of unique people, rely on their land for their livelihood, who are largely self-dependent and remain socially separate from the national society (Rai & Vidyarthi, 1977). The scheduled tribe or so called Adivasi are the indigenous peoples of India subcontinent. There have many tribes in India such as Gond, Kol, Bhil, Oraon, Bhumij, Santal, Munda, Khasi, Garo etc. According to Census 2011, total population scheduled tribes in India is about 104 million people. The tribal population constitutes 8.6% of the total population of India. As per 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 states left Only Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and Puducherry. There have no state in India where have no impact of modern civilization on society. There have also effect of globalization, homogenization, and modernization on Indian tribes. Most of the Indian tribes are losing their cultural identity but in case where they are in majority, their traditional cultural practices is still going

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on. 5.8% of India's total ST population resides in West-Bengal. High concentrations are found in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, and Purulia districts. West Bengal state is the abode of numerous tribes who reside in the rural parts of the state. Most of the people of tribal group of West Bengal speaks in Bengali mix with their own localized accent. Tribal society and their culture is totally different from the other societies and also differ from the modern societies. In the past, tribal culture was simple and closely connected with nature, where people depended mainly on forests and land for their livelihood. Their traditions, customs, and social life were preserved within their communities. However, in the present era, urbanization have brought significant changes to tribal societies. Many tribal people are gradually moving toward cities and adopting modern lifestyle. As a result, some traditional practices and cultural values are slowly declining. Now tribal culture is undergoing a phase of economic and social transformation. Tribal culture is changing due to both traditional and modern factors. Among the traditional influences, Hinduism play a crucial role, as most of the neighbouring communities of tribal groups in India belong to Hindu religion. They assimilate into the Hindu way of life. On the other hand, the modern factors such as Christianity, urbanization, and industrialization have also influenced tribal culture. The religious transformation of tribal communities in India began during British period and missionary activities of conversion are still observed today (Rao, 1966). As a result tribal community assimilation with urban society and urban culture (Vidyarthi, L.P.; Rai, B.K. 1976). The study of socio-cultural change among the Santhal tribe in Birbhum district is very important in present context because tribal societies are no longer isolated and are gradually coming into contact with modern society. Due to the influence of education urbanization, government development programmes, media and tourism significant changes are taking place in their social structure, occupation, lifestyle, and education, housing pattern, food habit, dress pattern and cultural practise. This study help to understand whether traditional culture and identity are being preserved or gradually changing. Moreover, such studies are important for policy makers and planners to design sustainable development programmes for tribal communities while preserving their traditional knowledge, culture and social identity.

Study Area

Bolpur-Santiniketan is an important cultural and tribal region. It is situated in the southern part of Birbhum district. Bolpur-Santiniketan is a part of the Rarh region of West Bengal. The area geographically located approximately at 23°40' North latitude and 87°41' East longitude. The region is bounded by the Kopai River in the north and west, while the Ajay River forms the southern boundary of

the area. In the northern and north western parts of Bolpur-Santiniketan, a distinctive type of topography has developed due to rill and gully erosion on the lateritic soil surface. This erosional process has created an undulating and dissected landscape, locally known as "Khoai." The climate is generally tropical monsoon type. It lies about 150 km North West of Kolkata. It is also well known for its cultural importance and Shantiniketan Ashram due to the presence of Visva-Bharati University and Shantiniketan Ashram founded by Rabindranath Tagore. Apart from its cultural importance, it is also known as a prominent Santhal tribal belt. For the survey, information was collected from Banerpukur Danga, Goalpara and Surul village.



Fig 1: Location Map of Study Area

Review of Literature

1. Dey (2015) has explained the influence of globalization in socio-cultural aspect of the Santhal migrants and how they have carried forward various modern values in their tribal society.
2. Ghosh (2015) depicted that how far the pattern and quality of living of socially disadvantaged people (the tribal people) have changed through globalization in West Bengal.
3. Paul & Gupta (2016) has explained impact of modernization that is rapidly eroding the ageold traditions of Santal of this region, especially their weaving, ornamentation, productive activities, handicrafts, house type etc. The objective of the study is to portray the transition of traditional culture of Santal of this region to its modern platform.
4. Biswas (2018) highlighted the influence of urbanization and the government schemes and policy has totally changed their way of life and now there is also a lot of change in their society and culture.
5. Talukdar & Mete (2021) examined the role and influence of social media in changing the traditional lifestyles, beliefs, values and norms of tribes in West Bengal.
6. Sen (2021) examined the livelihood pattern of the Santhal people in the present era. The study highlights the gradual changes in their socio-economic condition. The

7. study is also experiencing socio-cultural changes due to modernization and the influence of Visva-Bharati University and Santiniketan Ashram; they still preserve many aspects of their traditional culture and lifestyle.

8. Kumar & Thakur (2022) has described the social and cultural values of Baiga tribes and the lifestyle, culture and customs of this community. The study also explains that in the period of globalization, they still follow their traditional practices, customs and values.

9. Kumar (2022) has discussed the historical and anthropological approaches for the study of society and culture changes. The study highlights that modernization, education and economic development have significantly influenced the traditional lifestyle and cultural practices of tribal people in Jharkhand.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the socio-cultural conditions of Santhal tribe.
2. To examine the socio-cultural transformation of the Santhal tribe.
3. To analyse the socio-economic factors that restrict the promotion of Santhal tribe folk culture.

Methodology

The present study is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. Before conducting the primary survey, the study areas was carefully examined through a pilot study survey. Primary data were collected through semi-structure questionnaire survey, face to face interviews, observation, ethnographic study and photographic documentation. Secondary data were collected from the BDO office and Gram Panchayat office, Journal Article. Primary data were collected from 90 households using the simple random sampling method. All data has been presented through suitable tables, diagrams and chart using Microsoft Office Word - 2013, Microsoft Excel - 2013 and using various statistical methods and tools. The location map was created using the QGIS 3.16 software. To obtain accurate and reliable findings various statistical tools and methods were used to analyse the collected data. This study also has some limitations, such as lack of time, lack of funds and incomplete responses from some participants.

Discussion and Results:

After conducting the villages’ survey, the findings obtained from the study are discussed below:

Religion:

From the survey the information about their religion is obtained - they mainly believe in nature based religion, and the main feature of their religion is Animism, which means belief in the spirits and powers of nature. They believe that natural objects such as tree, hill, river, and sun possess spiritual or supernatural powers. The chief deity of the Santhals is Singbonga, who is regarded as the Sun God. Besides this, they worship many Bongas such as Marang Buru and Pargana Bonga. Their religious rituals and

ceremonies are usually performed at a sacred place called Jaher Than. Earlier they used to follow their religion and religious practices very strictly. At present survey shows that many changes have taken place in their dress and religious practices. By mixing with Bengali people and studying in Bengali schools they now celebrate many Bengali festivals such as Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja. Moreover, Santhal women and men have also started wearing shirts and pants instead of their traditional dress.

Santhali Language:

Santhali language is the mother tongue of this community. This community have their own script, its call Ol-Chiki. Within home they speak in Santali but outside of home they speak in Bengali as their neighbours. From the survey it has been found that 95% of people can speak in Santali and only 5% can't speak in Santali and those 5% peoples are born after 2000. In earlier times, people were very interested in learning and writing the Ol-Chiki language. For example, schools were formed to teach Ol-Chiki. But now day only 55% people can read, write and speak this language, 40% people can only read and rest of the people can neither read nor write.

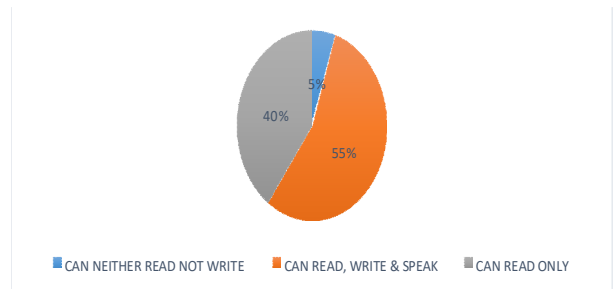


Fig: 2 Level of knowledge of the people in Santhali Language

Wearing Traditional Dress

From the survey at present, in their daily life they wear saree, shirt, normal dhoti and various types of dresses. However, during festivals they wear their traditional dress called Panji-Pahad, which is special traditional attire. But in recent time it has been observed that especially the teenagers, young boys and girls, are becoming more interested in western culture. Their interest is gradually shifting toward western style clothing due to social media and others. Among the elderly there is a strong effort to preserve these practices but new generation have lack of interest.

Preference in Tribal people for wearing Traditional dress	Yes in %
Prefer to wear to wear all time	25
Prefer to wear during festival times	60
Prefer to wear only modern dress	15

Table 1: Preference in Tribble people for wearing Traditional dress



Fig: 3 Preference in Tribes people for wearing Traditional dress

Food Habits

Santhal people follow a simple and traditional food pattern that is closely related to their natural environment, agricultural practices and cultural traditions. Their food habits mainly depend on locally available resources such as agricultural crops, forest products, fish and domestic animals. In daily life, they consume simple foods like rice, vegetables, fish and forest products. The cooking method is generally different; they prefer very little oil and spices. Food is often boiled, roasted, or cooked in earthen pots. They also consume and collect various different types of vegetables regularly and various animals, birds, rats, crabs, foxes, fish, frogs, ants, rodents, wild cats etc. In many households, consumed soaked rice locally known as Panta Bhat or Da Madi in the morning with salt, onion and chili.

During festival occasions, the food pattern becomes more elaborate and richer. Festivals such as Baha Parab, Sohrai, Karam Festival. Handia is a popular traditional beverage of the Santhals, mainly made from rice. It is commonly consumed by people during family gatherings and social festivals and rituals by men, women and children. They also drink intoxicating liquor made from dried Mahua flowers. For smoking, tobacco is rolled in sal leaves. At present, changes can be observed in their food habits. Generally, the new generation prefers food beyond their traditional cuisine to eat chowmein, momo, biryani, pasta and various other food outside of their culture.

Spatial Distribution of Settlements

According to the information obtained from the survey of Santhal inhabited villages, it is observed that they generally live in small hamlet type settlement or paras (small neighbourhood clusters). Their houses are usually constructed on slightly elevated land. The villages are generally surrounded by trees, bamboo groves and bushes. In most cases, agricultural lands are located around their settlements, and forest patches can also be seen near the residential areas. Most of the house walls are made of mud and various natural materials collected from nearby forests. Inside the house there is a sacred place known as "Bhitar". Houses including cattle shed, storage space for dried grains or food sheds for ducks and chickens and pits for storing

manure, pig shed. The walls of the houses are generally plastered with red clay and decorated with different types of traditional designs and paintings. The roofs are thatched with straw. However, at present along with these traditional houses, Semi-pucca and pucca houses are also increasingly being observed in these villages.

Education

The education scenario of the villages located near Bolpur-Santiniketan reflect a gradually transforming social reality. From the survey, only 31% people are literate among the sample people from these villages, which clearly indicates the relatively backward education condition of the area in the past. Most of the people in the village completed education only up to the primary level, while the number of people who completed second and higher education was comparatively low the older population of the village is largely illiterate which suggests that educational facilities infrastructure, awareness were not adequately developed in earlier times whoever over time, a gradual but significant change in the education social awareness about education, government education expansion program and the availability of nearby schools and higher educational institutions have played an important role in this transformation. In this context, the influence of Visva- Bharati University is particularly significant. The presence of this institution has create educational awareness and motivation among the local people, especially the younger generation, encouraging them to pursue education. Therefore, it can be said that the educational slow but continuous process of social transformation which hold the potential for further improvement in the future.

Festivals

The santhal tribe communities living in the rural areas surrounding Bolpur-Shantiniketan region celebrate several traditional festivals throughout the year, most of which are closely associated with agriculture, seasonal cycles, forest resources and livestock. Among these, some festivals are given more importance than others, such as: Erok Sim is celebrated during the time of sowing seeds in the fields. Hariar Sim is organized when the seeds begin to sprout. Iri-Gundli is a festival where people offer the 1st fruits of crops. Jahartor is celebrated during the 1st winter rice harvest. Sohrai is an important harvest when people thank their cattle and animals for helping in agricultural work. Mak Sim marks the end of the agricultural year. Baha is the spring flower festival celebrated before Holi, where village women perform traditional dances accompanied by rhythmic tunes of "dhamsha madal" beaten by the men folks. These festivals together reflect the cultural identity, social unity and traditional ecological knowledge of the tribal in this region.

Handicrafts and Arts

Bolpur Santiniketan is well known for its unique heritage of Santhali art and crafts. The area is famous throughout West Bengal for its rich tradition of handicrafts, cultural activities and artistic practices. Specifically, Sonajhuri

village is one of the most attractive and charming places near Santiniketan that attracts many tourists from distant places. The study area is well known for its cottage industries, especially handmade clay crafts, wooden crafts and bamboo and wooden furniture for decorating the houses, and traditional ethnic clothing. Over time, the local traditional crafts and artistic works have been modified to some extent under the impact of modernization and globalization. The field survey reveals that only about 14% of the villagers are engaged in their traditional art and craft practices, while the rest of the people show little or no interest in these traditional activities. The youngest people showed less interest because these activities offer low income and don't get fair prices while requiring a high amount of labour. These traditional crafts are mainly practiced by the older and middle aged people, who continue to carry forward this heritage from generation to generation. These handicrafts are displayed to express their cultural heritage and to decorate their homes. On the other hand, some people produced and sell these items in the market as a source of livelihood.

Marriage system

The marriage system of Santhal people is traditional and community oriented. In Santhal society, marriage is called 'Bapla'. It is considered a sacred social institution that creates a relationship not only between a man and woman, but also between two families and their village. They follow monogamy. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited, so they follow clan exogamy. Several types of marriages exist in Santhal society such as— Kirin Bapla, Sadai or arranged Bapla, Tunki Dipil Bapla, Apangir Bapla. They celebrate marriage as a festival. During the ceremony, traditional music, drum beating, dancing and traditional dress are important parts of the celebration. The way the marriage is celebrated often depends on the economic condition of each household. However, it remains a community festival in which most of the villagers participate. A few years ago, child marriage was practiced in their society. At present, due to various government initiatives child marriage before the age of 18 has been largely discouraged. However it is observed that in some cases girls are still married secretly at an early age before the age of 18. This data has been obtained from the survey.

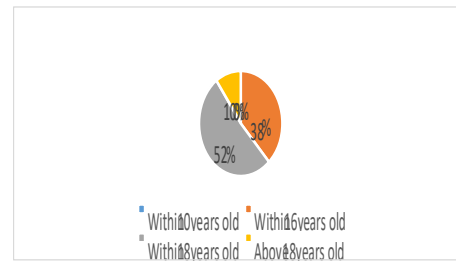


Fig: 4 Average age of Female at marriage in santhal families

Many changes have occurred in their marriage practices. Most of these changes are influenced by Hinduism. For example, they wear Banarasi saree at wedding. Instead of playing traditional instruments such as dhol, dhak and dam, but now use DJ box, mike etc.

Occupational Structure

Occupational structure According to the study area survey, the primary livelihood of Santal community is agriculture and forest based and labour based income. High proportion of the working population earn their livelihood through daily labour. Male, female and child labour are also present in these villages. They primarily work as sharecroppers. The amount of land they own is very limited. They engage in daily wage and sell handicrafts, bamboo and wooden products, clay items, local foods and art at the famous Sonajhuri. The weekly market is held once a week. Tourism also contributes to their income, as they earn money by performing Baul and folk dances with musical instrument madal. Furthermore, they have traditionally relied on nearby forest patches to collect sal leaves, wood and other forest resources. Overall, the livelihood of the Santals are based on a combination of agriculture, forest resources utilization, and market oriented cottage industries, art and crafts. At present, some changes can be observed in their economic activities. More than 50% of Santal population in the villager are economically connected with Santiniketan Ashram and Visva-Bharati University.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be said that the livelihood, social structure, and cultural tradition of the Santhal community are largely dependent on nature. The people of Bolpur-Santiniketan have maintained a close relationship with nature since the beginning. In this region, Visva-Bharati University and the Santiniketan Ashram have played an important role in shaping the social and cultural life of the Santhal tribe. As a result, the Santhal tribe of this region have developed a distinct identity compared to Santhals living in other districts of West Bengal. The ideals of universalism, humanism and love for nature established by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan have greatly influenced the Santhal society. He never considered the Santhals as untouchables or inferior. However, in the present time due to modernization, tourism, urbanization, globalization and the spread of the internet and

Average age of marriage (Female)	Numberof responded (%)
Within 10 years old	0
Within 16 years old	38
Within 18 years old	52
Above 18 years old	10

Table 2: Average age of Female at marriage in santhal families

smartphone, noticeable changes are taking place in their traditional lifestyle and livelihood patterns. Santiniketan Ashram, Visva-Bharati University, the Khoai region, Kopai river (which Rabindranath Tagore described as a "Choto Nadi"), Kankali Mandir, Sonajhuri forest and traditional cultural practices of Santhal tribe, combined with the natural beauty of the region, has created a harmonious and enchanting paradise. Many people from Kolkata and other cities visit this area during holidays to spend quality time. During Poush Mela and Basanta Utsav, a large number of visitors gather in this region. As a result, the rapid growth of hotels, resorts, and homestays in this region has transformed not only the physical environment but has also significantly influenced the lifestyle of the Santhal peoples. Now they work as caretakers, gardeners, etc. drivers and in other service roles in the newly developed residential areas. As a result, a significant change can be observed in their socio-economic life. A changing pattern can also be observed in their housing structure. Previously, the Santhal people lived mainly in earthen huts but at present live in semi-pucca and pucca houses. Traditionally, the Santhal people consumed a local beverage known as Handia. However, in recent times the consumption of foreign liquor has increased, mainly due to interaction with visitors and influence of tourism. Many changes have also taken place in their rituals. They have been largely influenced by Hinduism and now celebrate Bengali festivals. They also celebrate the festival of Christmas in December. Although significant socio-economic and cultural changes have taken place, the traditional heritage of the Santhal community has not been completely eroded. Their cultural identity still persists through different festivals and ceremonies, traditional ornaments, art and crafts, decorative wall motifs on mud houses and the continued use of indigenous agricultural tools.

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