

The Changing Cultural Pattern among the Santals of Birbhum, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: This study is confined among the Santals residing in Bolpur-Sriniketan Block of Birbhum district, West Bengal. A major issue that the study deals with is the wide range of impact of modernization that is rapidly eroding the age-old traditions of Santal of this region, especially their weaving, ornamentation, productive activities, handicrafts, house types etc. Changes have been observed in practise of their festivals especially among the youth. The objective of the study is to portray the transition of traditional culture of Santal of this region to its modern platform. The study also reveals the benefits of modernisation which has aided the Santal from being in a back footed position, in the social ladder, as well as has provided them with better living condition including education and health care and empowerment of women. The modern process of change, have brought a change in tradition and cultural modification among Santal of this region. The reason is particularly due to acceptance of modern culture as well as the changing taste of the Santal through awareness from different sources.

INTRODUCTION

India has vast geographical area with diversified ecological, cultural and linguistic zones. The tribal form a significant population of India as, the country have given shelter to more than five hundred tribal community constituting 08.6 per cent of total population. The term 'adivasi' is implied to the tribal people. The ILO has classified them as indigenous people and they are living in this subcontinent from unrecorded period. They settled mostly in ecologically marginal areas of hills, forest and other places isolated from the main stream population and are characterized by their distinct dialects, culture, folklore, geographical isolation as well as their subsistence economy (Vidyarthi and Rai,'76). The Santals form one of the largest tribal groups in eastern India

concentrated mainly in Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Tripura. Birbhum district of West Bengal, comprise nearly 6.74 per cent of total population and 89 per cent of tribal population (Chaudhuri,'87; Ghoosh, 2013). This district is situated in the eastern side of the Santal Pargana district of present Jharkhand. The Santals are the major tribal group concentrating in Birbhum district. They are locally known as 'Majhi'. Some authors as Hunter, Dalton, Risely and the administrators Mc. Alpin of eighteen century portrait Birbhum as the homeland of the Santals. In 1872 Santal population in Birbhum was 6954 and it increases to 242484 in 2011. Being a more adaptive community, the lifestyle of the Santal here is not so primitive. Santals are also found in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2008).

The Santals of this region have come in contact with the non-tribal and urban lifestyle. The impact of this exposure can be seen in the field of culture,

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language, traditions, occupation, customs etc (Saren, 2013; Majhi, 2010; Paul, 2005). As a result of exposure to modern way of life and economy, the Santals have come close to modern forms of life, institutions and values that have encouraged socio-cultural transformation in their society (Hembram, '88). They are influenced by the new cultural traits, practices and adopt new systems when they come across at the place of settlement with academic institutions, and employment (Chaudhury and Patnaik, 2008; Majhi, 2010; Saren, 2013). Thereafter, it would be interesting to understand the impact modernization on the Santal. In order to do so, attempt has been made to address the transition of traditional culture of Santal of this region to its modern platform. The study also reveals the benefits of modernization which has aided the Santal from being in a back footed position, in the social ladder, as well as has provided them with better living condition including education and health care and empowerment of women. The modern process have brought a change in tradition and cultural modification among Santals of this region. The Santal ancestors possess own religion, strong cultural heritage and traditional village political structure which are at stake today. The reason is particularly due to acceptance of modern culture as well as the changing taste of the Santals through awareness from different sources. This study is confined among the Santals residing in Bolpur-Sriniketan block of Birbhum district, West Bengal. Present study is an outcome of field based work. It includes focused group discussion, intensive interview, interaction with key persons, and informal discussions with Santal people. Secondary sources of data are also used in writing the paper. The study focuses on qualitative analysis for better understanding of the cultural change.

Interrelationship between Tribal and Non-Tribal

The Santals in this district (*****Ref) reside mostly in rural areas, and are illiterate or poorly educated. The development of infrastructural facilities, construction of roads, better communication system have led to changes in the socio cultural status of the Santals of this region. Interregional disparities are being observed to be in a declining state in all spheres of their life. Cultural diffusion and

acculturation are the resulted fruits of interaction with other non-tribal people which is bringing changes in long term process. Changes in a drastic manner have been noticed in food habits and their use of material culture. In early days the Santals of this region had their traditional institution through which they enriched their cultural heritage. In post-independence period several programmes taken by the government, non-government organisations as well as Christian missionaries have imparted education and awareness among the Santals which introduced them to the exterior modern world. It was after independence that the government paved attention on the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution took special care, and these weaker sections were provided with a number of safeguards for the promotion of their interests, including educational facilities. Special mention, in this connection, must be made of the Article 46 of the Constitution in which it has been made one of the Directive Principles of State Policy to promote with special care, inter alia, the educational interests of weaker sections of the people, particularly of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Together with these programmes, the bliss of reservation policy in academic sector, employment sector etc. taken by government have -result in their up gradation, changing their socio-cultural life to a large extent. Interrelationship between tribal that is Santal of this region and the non-tribal communities have transformed the traditional image of tribal society gradually to a modern society. Along with the socio-cultural changes through adaptation of the different traits, a number of employment opportunities have opened before them. Another interesting transformation that has been noticed is in the field of religion. The Santal are inclined to follow the Hindus, and many among them have converted to Christianity.

Occupational Diversification

The tribal economy can be classified as subsistence type, and of mixed economy with mutual dependence on labour. Tribal, which acts as single body, makes its economic dealings in periodical markets without having a profit making motive in it. Co-operation and collective endeavours acts as strong developing pillars of their economy with less rate and

scope of innovation and specialization. It can be also characterised as absence in access of technological aids. The mode of production and earning is 'domestic' among the tribal. Traditionally they are found to be absorbed mainly in two different kinds of economic activities, namely agricultural labour as well as through forest oriented activities. The life of the tribal is closely knotted with nature. Forests and tribal are inseparable as it is the common thread in all respects of their life starting from birth, marriage, livelihood and death. Forest is the pillar in case of contribution to the tribal economy. This ethnic group, Santal, was originally hunters and gatherers. Non Timber Forest Product (NTFP) are used by them in the form of food, fodder, fibre and household articles, medicinal and ornamental forms and supplement their income, especially during lean seasons, besides providing religious and aesthetic needs. Tribals are hugely dependent on the forest-based economy, and the Santals of this region are of no exception. The Santal uses edible NTFP for direct consumption, like root, fruits, flower, seed, honey, mushroom and small animals like pigeon, cock, wild hen, hares, pigs etc. Other than consumption their economy is also dependent on forest in the productive sector that is handicrafts. A huge section of the Santal population here have subsisted on crafts and cottage industries such as basket making, spinning and weaving, matting, bamboo work, as well as Sal leaf-plate making etc. The entire raw materials which are required for these production are derived from the forests as well. Other than these they practice agriculture to some extent. But with the reckless cutting of trees, deforestation, consumption pattern and supply of forest products reveal that there has been a significant pressure on the forest with the increasing population growth, urbanisation, and high rate of economic growth, pollution and over exploitation. The degrading circumstance of forest resources threatens sustainable economic development as there has been a huge economic and social impact of this loss on the Santals of this region. The working on handicrafts which once was notices to be a prime occupation among a section of Santal here is now observed to be a subsidiary one or only for self-utilisation. The study has noticed a gradual inclination of the Santal inhabitants of this region towards professions other than their traditional one that is forest-based or agriculture. The reasons

also vary for this change like being introduced to education and higher education have paved the way of opportunities for employment towards urban and industrial fields for white collar jobs in public or private sectors. They have made a mark in government sectors as well. Some Santal families of this region, do possess white-collar jobs in different offices, hospitals, factories, as clerks, office assistants, teachers etc. Santal inhabitants having low or no educational background also have changed their profession owing to shortfall of traditional resources, and also as there is better openings in other sectors. They are found to be engaged in professions like construction workers, domestic workers in others households, workers in restaurants, as beauticians, driver etc. Some little educated among them are found to be cook for mid-day meal, and in Anganwadi centres. MGNREGA has emerged as a bright opportunity in their life, delivering the assurance of guaranteed work with a replacement of better remuneration for less laborious work. Moreover the periodical small markets of this community are presently linked with the bigger markets; therefore this has introduced a number of new innovative occupations in the Santal economy. The attitude of the Santals have changed which has developed due to the fruits of modernisation. This is observed to be a major cause of occupational diversification. Income among this section of people is not restricted now to mere self-sufficiency any more, they want to earn more for their spending for a better life. They have stepped in the world of new technology and luxury that demands for a higher range of income diversifying the traditional occupations to modern economic activities.

Socio-cultural Changes

The change in traditional socio-cultural issues is the resulting fruits, of the changing taste of the Santal of this region. Adoption to modernization is the requirement of time. Though modernizing the thoughts of Santal would be helpful to their society, but erosion of their rich cultural heritage which has been passing on through ages by their tribal ancestors from one generation to other, are changing in the process of modernization, and this is undoubtedly has a telling effect on their society. They are experiencing

a phase of cultural crisis in the present century as a result of this modernization. The dramatic changes in the economic and political environment of Santal population have had a profound influence on their social life as well. Many Santals still live in clusters of villages in interior forests or in areas, with less accessibility and influence of the town, with an approximate homogeneous population, do still retain their culture to some extent. But today changes have been noticed in areas where the tribal population have been split up and have come in contact with numerous populations of different caste and cultural background. The social and cultural order which was in practice in earlier times, now have started to decline on the interaction with caste based people in the neighbouring areas. This disturbance is being caused due the interaction of the Santals with the other caste people who are economically and politically more powerful. The pace of social change is noticed to be faster among the Santals here, who are frequently interacting with their settled neighbouring peasant communities and in some cases with the urban population. Such tribal communities were certainly ahead of others that are; the primitive tribal communities who still reside in interior either in forests or far of places from cultural contact of other caste people. The latter are more vulnerable, and do have less opportunity of interaction with the advanced communities. So, when analysis is done regarding the range of changes of the tribals then interestingly they are found to be at different positions owing to different levels of acculturation. The effectiveness of traditional systems of the Santal has sharply declined because of the increasing dependence on external economic forces as well as their settlements surrounding the other caste people. Emergence of education and self-awareness for development from different sources are also mentioning criteria responsible for the encouragement of their modern adaptation.

Education

Santals are generally illiterate. But the picture has been observed to take different colour in this present century to some extent. Awareness regarding education has been observed since two generations of the Santal community to a higher range. Parents are sending their children to anganwadi centres and

schools. Most fascinatingly in this region Santal girls are also encouraged for higher education. Improvement in literacy level has positively effected in changing the economic and socio-cultural life of the Santal as well as this will restrict them to be exploited in the hands of other people. Government as well as non-governmental sectors have immensely contributed in high reaching the literacy and creating awareness regarding the need for education. The development programmes for improvement of educational level together with reservation policy in different types of job by the government have helped the Santal youth to change the occupation pattern for betterment of their living. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India have taken some measures for economic development. These are: ITDP, LAMPS, and AMSY under NSTFDC (income generation scheme). The Development programmes act as the accelerating force in the producing an opportunity of higher education and better employment which is grabbed by the present generation Santal of this region. National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation introduced education loan scheme in the name of Adivasi Shiiksha Rrinn Yojana in which an eligible person can get concessional loan for professional and technical course to PhD conducted by government or government sponsored colleges or institution. A new trend of tutorial arrangement for the children has been observed in the study area. These tutorials are often run and guided by young educated Santali girls imparting the light of education among their juniors. Various programmes and schemes like Post-Matric Scholarships (PMS), Pre-Matric Scholarships, Hostels for ST students studying in middle schools, higher secondary schools, colleges and Universities, Coaching and Allied scheme, up-gradation of merit, Top Class education for meritorious ST students in reputed educational institutions for higher/technical education, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowships for M.Phil and Ph.D courses, many State level educational promotion schemes of free text books, uniforms, bicycles, merit scholarships, etc. have been implemented by both the Central and State Government. Many students of the locality are availing the benefit of the government schemes for their educational development.

Marriage

Santal marriage is practiced following their traditional customs, and is identifiable through its joyful activities of singing, dancing, in the rhythm of drums and flute. Bride price is an integrated custom of this tribal marriage. 'Raibar' locally named as 'Ghotok' plays a significant role in conducting Santal marriage. Child marriage is a dominating phenomenon here with a number of reasons. Though there prevails the influence of the rigid and deep-rooted traditional culture, it has been observed that acceptance of modern views are the emerging trends of Santal society. With awareness generation, impact of education and social changes, the present generation views certain changes in their thinking process, which is depicted in the marriage ceremony of the Santal of this region. In upcoming generations it has been observed that focus on higher qualification of girls is made. It may be in a very limited and rare case but girls are observed to receive such opportunities in few families which can be set as an example for the future generations. Though some desire, but fail to save their daughters from being victimised of child marriage. Findings of the study have portrayed a new phenomenon among Santal marriage of this region. In the recent years advent of transaction of dowry has been observed among Santal marriage. Marriage is being conducted on fulfilment of the pre settled demands of the bridegroom's father by that of the bride's. This custom is found among the higher caste people of the society. Such practise did not persist in the traditional cultural orbit of Santal marriage. But with sanskritisation and modernisation since recent years dowry transaction has become a strong part of Santal marriage in this region. Bride price on the other hand, which is regarded as the part of marriage do merely remain as a custom. Added to these, certain slow but steady changes are noticed in the study area. Previously girl-bride had no voice regarding her marriage. But present scenario do gives an opportunity to women to voice for their age at marriage and authority of choice of partner. As far as the celebration of the ceremony is concerned in earlier times Santal marriages had no conception of offering food meals that is lunch or dinner to the invitees or relatives of the bride or bride-grooms family. But recently a changing trend is being observed in the study. Now-

a-days preparations are made by ordering caterers to serve food to the invitees. Interestingly inter caste marriages is an emerging trend among the Santals of this region. In this case majorly, marriage is found to be conducted among Santal and the higher caste Hindu family. The concept of legal separation that is divorce is also found to be practiced in this community. In earlier times couples were separated for personal preference or with mutual consent, and remarried accordingly. But presently they are now inclined towards legal approval of marriage and separation. Thereafter demand for marriage registration and divorce is in practice.

Family Pattern

The advent of urbanisation has changed the pattern but family do retain its importance in the Santal society. Family may be broadly defined as a unit of two or more persons united by marriage, blood, adoption, or consensual union, in general consulting a single household, interacting and communicating with each other (Desai, 1994). The joint families in present century have broken to nuclear families. It is observed that the family structure in Santal society is majorly nuclear. There are many reasons which accelerate these changes like occupation in areas outside the village or town, opting for higher education, mal adjustment with elder family members, migration for jobs, inclination towards city lifestyle etc. The children of such nuclear families as seen do develop early independence with added responsibilities. The elder children do take up their unavoidable imposed responsibilities of rearing their siblings. Often in Santal nuclear families it is found that the maintenance of the family is carried out by the female member or the mother. Father being capable of earning either doesn't work or spends his earning on gambling and intoxication. Therefore majorly these broken nuclear families of single parent responsibility are poor and cannot adequately meet their children's needs. Moreover migration for economy puts stress on child's education and health as well. The residential changes of families among the youth in towns and cities from their traditional lands have deprived their children from being a part of their joint families and this created gap between generations do place them away from their orbit of origin.

Health Practices

Santals are characterised with challenges like poverty, malnutrition, ignorance towards health-care and lack of awareness, poor sanitary and living condition, poor maternal and child health services, which are contributing factors for miserable health conditions of their community. An individual is usually considered to be ill or affected with some diseases if he/she is incapable of performing his routine work. The pattern of consumption to a large extent plays a vital role in malnourishment of the Santal children. Reproductive health is also found to be poor among the Santal families. Difficulties during pregnancy, lack of nutrition, prone to anaemia, premature pregnancies and giving birth to malnourished children as well as infant mortality and maternal death are some of the common illnesses found in health status among Santal women. The physiological vulnerabilities, present among the girls are much more likely to result in maternal death during child birth. It has been also noticed that primarily the young Santal mothers are not concentrated upon for medical check-up which leads to complications in advanced pregnancy. These young brides, during pregnancy, do even lack the knowledge regarding their regular health check-ups, immunisation, and other services provided by the government under ICDS, which is a significant sign of negligence towards their health awareness. Moreover tuberculosis, *kala-jar*, skin infections are a few common findings of disease among the Santal here. From ancient times Santal do believe on *Ojha*, their traditional health practitioner and consumes medicines from medicinal plants as given by him. Increasing level of education and health awareness are found to decline the dismal health condition among the Santal families. The spread of information about the importance of proper nutrition, good health and various birth control measures, in addition to general health check-up have grown in acceptance of medical practitioners and allopathic and homeopathy medicines. As a consequence, presently Santal have developed a belief and have become dependants on health centres, even for minor illness like cold and cough, they prefer to visit health centre rather than seeking opinion from traditional practitioners. Further, during child delivery, majority of Santal women of this region are getting admitted to the nearby health

centres. Moreover, Santal female folk have become well aware of family planning and women from this community go for sterilisation operation at times beyond the positive concern of husband and his family. Consumption of external liquor and excessive smoking are also responsible for their ill health.

Food Habits

Food habit is another indicator which represents the changing of the Santal. Interaction with non-tribal not only changed the outlook but its effect is also dramatically visualised in the taste and consumption of food. Since the Santal of this region are daily labourers thereafter their consumption restricts to rice, potato, some leafy vegetables and puffed rice. Only in occasions they are found to consume meat. But with enhanced education and generating awareness regarding the nutritive value of different food items and vegetables, a gradual change in the *consumption pattern* can be noticed. They have started to consume different cereals (*dal*), and vegetables at times through kitchen garden. On the other hand preference of fast food has a growing rate among the youth of Santal of this region. Even among children snacks like chips, kurkure, magi, are very popular. It has also been noticed that a number of fast food stalls have developed in this region which run in a good manner. Changes have been noticed in their drinking behaviour also. The Santals of this region especially the youths are found to be inclined to consume local liquor other than or parallel to their traditional home made drink. Only during their festive seasons they majorly concentrate on their traditional drink. Other than that throughout the year they are found to purchase and consume local liquor.

Expenditure Pattern

Previously the expenses of the Santals covered their food, clothes, and other daily requirements. But with awareness generated from different sources, they have become health conscious and are gradually realising the importance of education. So, now the expenditure pattern has made space for these two areas as well. As far as health is concerned it has been previously discussed that Santals has now grown a belief towards medicines other than from medicinal plants given by *Ojha*. They do visit health centres,

even in need they are spending on private practitioners as well as medicines. They are observed to have developed the habit of staying healthy and this has resulted to open the door of expenses for treatment starting from minor to major issues of mal health of the family members especially children. Another area also draws importance in the list of expenses upon is education. Parents are sending their children even girl child for higher studies in college and universities. In addition to these parents do spend on private tuitions for children so that they do not face difficulty in studies since either their parents are illiterate, less educated or they lack time, being overloaded with work, for teaching their children. New trends of expenditure also include modern clothes and cosmetics to keep oneself update and presentable with the outside world. Expenses on fast food have been also observed even in regular basis. Santal youths of this region are found to expend on local liquor to a large extend which was previous absent since they majorly consumed their home made traditional drink.

Wealth Making

Traditionally tribal were not of a character to be conscious about wealth making or securing and saving the same. They were not commercial in nature in their economic sphere that is it can be observed that there is absence of profit making motive in economic dealings. A new trend has been noticed that Santals in this area have developed a tendency of accumulating wealth or making property. They have inclined towards a habit of saving from their income which was completely an alien concept for them previously. They are now found to visit banks, create bank accounts, and save as per their capability. Reasons for savings as conveyed by respondents were for marriage of girls, education of children, constructing house, cattle business, future use etc. The Santal who are educated, have white collar jobs or earn well through business or other services do save to increase their wealth and property. They are in a tendency to be rich and established in terms of house, property, education and lifestyle to secure an equal position and status like the non-tribal in the society. They are of an opinion that through wealth consumption resulting in changing life style, they can make a better standard for themselves in the society.

The greed and desire for luxury have opened hands for savings and developing commercial attitude.

Self-Image

The Santal youths now like to portray their self-image as modern non-tribal youths are presenting. Self-presentation is an indicator, as considered by the Santal youths, to present their state of modernisation that accelerates their acceptability in the wider society. They wear modern dresses like jeans (by both young girl and boy), shirt, skirt-top, *salwar-kurta*, as well as they wear modern jackets of jeans and foam in winter season. Santal boys are also found to use fashionable covered shoes and fancy sandals in case of girls. The Santal girls and women use facial cosmetics to a large extend like fair and lovely, *kajal*, lipstick, fashionable hair pins which they believe do enhance their beauty and places them in equal standard with the other non-tribal girls or women in the society. Apart from white metal jewellery, the Santal female folk of this region do wear other metal and junk ornaments. Wearing wrist-band or iron bangle is also a presentation of modernization. The self-presentation of present day Santal youth is similar to the non-tribal of the society

Language

Language is another important aspect which deserves a special mention in the list of changes owing to modernisation. Santal whether men or women is capable of speaking Bengali, the regional language of this area, very fluently. This has been possible owing to coming in contact with the non-tribal people who either resides as neighbours, in employment background, or in educational institutions. The study reveals that to a huge extent the Santal of this region do avoid to speak in their mother tongue in group meetings or places where other non-tribal are present. Astonishingly this is found among the children of present youth as they find that would discriminate them and lower their standard among others. Even the parents of present generation do not want their children to speak in Santali resulting to the fact that a mentionable section today and the complete Santal population of tomorrow would be unknowing their mother tongue. Children of so called Elite class that is the one who belong from a little rich and educational

background are fluently speaking English and Hindi but are restricted to speak in their mother tongue since being unknown to them as attempted by their parents.

Housing Pattern

Housing pattern is also a visual change of culture degradation among the Santal of this region. Household pattern was cultural identification of the Santal. The colourful decorations through paintings and art on the mud walls at outdoor was the representation of their creativity and their traditional art. But present day these are found to rare among the community. The rich elite class people do construct their house out of the village. The study has observed certain households of elite among the Santal having bungalow decorated with beautiful garden with expensive plantation. They are well furnished and equipped with modern equipment.

Usages of Household Articles

Adoption of modern articles is observed in this region (see Table 1). The Santals do use a wide range of modern articles which either were absent or not popularly known among the Santal forefathers. From the beginning to end of the day, presents us a number of articles which they have adopted with time and with residential opportunities near urban areas. The study has revealed a wide range of articles which has been replaced with modern ones to large extend. But certain articles do persist which is new adoption of the Santali culture of this region. Reading newspaper either in household or maximum times, in glossary shops nearby, in others house, or in group meetings is a new emergence. Other than this the usage of mobile phones and internet deserves special mention in the discussion. At a glance, usage of a multimedia mobile phone which is available in low cost increases the standard and style statement of the person. Household have been found to be decorated with modern equipments like colour television, water filter, aqua guard, water heater, refrigerator, sofa-set, rod-iron beds etc. Here the study places certain articles which have been replaced with its modern ones by most of the Santal of this region.

Song, Dance and Rituals

During ritual performance earlier the focal point was the beating of drums and rhythmic tunes of flutes.

TABLE 1

List of modern articles now utilized by Santals replacing traditional articles

| Traditional items | Modern items replacing traditional |
|---|---|
| Neem leaves | Toothbrush |
| Neem leaves | Tooth paste |
| Clay and traditional soap | Popular branded soaps |
| Ritha or some seed of a plant | Shampoo |
| Utensils made of bell metal (kasha) | Utensils made of steel, aluminium, bone china, glass. |
| Earthen pots and jars | Filter |
| Mud ovens and fuel by dried leaves and branches | Gas oven |
| Local sandals of plastic | Branded shoe |
| Lanterns | Emergency lights (electronic) |
| Plastic handmade raincoats | Raincoats |
| Mud pots for water consumption | Aluminium containers |

Open fire were the source of light. These were accompanied with singing and dancing, but there was no other music or external intrusion of source of entertainment than these in the ritual celebrations by tribals. Today the scenario of celebration of any kind of ritual is found to have taken a very different shape from its previous mode. Village and the surrounding areas are filled with shops, tea stalls, and make-shift restaurants with small wooden benches that grow up on the eve of the celebrations. Loudspeakers blare out film music at an interval of small distances. There are construction of stage found to conduct programmes with musicians, singers and orchestra. Santal girls are found to perform on famous Hindi and Bengali film music. A transformation has been observed from a tribal gathering devoted to the worship of their deities and traditional celebration to a great fair attended by numerous of non-tribal which reflects the submergence of pure Santal culture in the ocean of Hindu practices.

Attitude towards their own rituals is found to be shifting in the present generation than their ancestors. They find traditional celebration to be ancient practice and are not getting attracted towards them. They do celebrate the festivals in their own manner with their friends and relatives. *Hanria* (local drink) consumption which had been the part of the ritual since their forefathers now has been replaced with modern alcoholic drinks by the youths. Side by side

their attitude towards other caste rituals as the study depicts is a phenomenon of interest, well acceptance and adoption of the same as well. The youth of Santal community now do celebrate Durga puja, Saraswati puja, Viswakarma puja, Holi and Diwali celebration, etc. along with their traditional rituals. Their interest is now increasing developing towards modernization. Modernization has led the Santal youths to follow the foot prints of the non-tribal youths in modern celebrations like birthday, marriage day, Valentine's Day, etc.

Religious Conversion

Some sections of Santals have inclined to Hinduism by adapting the religious ceremony, rituals and customs, while a larger group have converted to Christianity. It is observed in the study that the Santals have converted to Christianity basically with the objective to receive the desired economic benefits rather than being attracted towards the Christian religious beliefs. Expansion of Christian Missions and educational institutions having Santal beneficiaries are tending to increase the impact for accelerating the process of conversion among the Santal. It is generally observed that when the household head becomes converted, other members are likely to follow the trend. Moreover the Christian Mission run schools where Santals get free education and sometimes other subsidiary benefits such as, books, hostel accommodation etc. In times of economic crisis like house repair, money needed for treatment, schooling of children etc. Missions often help them in kind or with cash. They also distribute blankets among the poor Santals. In addition to these they make routine visits to different Santal villages, inquire about their difficulties and advise and help accordingly. Thus they receive benefits and humanitarian behavior, and these benefits accelerate the conversion process of Santal to Christianity.

Santal Society and Elite Class

The elite class among the Santal community is the result of introduction of the different dimensional factors, such as, contact and interaction with other caste people, and adopting their culture, customs, habits etc. In addition to these Santals are opting for higher education, getting awareness from different

sources, modernization and their enhanced economy are some of the factors. This class that developed from Santal community at presents neglects the Santals who inhabit the village as they are backward and inferior in comparison to them. The Santal elites are capable to put their society to greater exposure to reduce backwardness through spread of education, transmitting knowledge about their constitutional rights, and bringing awareness about of other aspects for development. But this is not actually happening. The new identification and status acquired from higher education and better economic standard through advanced occupations and lifestyle restricts the elites in participating in their own rituals and ceremony which they have been previously celebrating with their forefathers. The higher social standard similar to other non-tribal in the society is being accepted by this elite class at the cost of sacrificing their own traditional system.

It has been found that the Santals are gradually getting convinced that their backwardness can be removed only with the spread of education. They have emphasized in this context that their children should opt for higher education and join different occupational sectors for the betterment of their living condition. In addition to these they consider the elite class as their role model since they have acquired a special position in the society through their individual capacities and qualities. They expect that the elites would become the catalytic agent of change in their society. The respondents convey that the youngsters are walking on their footsteps and the future generation will acquire socio-economic and political development. Though they have a positive attitude towards these elite people, they do also express their grief that most of the elite persons and their families are gradually getting cut off from the roots of their village.

Political Organisation

The Santals of this region have their own traditional political structure and look after the village disputes and maintaining the social prestige of the community. The influence of recent external political structure and their residing with the non-tribals have weakened, if not dismissed, their traditional governing body. Legal cases do not remain restricted to their

own boundary, they are now judged by the legal body of the region as well. The Santal people here are joining hands with the new established local government, the Panchayati raj institutions, along with their traditional political organisation. They are found to participate in 'gram sansad' and 'gram sabha' meeting, and gram panchayat elections, for the development programmes and in decision making process. Women are also coming forward in contributing for their development responses, and they are also found to have approached the judiciary in cases involved with women.

Changes Observed in Womenfolk

Though Santal women are enjoying much freedom, however, not much importance are given to their views and voices in the society. The women are found to be very hard working in their society. With the modernization, awareness and spread of education support from government and non-government organizations, the Santal inhabitants of this region are found to be concentrating on the educational development of their female children. Santal girls of this region have adopted modern views in terms of education, attitude and behaviour, self-presentation and desire for employment. Besides shouldering the household responsibilities, the present Santali women youths have desires and efficiency of higher education, employment and having an equal status in the society as the non-tribal woman. They have succeeded in this direction to a large extent. The female youths are observed to have a keen interest in gaining qualification at least up to class-X or class-XII, since this can give them some employment opportunities in future. They are found to be employed in sectors like as beautician, domestic workers, restaurant workers, health workers, as mason and working in self-employed small business of garments and *sal* leaf plate making business. Educated Santali girls with the opportunity of reservation have received employment in white-collar jobs, as teacher, office clerk; receptionist etc. Young educated girls have also started to impart education among their juniors through tutorials. Slowly they are also voicing against the early age of marriage (though not succeeded in all cases) as they have an aspiration to complete their education and create a self-identity. Respondents are found to

have conveyed that they do not want to repeat the same dark future of their daughters like them owing to child marriage. This realisation has emerged owing to the boon of education and awareness of development among them as fruits of modernization. Santal girls and women are now forming Self-Help Groups (SHG) and are running SHGs which have enriched their skills, and have developed confidence in them and a habit for saving money. References have been found that SHG has contributed a lot in the spheres of literacy, skill development from gaining trainings from Panchayat and personality development as a whole. Apart from these the study reveals a change in the attitude of women youths. They have adopted completely modern fashion in terms of dress, facial make-up, and ornaments and so on. Moreover these progressive Santali women not only differs in self-presentation but also in pursuing a sense of self-confidence, and a capacity to place one's opinion in social gathering as well. Which is found to be absent in case of the traditional ones who are still to come in the orbit of modernization. The present youths are also participating in the mainstream political sphere. With the reservation in political bodies, the Santali girls are gradually making an entry into the political structure of the society. The achievements of these womenfolk of this region acquired through their desire, efficiency, hard work and co-operation of their family are setting example in front of the entire community giving the other girls an inspiration to follow their footsteps.

Case Studies

Case 1: Jitendranath Murmu, age 28 years, lives in outside area of Fuldanga village. He is Madhyamik qualified and at present is employed in Calcutta Police since 14 years. He is married to a Santal girl from Purulia who can't speak Santali at all. So conversation between them is in Bengali. His wife is Madhyamik qualified as well. Jitendranath is owner of a two storeyed well-furnished house. He has two daughters. One study in class-II in Happy Home School (English medium) and the other is younger and thus goes to *Anganwadi* centre. Both the parents are of opinion that they will give higher education to their daughters so that they can lead a better standard of living in their future. Jitendranath is of opinion that the tribal

community is lagging behind owing to their lack of hold on English language. So he has planned to provide his daughters' education in English medium school. This family is different in their perception from their traditional tribal culture, and have adopted themselves and their upcoming generations on the footsteps of regional Bengali culture. He considers his traditional activities to be backward, as his birth place Khejurdanga village is in interior area. He rarely visits his birth place and ancestral house, his children are completely unaware of traditional Santali culture as they never had the opportunity to come in contact with a traditional village. To them their mother-tongue, Santali, is like a foreign language to them. The dressing pattern, food habits and regular activities of this family represent the modern culture of the society. Children of Jitendranath are very fond of Chinese food which is a foreign item in Santali culture. Moreover they possess bank account, use gold jewellery, have utensils made of steel, glass and bone china, etc. They greet by saying "Hello" or "Namaskar" instead of "Johar-Johar". Children shake hands with newcomers. Wife of Jitendranath is comfortable in wearing salwar-kamiz, and kurtas. She has no experience of wearing two-part traditional Santali dress in her lifetime. She insists her children to watch Hindi programmes so that her daughters can shade off the tag of being Santali. The family do not use their surname while telling their names until they need to do so as they are not comfortable in showcasing their tribal identity. Moreover, Jitendranath is very happy with his present employment structure and finds his service to be a better option than agriculture or cultivation in terms of both economy and social prestige. As far as Santali rituals and festivals are concerned, the respondent conveyed that he and his family do not have any interest and time to visit and participate in those traditional festivals, as his children, like other Bengali children, do not know the folk songs or folk dances of Santals. On the other hand they have adopted and participate in the modern celebrations during the birthday, marriage day programmes. They also celebrate the Hindu caste festivals like Durgapuja, Saraswati puja etc. in a grand way. Thus the impact of modernization on the present day Santal community can be gauged through this case study. Adoption of modern activities of the Hindu

culture is reflected as to be modern or up to date by this family, which now they are following. The activities of this family has led them far away from their traditional culture, in gaining equal status as the non-tribals in the society. Thus Santal youths are becoming more modern in their outlook at the cost of eroding their deep rooted age-old culture and traditional customs of their ancestors.

Case II: This case is from a village in Birbhum district, West Bengal. A girl named Parbati Murmu of 24 year, is a graduate from a girl's college of Birbhum district. She is trained in technical works like mobile repairing, basic computer training, and health education. She received full support from her family to continue her studies, especially from her mother. This opportunity led her to complete her studies and acquired trainings which will help her to achieve a good job, and will thus give her economic independence and a security as well. Not only that she can speak in languages other than Santali, that is, in Bengali, English as well as in Hindi to some extent, and these have enriched her profile. She has also adopted the modern way of life in dressing, wearing ornaments, and modern fashions, so as to help her acceptable in the society of the non-tribals. Parbati is strict in her principle that she will marry only on being employed. Today this graduate girl is economically independent as she earns through home tuitions and works as health worker in a village. She acts as tutors to her juniors in the village. At present she has set herself as a model example of self-reliance before the Santal community. Following her example a few girls of the village have followed her footsteps which is an achievement of their village, and for the community on a broader perspective.

CONCLUSION

The impact of modernization is now manifested in the day to day activities of the Santal community of Birbhum district. . The processes of modernization has lead the Santal youths to learn about new food habits, language, dress pattern, use of modern equipments, habit of saving money etc. Interaction and coming in contact with the non-tribal community for residence, employment, and in educational institutions etc. have accelerated in majority of them the understanding for the need of education of their

children and expose to modern health practices. The present paper reveals that the transformation by adoption of modern activities is disintegrating the homogeneity of the Santal community. They are experiencing a transitional phase in terms of socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. If this process of cultural transformation continues, it can be said that they will retain not much distinction of their socio-cultural identification in near future. With the benefits of constitutional safeguards received by them and development of modernization process, the earlier marked cultural features of this community are gradually disappearing in Santal community. The upcoming generations would be greatly following the foot-steps of Bengali Hindu culture or of the Santals who have converted to Christianity. With the passage of time the Santals will shape themselves to adopt and fit in with the present trend of modernization and technological advancement in West Bengal. Though this will ultimately lead to the loss of some of their distinct cultural identity, while on the other hand they will have a secured economic benefit and a higher social status through education.

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