

Eastern **HIMALAYAS** CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Eastern Himalayas: Cultural Diversity

First Volume

Editors

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Socio Cultural Knowledge of Indigenous People and Their Impacts on Environment: Study of Santhals from the foothills of the Himalayan Belt

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Abstract

Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a particular culture or society. A tribe is a group of 'Indigenous' people living under primitive condition and still not popularly known to many modern cultures. "Tribe" has been used for those groups of human beings, whose place of residence is situated in remote areas like hills, forest, sea coasts and islands and whose style of life is quite different from the present-day civilized men. Local indigenous people residing in the place of the world are termed a tribe or tribal. India is one of the countries having a large concentration of tribal population. There are number of Indigenous living- in all over India. Apart from India, Indigenous practices can be seen in neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Santhals are the largest tribe in the Jharkhand and West Bengal State of India in terms of population and are also found in the states of Odisha, Bihar and Assam. They are the largest ethnic minority in Northern Bangladesh, Rajsahi Division and Rangpur Division. But a sub-santhal number of Santhals also live in Nepal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. According to D.N Majumder "Tribes as a social group with Popular association endogamous with not any particular of functions governed by tribal ruler or otherwise united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribe or cast." The Santhals are one of the largest homogeneous tribal communities of India counting more than 10 million people. Santhals share the same language, culture tradition and values. Santhals' social and religious system is very complex and complete in itself. The paper tries to explain special reference to Santhals communities in Darjeeling district and also find out various cultural as well as food habits, religious practices, social system like marriage and various type of awareness. Social change is one of the important issues which can determine the level of development and change in the pattern of life style. L.M Lewis believes that tribal societies are small in scale are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relation and possesses a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions.

Keywords: Santhals, culture, food, indigenous, society, community

1. Introduction

The Santhals are an Austroasiatic – speaking ethnic group in South Asia. The Santhals are one of the largest Indigenous tribes in India. States of Jharkhand and West Bengal in terms of population and are also present in the states of Assam, Tripura, Bihar, Odisha. Santhals speak santhali “language. It is the Austroasiatic family. Santal is probably derived from a foreign word. The term refers to the inhabitants of the erstwhile “Silday-Sawant” in the Medinipur region of West Bengal. Sanskrit word ‘Samant’ or Bengali ‘Saont’ means plain land, their race name is ‘Har Hopan’ (son of human race). The original homeland of the santhals is not known with certainty due to lack of significant archaeological records. However according to linguist, Paul Sidwell Austroasiatic speakers probably came to the Odisha subcontinent – from Indochina around 4000- 3500 years ago. Austroasiatic speakers spread from South East. Asia and mixed extensively with the local Indian population. After coming to India, the Munda People were largely merged with the Dravidian tribal group.

Indigenous knowledge system is an integral part of tribal culture and has wide ranging relevance in livelihood, education, health, agriculture and livestock. Remoteness, social isolation is the common lenses through which Indigenous communities particularly vulnerable tribal groups are viewed. Santhals belong to one such tribe. Vulnerability, marginality and lack of modernity are a few of the stylized characteristics features of these communities.

Darjeeling district is the northernmost district of the state of West Bengal in eastern India in the foothills of the Himalayas. Darjeeling district is located between 26°31'05 and 27°27'10 North latitude and 88°53'00 and 87°59'30 East longitude. It not only has the highest number of scheduled tribe population in the state but in terms of diversity of tribes also this place is enriched. As per official census 2011 and population data 2022 of Darjeeling district, Hindu are majority in Darjeeling state. Total population of Darjeeling district is 1,846,823 as per census 2011. Schedule cast and Scheduled tribes made up 18.18% and 20.21% of the population respectively. Here on the other hand the Indo-Mongoloid tribes such as Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Newar, Thami, Chettri, and Damai who are Indigenous to this region, others communities like Oraon, Munda, Santal, Bhumij, MalPahariya are also living. Santal is one of the major scheduled tribes of the district according to the 2011 census. Santal total account for 1.15% respectively among the total tribal population of Darjeeling district.

II. Literature Review

Subrata Guba and MD Ismail - Socio - cultural changes of Tribes and their impacts on Environment with Special Reference to Santhal in West Bengal, he was mentioned that santhali people are the largest community & ethnic group in West Bengal, traditional art & crafts are a part in their life. Dr. Boro Baski - 2018 discussed. A brief introduction of santal life and culture and our approach to development. He was basically mentioned that santhals as a community characteristics features of santhal identity etc. P. P.K.Mohanty in 5 volumes, Encyclopedia of scheduled tribes in India. He discussed in tribals in North - East India, describes the tribal development in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, MI Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura. N.E.India for a traditional society especially tribal community like that of lively hood santal marriage system, social life, village administration, the fundamental features are always in favour of the maintenance of their Socio Cultural tradition. Day by day due the impact of globalisation, people are tending towards new economic order which may ultimately fade away their traditional value.

III. Objectives of the Study

- To highlight the Socio-Cultural changing status of Indigenous People in foothills Himalayan.
- To find out the Socio-Cultural and socio-economic factors which are hindering the promotion of tribal and folk art & culture.

IV. Methodology

The study basically is based on both primary and secondary data. Didn't get any information from Panchayat or BDO Office but tried to present what I got by asking some people of that locality, Also I got some data by searching from the internet. Lastly all the data are arranged in the suitable format for better understanding through analysis.

• Study Area

Darjeeling is the name of a town as well as a district in in the West Bengal state of India. Both the town and district are famous as one of the most important tourist destinations in the country, Hanskhoya, Khoribari, Kestopur, Choupukuriya, Kamalpur tea garden are rural area in Darjeeling district in West Bengal. These areas are home to many beautiful tea plantation, a truly scenic tour that will delight the thirsty. Hundred percent santhali Indigenous People live in tea plantation. Dhemaal jot in Hanskhoya is a beautiful tribal village, the village is right next to a tea garden there is not much demand for urban life, but

the people here are much ahead in terms of education. Near the village a small river flows past the tea garden, this river and the tea garden add to the beauty of the village, the people are very simple. The traditional life of the Indigenous Santhali community with their local art and culture make them so proud. Local market is Kestopur. The main attraction here is the Bagdogra forest that offers a serene atmosphere and is the perfect place for take a leisure walk. However, although this jungle is worthy of travel, the origin of many wild animals here is a cause of fear, but Bagdogra Bangdubi forest is famous for Jangli baba mandir. The Teesta region - Canyons created by wind and water is worth experiencing here. River Tista flowing through the hills has given a truly unique dimension to the natural beauty. Map”



Figure: Photograph of study area- DHEMAL JOTE, HANSQUA, West Bengal

• Discussion

Santhal social organization has very interesting characteristics. It contains flexibility in rigidity. The base of Santal society is a division between "brother" (bocha) and "guest" (pera), a divide found in many other tribal societies of Central and Eastern India. Children of the same father (sometimes grandfather) known as nij bocha. They cannot marry each other and propitiate the same deity, since the house refers to a common ancestor from which all the families are believed to descended. Those in the closest form of brotherhood, called mit orak hor (people of one house) in Darjeeling those who do not have brotherhood are referred to as Pera, or guests. Women perform special welcome rituals for pera. Those related by marriage can have one of two relationships. They can be balaya relationship exemplified by the couple's parents or sangat, society has much less stratification and is more egalitarian than adjacent caste Hindu society but still has some status differences, when they interacting with. Others in santal society is their standing as Marang (senior) or Hundin(junior), the question of Marang or hundin is decided by age. The santals have various social organizations important for rituals, called "Namal disom sarjom buto dharam aakhra, AASA, All Adibasi Sardi Susor Association.

• Religion

According to the 2011 Indian census Jharkhand practice s 63% Hinduism, West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar combined 31% practice Hinduism as well as Sama religion and 5% practice Christianity. There are various customs observed by santals. In santhali language the deity is called "Bonga". The main deities are "Marang Buru ", "Jaher Ayo" and the ancestors is those who have passed away. Santals organize various Puja parbans and festivals. The annual festival named "Sohrai", "Sakrat ", celebrates Baha Utsav at the end of winter. During Durga Puja santals indulge in a special dance festive known as Dasai in santhali language. Also, Mahmode(মহম্মদ), Maghsim Jam etc. Is observed with the change of nature.

• Food

Rice is the staple food of santals, fish, crab, chicken, chicken Meet are their favorite food. But eatpork as a traditional food.

• Community

Santhal village were found Naxalbari, Hatighisa, Choupukuriya, Champasari in Darjeeling district. Where 100% households are Santhals. Santhals lead a

community life which is cohesive and organic and unified. From the birth to death all ceremonies centre around the community, there is little scope for individual celebration.

• Education

Education is the key for development but the study found that participation of the children of santal tribes in Darjeeling district of West Bengal is very low. The biggest reasons are the environment, economic conditions, not being able to eat on time, as a result after a while he left his studies and turned to work for the sake of his family. But in some cases, someone is trying to overcome all obstacles and learn to adapt to the changing society and move forward in life. It is an important factor of socio-economic development of not only particular area, as well as any countries because the process of development of an area depend on the level of education of the people. According to field survey in present situation 80% people are literate among sample people in Dhemal jot village and literacy gape is not far the most of the literate population are primary educated as well as many of them are higher educated. Fild reported that more than 50% educated people are primary passed followed by middle pass more than 40%. About 15% People are senior secondary passed and remaining are graduate or post graduate passed.

Picture, school

V. Language

Language is a vocal identity of the society. All over India including West Bengal the Santhals have a specific language and the Santhals living in Darjeeling district have their specific mother tongue santal. But Santhali language has its own idiom /alphabet. The alphabet is AL-CHIKI. Its inventor is Pandit Raghunath Murmu. It is their mother tongue all santhali people in this village speak in this language. However, they are used to make conversations in local language, Nepali Language, Hindi language with their other neighbours.

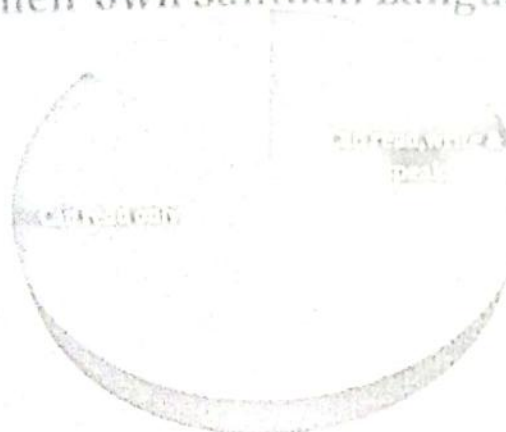
• Knowledge about Santhali language

Many Indigenous santhal communities live in these rural areas, but interestingly it was noted that only 80% people can speak & understanding this language. 20% people can speak, read and write their own language. Many of them get used to speaking and being educated in Bengali medium

Table-1: Level of knowledge of the people in their own Santhali language:

Can read, write & speak	Can read only	Can neither read nor write	Total nos interviewed
50	35	15	100

Level of Knowledge of the people in their own Santhali Language



■ Can read,write & speak ■ Can read only ■ Can neither read nor write

• Occupation

Except educated working Santhals families most of the santhals who live in areas dominated by tea plantations really they live a poor life. They are compelled to sell their labour at a very low price in tea gardens or elsewhere. Besides they are also associated with farming buses, they dig soil, carry loads, or engage themselves in similar works of day laborer. They are accustomed to hard work, like their simple, plain and candid way.

• Settlement Pattern

Maximum population here is in the tea plantations. Also, in a different village beyond the locality. But in most cases the houses are two – storied also made with bamboo and wood, the doors are made very small to protect themselves from wild animals.

• Physical form of the People

Physically the santhal people are of medium size, muscular body, mostly dark skin colour and long lips, small forehead and low head. Hair is wavy and curly in nature. Incidentally the Negroes have many similarities with the Boding santhals.

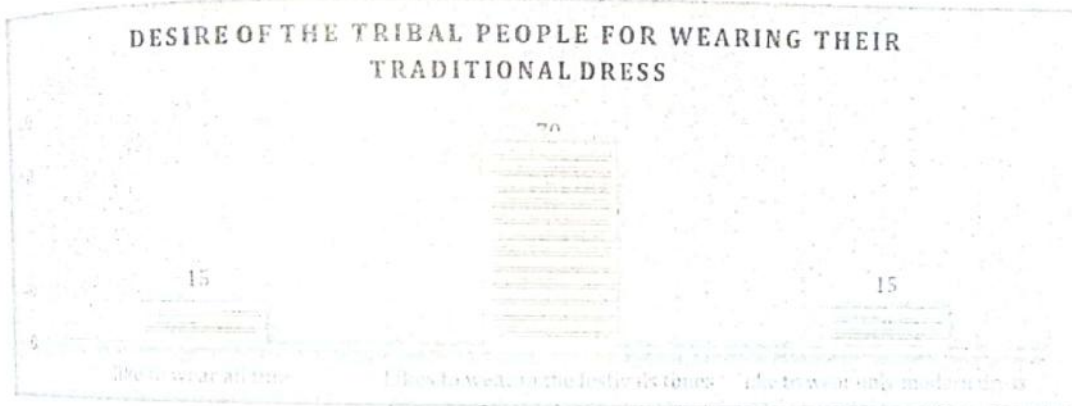
• Dress of Santhal People

Indigenous santhal people have one more unique feature in their culture is dressing. They have their own way of adorn themselves with natural elements. It boasts of its rich culture and clothing heritage which has evolved through time but its people are still traditionalist at heart, especially when it comes to express their community gathering during festive occasions.
<http://www.santhalidisom.com>

Table 2: Desire for wearing of traditional dress

Desire for wearing traditional dresses	Yes in %
like to wear all time	15
Likes to wear in the festival's times	70
like to wear only modern dress	15
Total no of persons interviewed	100

DESIRE OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLE FOR WEARING THEIR TRADITIONAL DRESS



• Festivals

Santhals of the foothills of the Himalayan Belt mainly ccelebrate the Baha and Sakrat which falls in the month of February and March every year. They celebrate this festival to please their God Marang buru, Jaher Ayo and their Ancestors. They also celebrate hunting festivals called disom sendra on the event of Baishakhi Purnima.

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VI. Conclusion

It has already been decided that santhali people are the largest community and ethnic group in West Bengal. Traditionally they have natural talents in art and culture which is reflected in their beautiful wall paintings housing architecture and wood works. Occasionally their traditional dress, they speak among themselves their own santhali language most of santhali people earn their living by hard working.

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