



SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF SANTHALS IN BOLPUR-SANTINIKETAN OF BIRBHUM DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Tribe, the isolated dwelling communities were identified as ecological people for their distinctive outlook to resource creation and livelihood in a natural set up. Tribal communities, especially Santhals in eastern India have changed their traditional livelihood with the introduction of new economy under British rule. Such a change is debatable whether it is internal or external. Santhal of Santiniketan, in close proximity to *ashram* culture has also experienced a change in their cultural profile which is distinctly different from traditional transformation. Culture of Santiniketan associated with Tagore's thought, believes has modulated their mind and spirit to a considerable extent in which they are not only totally dethroned from their traditional culture but also gradually polished with the *ashramik* Culture of Santiniketan. Present focus is an attempt to pursue such as uncommon change of tribal community around ashram of Santiniketan.

Key Words: Tribe, Ecological people, Cultural profile, Transformation, Santhal, *ashramik* culture,

Introduction:

Tribes are an integral part of the Indian civilization, associated with folk culture. Tribes of India can be classified into five cultural types – forest hunting type, hill cultivation type, plain agriculture type, simple artisan and folk artist type as well as industrial and urban workers (Vidyarthi,L.P; Rai,B.K). Now tribal culture is passing through a phase of economic and societal change. Tribal culture is changing due to two factors –

traditional and modern. Among the traditional factors Hinduization is most important as major neighboring community of tribes in India is Hindu. Due to close contact of Hindu people, tribes adopt Hindu style of life. On the other hand modern factors are Christianity, Urbanization and Industrialization. Religious transformation of tribes in India was started during British rule which is still now common practice of missionaries. On the other hand 'industry based urban explosion' in Chotanagpur plateau has lead to 'cultural mutation' (Rao, 1966), resulted in assimilation of tribal community in the urban-industrial civilization (Vidyarthi,L.P; Rai,B.K 1976).

Study Area:

Bolpur- Santiniketan, located on the southern most tip of Birbhum, is a part of *Rarh* Bengal. River *Kopai* and *Ajay* mark the northern and southern boundary of the area. It is undulating plain, lies between 35 meters to 55 meters above mean sea level. The general slope of the land is from west to east. Northern and north western parts are characterized by rills and gullies on lateritic soil- locally known as '*Khoai*'.

Bolpur –Santiniketan, though a single entity in recent but are different foci of growth in past. Bolpur is commercial town while Santiniketan impregnated VB, an international university, the place of education as well as residence of both teachers and students like *Gurukul* of ancient India.



Methodology:

Present study has been done on the basis of primary data collected through questionnaire survey, interview, observation and ethnographic study as well as through photographs which serve as data in image form. Present analysis has carried on the basis of responses of 328 people of Pearsonpalli, Kaliganj, Banerpukur danga, Surul, Taltore and Goalpara.

History of Santhals of Santiniketan:

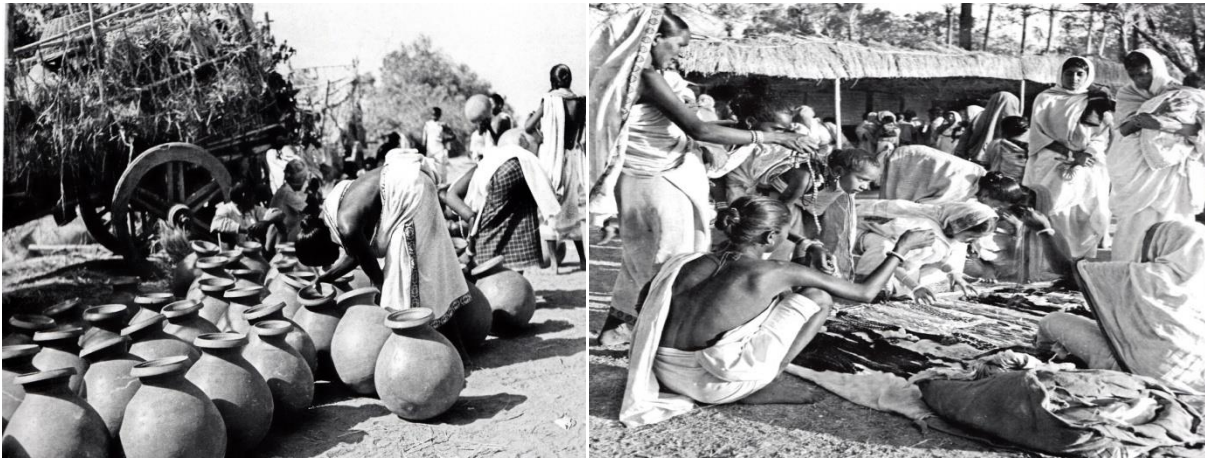
It is quite difficult to find the place of origin of santhals as there is no evidence of their native place. They migrate from the central India to Chhotonagpur Plateau and settled in Hazaribag, Singhbhoom, Manbhoom, Beerbhoom and parts of Bhagalpore and formed Santhal Pargana. They occupied extensive tract of level country valley of this Santhal Pargana, called the *Damin-i-Koh*. The then Govt. Lord William Bentinck G.G. encouraged the santhals of Beerbhoom to clear vast jungles of the *Daman* and to cultivate fertile soil as they are hard worker and had the taste of agriculture. From then they settled in the low land of Birbhum (Mitra.

G.H. 1936). Basically santhals of Birbhum are agricultural labor. They migrate to the eastern part of the district and nearby Burdwan district during the season of sowing and harvesting of paddy.

Their presence in barren land of Bhubandanga was found in history before the formation of Santiniketan. They moved to and fro in search of job as agricultural labor in this land. Santiniketan *ashram* was formed by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1901 in the land bought by his sagacious father Maharsi Devendranath Tagore in 1863. After that santhals settled permanently in surrounding land of ashram in Pearsonpalli, Andrewspalli, Kaliganj, Balipara of Santiniketan; the land under Viswa-Bharati jurisdiction, was given lease to them for 99 years. Tagore wants to incorporate santhals villages and not exclude them during formation of the boundary of Santiniketan. That's why map of Santiniketan is not straight line rather irregular and zigzag (Dasgupta, C).

Attachment of Santhals with Santineketan Ashram:

During the day of Tagore attachment between the santhal and ashram dweller was very close. Rabindranth never seems them separate from ashram family. All these area were under Tagore's rural reconstruction programmed. C.F.Andrews, Pearson works in this area to eradicate malaria, *kalajor* under the supervision of Tagore. Mutual co-existence among ashram dwellers and santhals were present at that time. Santhals went to ashram regularly to sell egg, earthen pot etc.(Bishee,P 1944). They engaged whole day in ashram area in collecting dry leaves, fire wood for fuel and also took part in different festivals like *Holokarshan*, *Varshamongal*, *Maghmela*, *Poushmela* etc. On contrary santhals served as living models for artists Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij and so many students of *Kala Bhavana*. Their life style was the source of inspiration of these artists. Painting 'Ashram' of Nanadalal Bose depicts a santhal women carrying freshly cut grass to feed her cattle and another santhal girl sits under a tree as an ass graze nearby and sculpture of Ramkinkar Baij-'Mill Call' depicted the dynamism of santhal life while santhal people were going for work as wage labors in the rice mills of Bolpur town.



Poushmela during the time of Tagore

Santhal woman at Sriniketan mela

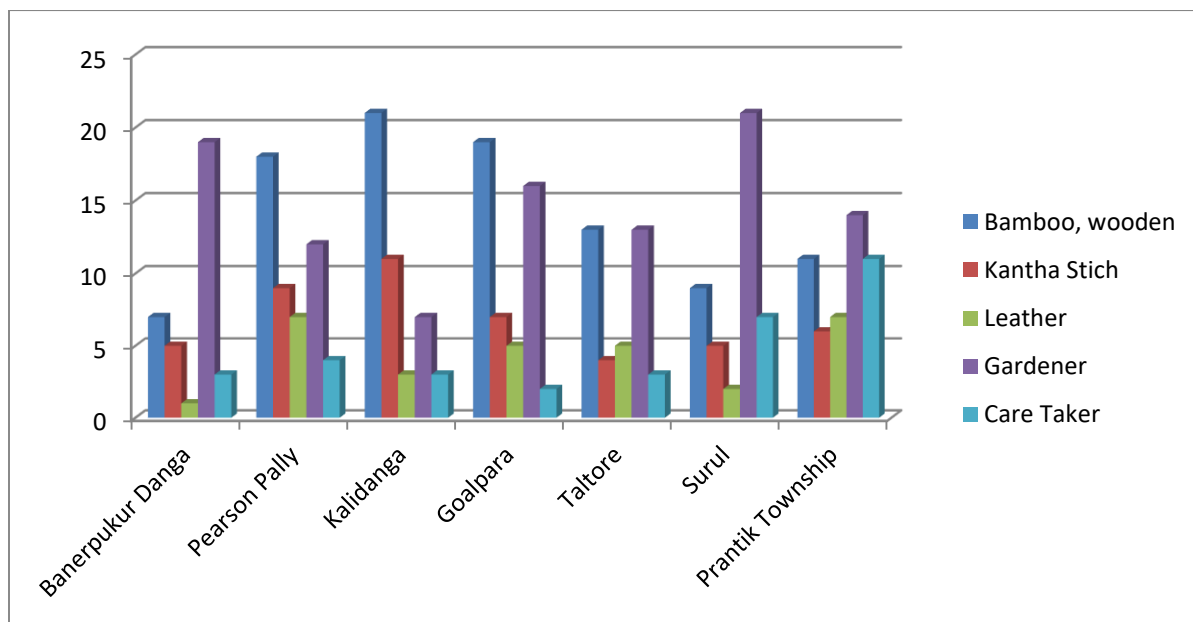
In opinion of old *ashram* dweller Kalpika Mukhopadhyay, retired professor of Sanskrit-tribe of this area was treated as part and parcel of *Ashram* and their children played with santhal boys and girls of Balipara like neighbor irrespective of caste and class bar and both of them took participation in picnic and other recreational activities. Co-operation and co-existence prevailed through the ashram and its surroundings. *Pousemela* –a village fair organized by Tagore was the place of interaction between santhal and ashram dweller as various tribal art works, earthen pots were sold and bought by both of them. Being in touch with this educational institution, they also became influenced and admitted their children in Sikhasatra, Patha-Bhavana so that their children can learn preliminary education. Some of them are the students of Kala-Bhavana, Siksha-Bhavana, Vidya-Bhavana etc.

Name of the Areas	No. of Responder	Distance from Santiniketan
Banerpukur Danga (Ballavpur)	64	1.5 km
Pearson Pally (Shyambati)	27	Adjacent
Kaliganj and Simantapally (Shyambati)	52	Adjacent
Goalpara	68	4 km
Taltore	19	3.5 km
Surul	60	Adjacent and within 2 km
Near Prantik Township (Taltore)	38	5 km
Total	328	

Name of the Areas	Teaching	M F		Non-teaching	M F		Student	M F	
Banerpukur Danga (Ballavpur)	0	M-0,F-0		7	M-6 ,F-1		11	M-7, F-4	
Pearson Pally (Shyambati)	2	M-2,F-0		6	M-4,F-2		4	M-2,F-2	
Kaliganj and Simantapally (Shyambati)	1	M-1,F-0		2	M-2,F-1		7	M-4,F-3	
Goalpara	3	M-3,F-0		9	M-7,F-2		11	M-7,F-4	
Taltore	0	M-0,F-0		0	M-0,F-0		4	M-1,F-3	
Surul	2	M-2,F-0		3	M-2,F-1		21	M-9,F-12	
Near Prantik Township (Taltore)	0	M-0,F-0		2	M-0,F-0		0	M-0,F-0	
Total	8			29			58		

Sriniketan- centre of rural reconstruction took so many initiatives for the socio-economic development of this tribe. Though santhals of West Bengal are engaged mainly in agricultural work, labor in stone crusher but santhals of Birbhum district have exceptional heritage of art and craft, mainly in potteries, wood works and dress materials are remarkable (Biswas,M,2018). In Santiniketan they practiced art work as Sriniketan gave training to them on the work of wood, terracotta, leather work, *kantha* stitch, *batik* through which they became self-sufficient in earning their livelihood which is the basic motto of Tagore's rural reconstruction. According to surveyed data santhals in Pearsonpalli and Kalidanga, adjacent to Viswa-Bharati campus are more attached with Santiniketan as in these area 67% and 40% people are engaged in bamboo and wooden work whereas 33% and 21% with *kantha* stitch after get training from Sriniketan. Comparatively areas like Banerpukurdanga, Goalpara, Surul, Prantik which lies within 5 km radius of campus show less attachment with Sriniketan as in these areas percentage share of people engaged in wooden work is 11, 28. 15 and 29 as well as in *kantha* stitch is 8, 10, 8 and 16 respectively.

Name of the Areas	Bamboo, wooden	Kantha Stich	Leather	Gardener	Care Taker
Banerpukur Danga	7	5	1	19	3
Pearson Pally	18	9	7	12	4
Kaligangj	21	11	3	7	3
Goalpara	19	7	5	16	2
Taltore	13	4	5	13	3
Surul	9	5	2	21	7
Prantik Township	11	6	7	14	11



Tribal people of the surroundings area of Santiniketan (Kalidanga, Pearsonpally, Banerpukurdanga, Taltore, Goalpara, Surul) are attached with VB not only socially but also economically. They work in teaching and non-teaching post and also as care taker in Viswa-Bharati. In Pearsonpalli, Surul and Goalpara number of teachers are 2, 3 and 2 while engaged in non-teaching post are 6, 9 and 3. In Banerpukurdanga this figure is 7. Children of these tribe are also become part of Santiniketan as a student. In Surul number of students are 21 while in Banerpukurdanga and Goalpara it is 11 and 11. Santhals of Pearsonpally and Surul are economically more attached than others area as in both of this area 63% people economically attached with Viswa-Bharati.

Recent Changes of Livelihood of Santhals:

Urban growth of Bolpur town which was started from World War II with huge immigration of refugees of East Pakistan has got its momentum from 1990s with the formation of Prantik Township in the north of Santiniketan. Mostly people of Kolkata and other cities came here to take rest for few days from their daily busy schedule and built houses in this serene tranquil environment. This is their second home where they came mainly during festivals of Santiniketan- *pous mela*, *basant utsab*. Besides housing apartments lots of hotels, resorts and homestay mushroomed here which have changed not only the physical environment of the area but also life style of the santhal of these regions also. They are now working as caretaker, gardener of the house of new set up area (Prantik, Shyambati, Taltore etc.). Owner of this buildings are not permanent settler as they are mainly from Kolkata and other cities and cannot stay throughout the year. Those houses are under the care of santhal. They also take job in the new set up hotels, lodge, housing complexes through which they come in contact with the people of metropolitan culture/popular culture and acculturate their food habit, dress, style and so many artifacts. In this way transformation occurred in their socio-economic life. They have shifted their economy from leaf collection and agricultural labor to gardener, caretaker. With increasing popularity of *Khoai haat* santhals of Banerpukurdanga now engage in this *haat* where they sells different items of tiffin in their temporary shops. Their house type also changes. Instead of earthen hut they now built semi-pucca or pucca house. Their food habit also changed as instead of *Hanria* (liquor of palm) they now drink foreign liquor came to this Santiniketan with the hand of tourist as well as people of the metropolitan areas. Dress code, rituals also changed. Now they celebrate *Durga Puja*, *Saraswati puja* and so many Bengali festivals and santhal male wear shirt pant instead of their traditional dress.

Inspite of these changes cultural tradition still thrives through wall painting depicts their day to day life, festivals and also through beautiful murals crafted on sunbaked mud panels. They still now used traditional tools like wooden plough, the wheel of potter, pedal operated thrashing machines instead of modern machineries



Tribal dance in sonajhuri



Leaf collection of santhal women in Viswa-Bharati campus

Conclusion:

In general livelihood, cultural tradition of santhals is governed by natural resources available within the area. In Bolpur-Santiniketan santhals are attached with nature as well as with Santiniketan ashram – an educational as well as cultural hub, founded and directed by Tagore's thought, believe and philosophy of naturalism and universalism. Being influenced by universalism they did not isolate them like santhals of other part and in vice-versa Viswa-Bharati also never exclude them. Due to attachment with Viswa-Bharati not only their educational attainment is higher but also they became trained in various art and craft through rural reconstruction programme of Viswa-Bharati which help them to shift their traditional practice of livelihood and also make them different from santhals of other part of West Bengal.

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