

Scheduled Tribes in India: Socio-cultural Change of Santal Tribe in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Indian subcontinent is the domicile to huge numbers of tribal community, who are known as '*Adivasi*' and still untouched by the way of life of the modern world. Obstinate in the age of globalization, the scope and strength of the deprivations of the tribals has intensified. According to census of 2001, India has the largest population of tribal people with more than 84.4 million constituting 8.20 per cent of the populations. So far as the states of West Bengal there were forty-one 'Schedule Tribes' (ST) in 2001 and their concentrations is more in southern, western and northern parts of the state. The ST population in West Bengal was 44,06,794 of which constitute 5.5 per cent of the total population of the state; most of them, 93.9 per cent, reside in rural area. The state has registered 15.7 per cent decadal growth of ST population in 1991-2001. The Santali tribal community constitutes 51.8 per cent which is more than half of the tribal population in West Bengal. The majority of the Santals are concentrated in the districts of *Purulia*, *Bankura*, *West Medinipur*, *Bardhaman* and *Hooghly* in West Bengal. The paper would try to understand the context of the study which finds out the socio-economic, religious and cultural dichotomy of the schedule tribes in general and how the Santals have shaped into their tribal identity in West Bengal.

Key Words : Santal, West Bengal, Tradition socio-culture

INTRODUCTION

The 'Scheduled Tribe', or so called '*Adivasi*' is a collective idiom for the indigenous peoples in mainland Indian subcontinent. The '*Adivasi*' construct up 8.6 per cent of India's population, or 104 million people, according to the 2011 Census, and a large percentage of the Nepalese population. The same term '*Adivasi*' is used for the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh and the native '*Tharu*' in Nepal. The '*Adivasi*' societies are predominantly high-flying in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal and some north-eastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They also known as primitive peoples, aboriginal or '*Mulnivashi*' peoples are ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently. Groups are usually described as indigenous when they maintain traditions or other aspects of an early culture that is associated with a given region. The Santals is third largest tribal community of Indian with a population

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of 4,260,842, they are found in the central and eastern states of India in Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Assam and beyond in Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. During the long history of ancient and modern India, they have been called by various names. The Aryans who followed and occupied their lands and civilization called them *Ashurs* and *Naushad* in *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* although they were *Kherwars*. In response to Aryans, the *Kherwar* called themselves *Hor*, the human being and their religion *Hor Dhorom*. The traditional home of the Santals was Chotanagpur plateau and surrounding plains of south of the river *Damodar*. The Santal migration started after the famine of 1770 into *Rajmahal Hill of Bihar*, *Birbhum* and *Santal parganas*, their present homeland. According to census of 1981, Santal population in West Bengal was 1,666,610, of them 3.23 per cent were returned from urban area,¹ and in the census of 2001, India has the largest population of tribal people with more than 84.4 million constituting 8.20 per cent of the populations. So far as the states of West Bengal there were forty-one 'Schedule Tribes' (ST) in 2001 and their concentrations is more in southern, western and northern parts of the state. The ST population of the state was 44, 06,794 of which constitute 5.5 per cent of the total population of the state; most of them, 93.9 per cent, reside in rural area. The state has registered 15.7 per cent decadal growth of ST population in 1991-2001. There were total thirty eight (1991) notified STs in West Bengal, among them the Santals constitute 51.8 per cent which is more than half of the tribal population.² The majority of the Santals are concentrated in the districts of *Purulia*, *Bankura*, *West Medinipur*, *Bardhaman* and *Hooghly* in West Bengal. The main purpose of this article is to understand the context of the study which can influence the socio-economic, religious and cultural dichotomy of the schedule tribes in general and how the Santals have shaped into their tribal identity in West Bengal. It is argued that the Santal community of West Bengal continuously changing their socio-cultural domain by the influencing of modern education, western culture and a changing pattern of their occupation in their way of life is observed.

Historical Review of the Origin and Fruition of the Santals :

As per the Government records, this '*Adivasi*' groups are mostly called either as Santal. The Santals are considered one of the largest homogenous indigenous peoples in India. It has been argued that the Santals are the only cultured people on the empress of the underlying philosophic speculation and order of the thought that was wide spread in India prior to the rise and social order of *Pre-Dravidian*.³ H.H. Risley claimed that '*Santal*, *Sonthal*, *Saontar*, a large Dravidian tribe, classed on linguistic grounds as *Kolarian*', and Mr. Skreksrud told 'name of Santal is a corruption of *Saontar*, and adopted by the tribe after their sojourn for several generation in the country about *Saont* in Midnapur'.⁴ Ethnically the Santal, *Ho*, *Munda* and *Kharia* belong to the same family of '*Kolarian*' race and linguistically the Santals are grouped with the *Munda* family of language. Their past history is very vague as they had only oral traditions. During the first half of the 20th century, documentations have been started by anthropologist, sociologists and interested Christians Missionary, majority of them are illiterates but still continues in oral forms in their songs and legends though with some omissions and additions.⁵ On the other hand, they are all one in the perspective of their common assertion of their past, which may be considered as their primal precedent doctrine. As the traditional belief says, 'in '*Hihiri Pipiri*' (good land) they were born, they were sought after (by Thakur *Jiu*) in *Khoj Kaman*, and were replenished again in '*Harata*', they fixed our social orders in Sasanbeda.⁶ According to their mythological belief *Chae Chpama*, *Badolli* and *Koenda* forts existed and they had spent happy life over there. They dwelt for a long period enjoying undisturbed joy, peace and untold prosperity at these places. They believed that their happiest

period is over; till now they cherish with nostalgia being shaped into their tradition. The tradition says that they were defeated by some intruder and were pushed away from place to place. Then they come to contact with some more civilized people and they were found and brought in the pages of modern history. At this period they were in *Chhotanagpur*, especially in the districts of *Hazaribagh*, *Palamau* and *Singhbhum* and neighbouring districts of *Manbhum*, *Midnapur* and *Birbhum*.⁷ The history and origin of the Santal is not yet clear, however, few researchers has argued that there is no definite link on the origin of Santals or rather of the race to which they belong. Troisi has opined that there is no record about the Santals and their traditions, but He also highlights that there was once a large and important Santal colony in Parganas of *Chai* and *Champa* in the *Hazaribagh* district. He has tries to establish his argument that there is some evidence that a fort of the Santals was taken away by the Mohammadan who came to India long after the Aryans. It has been assumed that by about 1340 A.D, the forts of *Chai Champa* and the settlement of the Santals were taken away by Ibrahim Ali.⁸ George E Somers has surmised that the Santals lived successively in Persia, Afghanistan and Chinese Tartary, and entered India from the north-west, that they settled in the Punjab and made their way thence to *Chotanagpur* plateau. On the contrary Colonel Dalton alleged that the Santals came from North-East India, and found their way to the *Chotanagpur* plateau and the adjoining highlands near the Damodar River Valley.⁹ Soren argues that there are various theories available on the origin of the Santals and their history. But he strongly believes that the documentation of their origin, customs and traditions were started by the Europeans during the colonial period. In 1795, Sir John Shore spoke of Santals in Ramgarh in Birbhum district and came to contact with them in Chotanagpur plateau in the districts of *Hazaribagh*, *Palamau* and *Singhbhum* and in the neighbourhood of Midnapore and Manbhum districts in the middle of Eighteenth century. However the Santals began to migrate to *Rajmahal* hills at the end of eighteenth century from the north eastern side of Chotanagpur plateau and 'Damin-i-koh' was created in 1833 in this hill tracts occupied by *Adivasis of Paharia and Santals*.¹⁰ Levi-Strauss opines that the 'primitives' do not think differently from the civilized but they symbolize differently. Their religious systems, comprising myths and rites, are symbolic systems of signs and communication, which have been established based on analogical reasoning signifying continuities between nature and culture, and between cosmic order and social life. Therefore, religion is manifestation of different symbols.¹¹

Culture is taken as a system of ideas, beliefs, value orientations, patterns of meanings, inherited conceptions, and the meanings are the mental constructs of values. It also includes physical manifestations of groups as exhibited in the objects they make such as clothes, shelter, tools, weapons, implements, utensils, and so on. R.S. Mann argues that *Santali-culture* consists not only of elements of traits, but also of their interrelationships and organizations.¹² So far as tribals are concerned, every aspect of their life is integrated and interrelated. Even the fulfillment of their basic requirements of life is determined by culture and religion. Recently, Subrata Guha and Md. Ismail observe the religious beliefs, food habits of the Santals and also their festivals which are depend on nature and everyday work in the forest.¹³

Recently, few of the more like to show in their studies that dependency on forest based economy also influenced their cultural norms, traditions and values. Suman Karmakar observes 'ethno-medicine' of Santal tribe living around *Susunia hill* of *Bankura* district,¹⁴ and Arup Dey works on 'traditional health' care system of the Santals and its new transitional process in *Paschim Medinipur* district in West Bengal.¹⁵ The tribes are also poses a magnificent skill of making musical equipment, mats and baskets out is worth watching. But the influences of modern values and

institution in the day by day of the Santal spread of education, modern technology and migrants, sociologists have noted changes in the social, economic and cultural life and also changed their health status.¹⁶ The impact of such changes can be seen in their changing cultural values, occupational structure and role perception. Almost forty years ago, Nirmal Kumar Bose had also attempted to draw attention to the fact that how tribal customs and rites are often modified in the process of social absorption called 'the Hindu method of tribal absorption'.¹⁷ But some historians thought and theorized something other ways, as Christophe Jaffrelot described it, as 'ethnicization process', where the various castes searched for the egalitarian alternative cultural identity. Sanskritization process has internalized a hierarchical pattern of ritual purity. But the ethnicization process by providing alternative non-hierarchical social imaginaries provides an egalitarian alternative cultural identity. It implies the invention of a separate, cultural identity and more especially a collective history.¹⁸

Socio- Economic Status of Santal :

The livelihoods of the Santals turn around the forests and fulfill their basic needs from the trees and plants of the forests. Apart from this they are also engaged in the hunting, fishing and cultivation for their livelihood. But only 1.05 per cent was engaged in their traditional occupation of hunting and food gathering. Tribes are three basic linguistic families, such as *Tibeto-Chinese*, *Austro-Asiatic* and *Dravidian*, Santal is into the Austro-Asiatic category. These tribes, sometimes called aboriginals because of their being the earliest inhabitants of this country, not only belonged to different stages of culture but they varied from area to area in regard to size of the population, language, racial types, socio-economic organization etc.¹⁹ They have been classified as a '*non-Hindu*' "*Pre-Dravidian*" tribe.

The Santals are primarily agriculturists, growing rice as their main crop; besides they also grow millet, maize and some vegetable crops which are purely market driven. They have adopted various agricultural methods practiced by the mainstream people with little knowledge or application of crop rotation, irrigation, or fertilizers and pesticides etc. Hunting, fishing, and gathering are of little economic importance today. In West Bengal, the census of 1981 shows that workers constitute 43.14 per cent of the total population, of them a majority of 56.22 per cent was agricultural laborers and 36.04 per cent was cultivators.²⁰ They practice cattle rearing mainly cow, goats, sheep, pigs, oxen, buffaloes, cats and dogs. Their social organization is characterized by unity and equality among them. There is a lack of the caste cleavages so prominent in Hindu society, a matrilineal kinship system, and a relatively low level of political integration. The whole society seems to be divided into twelve clans and there are different sub-clans which in turn are subdivided into local matrilineal lineages. The society is merely a casteless society. According to birth no person, family, clan group is superior or inferior and woman enjoys much more freedom than their counterparts in Indian Society.

The Santals have also a choice of tradition and way of life in their society and practice them in their day to day actions. The customs and ethnicity practiced in the Santal society is a significant aspect. From birth to death, they rejoice the occasions with great eagerness. The Birth day occasion of a baby is much more sociological importance in Santal society. Because, Barren women dwell in lower position in the society and are treated as inauspicious. Birth is always welcome in the Santal society and a male child is preferred to a female child. After the birth of a child, the Santal midwife of '*hadibudhi*' cuts the umbilical cord of the child with an arrow and buries it near the door. The child is named on the day of the birth or on any odd numbered day following birth. The first-born

son is given the name of his grandfather; and second a male child will be named from maternal side. Birth is a significant bio-social happening in every society. It causes fresh alignments in the structural relations. The persons, on whom the birth as socio- biological events hinges, observe certain taboos and refrain from the performance of scared activities for varying periods of time.²¹ The birth customs are visible in the extent of pollution period, taboos, name giving, ear and nose picking, first shaving of head etc.

In the Santali society in West Bengal, marriage is a blending between a man and woman such that children born are regarded as justifiable off springs of both partners. Marriage not only unites two persons of reverse sex but also two culturally distinct groups in the wider content. Marriage is an essential ritual and several procedures are followed in a Santal marriage. Santals have different types of marriage. Their marriages are exogamous and these marriages known as *Bapla* are of seven types namely *Sanga Bapla*, *Kudam Napam Bapla*, *Kirin Bapla*, *Apangir Bapla*, *Tunki Dipil Bapla*, *Itut Sindur Bapla*, *Nir bolok Bapla*, *Diku Bapla* etc. in the Santli society, girls are married as adults mostly to men of their own choice. Sexual intercourse before marriage is tacitly recognized, it being understood that if the girl become pregnant the young man is bound to marry her. Should he attempt to evade this obligation, he would several beaten by the *Jag-Manjhi* (village head) and in addition to this his father would be required to pay a heavy fine. Polygamy is not favoured by the custom of the tribe. A man may talk a second wife if his first wife is barren, or if his elder brother dies, he may marry the widow. But in either case the consent of his original wife must be obtained to the arrangement. Divorce can be obtained easily; however, some alimony has to be given whole divorcing. Divorce is a common sequel to Santal marriage.²² Santal are very particular about the honour of their women, so far at least as outsiders are concerned and it is quite in keeping with their ideas that a sept (*paris*) formed by a liaison with a Hindu should have been look down and eventually vanished from the community. No Santal may marry within the sept, nor within any of the sub-sept into which is the sept divided.²³ It is granted at the wish of either husband or wife. The husband can demand the divorce if his wife is proved to be a witch, or doesn't obey him or always goes to her father's house. The wife can claim divorce, if her husband cannot provide her adequate food, clothing etc. If the woman divorces her husband to remarry another man of her choice, then the new husband has to return the bride price and other expenses to her former husband and if the husband divorces his wife, then he must pay the woman the compensation fixed by the village council.

The death during old age is taken with good courage because it brings event of transformation of body and soul of a person. Only male members partake in death rituals. The dead are cremated as well as buried. After the death of a esteemed person of the community who occupies an important post such as *Manjhi*, *Paranik*, *Godet*, etc., all Santals participate in the death ceremony. The entire village has to *mourn* the death. On the evening of the death of a person, a fowl is killed and offered it to the soul of the dead. After seven days the Santals purify themselves by bathing in a river. The last rite (*Bhandan*) is undertaken at an appropriate time after another seven days. The last rites or refinement are undertaken on the same day of the week as when the dead were buried. In the Santal society after the death of a person, the kin members are invited and they bury the corpse. After returning from the burial ground they take a smoke bath burning the straw at the entrance of the village. The bereaved family members of the deceased do not take any non-veg. items during the period of death pollution.²⁴

Ethnic Language of Santal :

Santali language belongs to the sub family of Austro-Asiatic cluster and classified under the 'Mundari' group of languages. They have their own scripts known as *Ol-Chiki* discovered by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in the year 1920s. Initially '*Ol-Chiki*' was regarded as copied one and also considered as one which doesn't have any characteristic of language. According to the census of 1961, the Santali (*Ol-Chiki*) language was spoken by 3,130,829 persons, of whom 1,102,556 (35.22%) were bilingual. Among the bilinguals 593,549(53.83%) spoke Bengali as their second language.²⁵ But after lot of studies, it was found that '*Ol-Chiki*' is alphabetic and does not share any of the syllabic properties of the other Indian scripts such as *Devanagari*, Oriya, Bengali. Santals did not have a written language until the nineteenth century. Therefore, the script is a recent development. A distinct script was required to accommodate the Santali language; it does not combine any features of any languages. In the year 2003, the Santali language has been included in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India.

Cultural Fairs and Festivals:

In the West Bengal, Santals observe a number of festivals to propitiate their Gods and Goddesses, round the year. As the Santals are agriculturists, their festivals are mainly connected with various agricultural activities and a few are connected with the hunting and collection of forest produce. Their most significant festivals are, *Eroksim*, *Hariharsim*, *Iri-Guldi-sim*, *Janthar*, *Saharai*, *Magha-sim* and *Baha* etc. which are very associated with the agricultural operations. The *Hariharsim* is observed at the time of the sprouting of seedlings. It means '*offer a cock to start paddy sowing*'. The Santals celebrate this festival to worship the mother earth with religious flavour and enthusiasm as they initiate the process of sowing paddy and other millet crops. The *Janthar*, the festival is celebrated with the aim of proper rain and growth of the crop properly. The priest (*naike*) offers male goat as sacrifice with a belief that propitiation of hill God will bring about bumper crops with sufficient rainfall. As they believe in the power of the nature God, they worship it with the expectation of proper rainfall so that the production of crop will increase. The *Iri-Guldi-sim* is observed for the offering of the first millet crop to the deities. Jantal observed during the month of September is a celebration of the first fruit eating of the winter rice crops to appease the hill God. *Saharai*, the cattle festival observed in the month of November, is one of the main festivals of the Santals. They worship cattle for increase of cattle wealth. The *Baha* is celebrated during the period of spring. Through this festival, they take the permission to use a variety of forest products and allow them to hunt in the forest. They offer flowers and other auspicious things so that they can enjoy the various forest products and begin hunting in the jungles. During *Baha* festival the Santal offer the first fruit of *mahua*, wild flowers and fruits to the *jaher* deities. Besides these, festivals like *Karama* and *Makar Sankranti* are also celebrated with pomp and ceremony for the prosperity and happiness of their community. *Karam Parva* festival is celebrated with the aim to make them free from various ill thinking and prosper the village in right direction. During the month of '*Ashwina*' or '*Kartika*', the auspicious day is fixed by the village meeting. A *Karam* tree is planted on the altar in the middle of village. The village maids offer molasses, non-boiled rice, flower and vermilion with various rituals, then story of '*Karam binti*' starts in which the story teller describe about the creation of the world. The '*Makar Sankranti*' festival lasts for three days and celebration primarily starts at night before *Makar Sankranti* is celebrated in the month of January every year. The first day is celebrated since morning by the burning of log of woods in the bank of river or near water reservoir and mainly the children and teens participate in

them. On the day of *Sakrat*, everyone in the family will take bath early and wear new clothes. In every household '*Makar pitha* (cake) is prepared as delicious item.²⁶

Santals bloodily love dancing; it is also the important part of the Santals fairs and festivals. Like other tribes '*enej*' or Dance and '*sereng*' music are integral parts of the Santal life. They dance and sing when they are in happy mood as they love it very much and these are always associated with their festivals and rituals which are always a community affair. Boys and girls, old and young, irrespective of age and sex, participate in such events. Dancing visits are exchanged between different villages. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the time and place for dancing. But they generally dance at night. The dancers do not wear any special costume. Various dances such as *Kalasi dance*, *Danta dance*, *Rinja dance*, *Baha dance*, *Jachur dance*, etc. are during different festive occasions. Traditionally, the Santal dance is performed with the tune of beating of drums and blowing of the flutes. The musical instruments such as *tamak*, *dhol*, *bhuang*, *tumdah*, *tiriau banam*, *ghanta* and *singa*, *sarangi* are used during dance. The Santals women dress red bordered white sari and dance in the line sequence. Apart from dance Santals play great music using *Tirio*, *Dhodro banam* and an open chest (*korom*), a short neck (*hotok*) and a head (*bohok*), *Phet banam*, *Tumdak*, *Tamak*, *Junko* and *Singa*. Santali dance is generally performed by both the men and women of the Santali tribe. It often covers issues related to gender and land rights. While performing, the male Santali dancers are dressed up in dhoti and make use accessories, like turban, tree leaves, flowers and bushes, during the dance. The dance is basically performed on special occasions. During the spring festival, it is performed to the glory of nature. Santali dance is accompanied with folk music instruments like flutes, pipes, drums and cymbals. *Mahishasura* is revered figures of tribes in West Bengal.²⁷ They are very obliged to their indigenous culture. So that, they don't refute their traditional heritage and culture, but now they adopt highbred culture, as they recorded CD, perform dance programmes with digital sounds and use decorated stage with modern forms.

Religion Beliefs and Divine Faiths of the Santal :

Indian tribes have religious polytheism. Religious complexity is found in terms of various tribal religions. These are always '*core*' and '*peripheral*' elements in tribal religion.²⁸ Thus, religion; society and culture together with power structure are interwoven in tribal polity. Cultural patterns influence and shape behaviour of individuals and their means of production, consumption and distribution. Such an interrelationship is not a limited to tribes, it has been found in caste-based Bengali society as well.²⁹ The Adivasi have their own distinct religion; but the mainstream people and the modern education has influenced them to a great extent. As far as the Santals are concerned they have beautiful of socio-cultural montage in the present caste rifted Indian society. Santals have separate religion and it is called *Sarna*, but yet to recognize by Constitution of India. At the time of worship, the Santals prepare pictorial boundary (*khond*) as a mark of the routine relationships with the nature. They do not believe in idol or image of deity. As a result they do not have any kind of traditional temple existence in their society. Based on their economic standard they have the practice of burial and cremation and a chicken is dedicated to the dead body. The priesthood is not appropriated by a particular clan group or a sect. Santals do believe in many Gods and Goddesses except common God and patrimonial one. According to them the Sun is omnipotent. He is the creator and father. The earth is believed to be their mother. She brings up all. Mother earth is the female and the Sun God is the male and all other are their off springs. Different clans of Santals worship the God with different names. The ancestral God is important and followed by some rituals

in regular interval of time. Santals worship the powerful Sun God as ‘*Singabonga*’ in common.

Santals have no temples of their own. They even do not worship any idols. Santals follow the *Sarna* religion. The God and Goddess of Santals are *Marangburu*, *Jaheraera*, and *Manjhi*. Santals pay respect to the ghosts and spirits like *Kal Sing*, *Lakchera*, *Beudarang* etc. They have village priests known as the *Naiki* and shaman *Ujha*. Animal sacrifices to the Gods are the common practice common practice among the Santals to appease the Gods and Goddess. Religion (dharma) is considered to be a part and parcel of Santal life. Though basically they are animists, because of their cultural revivalism in the recent times, they have named their religion after the popular name of their village ‘sacred grove’ as *sarna*. Like other tribals, the Santals are polytheists. They believe in the existence of a number of deities, ghosts and spirits residing in the hills, forests and streams and their ancestral spirits guiding every aspect of their life. Their benevolent Supreme deity is *Dharam* or Thakur or *Sing Bonga* who is identified with the sun and is worshipped with great reverence as the creator of the universe.

So far as tribals are concerned, every aspect of their life is integrated and interrelated. Even the fulfillment of their basic requirements of life is determined by culture and religion. To start with, food patterns vary from tribe to tribe. While everywhere people have some staple food on which they depend, on special occasions particular dishes are prepared. Here, culture determines when, what and how to eat, and with whom to eat and the whole ritual surrounding relating to giving and acceptance of food. While some food items are delicious and staple for some, the same may be inedible, and hence out rightly may be rejected by others.³⁰ They have belief on numerous *bongas*. Some important *bongas* are as follows, *Marang-Buru*, *Gosai-Era*, *Pargana-Bonga*, *Taher-Era*, *Manjhi-Bonga*, *Manjhi Haram*, *Manjhi-Burhi*, *Sing-Bongra*, *Mareiko*, *Turuiko*, *Manjhi-Burhi* etc. There are 178 different *bongas* in the beliefs of the Santals.

Religion being an important constituent of culture regulates other constituents and unifies them into a cultural system. In simple tribal societies religion is usually co present with power structure. Tribal religion is not based on sacred books and religious institutions like temple and church. However, it is quite evident that religious practices have interlinked ages with economy, and they are necessary for tribal society. Christian missionaries who worked with tribals failed to interlink their belief system and religious practices with economy and polity. Recently, the Santals people are practice Hinduism and believe in God. They worship numerous Gods, deities and spirits. The census records 82.62 per cent of the Santal as followers of Hinduism, 3.29 per cent as Christians, 0.09 per cent as Muslims, 0.02 per cent as Sikh s, 0.02 per cent as Jains and 0.09 per cent have not stated their religion.³¹ Their religion is basically centered in this respect. High God among them is Thakur; he referred to a *Singbonga* and is regarded as the Sun-God. The supreme Deity of Santal was fainéant, ‘*Thakur*’, some identify him with the Sun, whom the Santal regarded as a good God and worship every fifth or tenth years with sacrifices of slain goat. Risley has said more than hundred thirty years ago, ‘I am myself inclined to doubt whether a god bearing the Hindu name Thakur, and exercising supreme power which rank a comparatively late stage of the theological development, can really have formed part of the original system of the Santal’³²

Creative Culture of Santal : Arts and Crafts :

The Santals have natural talents in art and crafts which is reflected in their beautiful wall paintings, housing architecture and wood works. Their doors are bejeweled with colorful drawings. Inside walls are also decorated with beautiful drawings by the Santal women. They keep their houses neat, clean and decorative to appease the Gods and Goddesses and get their blessings.

Poles apart traditional arts and crafts are connected with the daily life of this tribal community. Santals in this part of Birbhum district have exceptional heritage of art and craft. In this village there are cottage industries, among which potteries, woodworks and dress materials are remarkable. Some of their traditional crafts and artwork have slightly been adapted in the present day under the influence of modernization. Through an interview it has been explored that in the present time only 17.5 per cent of the villagers' practices their own traditional art and craft and as much as 82.5 per cent are not interested in nurturing their skill in this matter.³³ This feature has a certain explanation. During the field examination it was found that mostly the people of old generation and middle age are occupied in this work of tribal arts and culture; because of the fact that these full-fledged people believe in their hereditary ethical value and have attachment to maintain their inherited education of arts. On the other hand a large contingent of the young generation have go much been influenced by modern global culture that they do not have the patience to learn their own artwork and continue with it. The villagers produced their craft and artwork both for decoration purpose in their houses as well as selling in the market.³⁴

Conclusion: Change and Development :

In the beginning of the twentieth century, we see, many NGOs and governmental initiatives have been taken for the upliftment of the tribals communities all over the India. Now, the Santals are considered as one of the upcoming progressive tribes of West Bengal. Urbanization, the government policies like "*Sarbo Shiksha Avijan*" and "*Mid-Day-Meal Project*" has influence the spread of education among the Santal areas. The technological enhancement is also one of the most important causes of the improvement of the Santal. '*Shishasree*' '*Kanyashree*' educational plans and frequent interactions with the mainstream society have changed their life style to a great extent. Now-a -days, many of the Santal youths are moving towards town and urban areas for education and in search of jobs. Occupational mobility has also brought a drastic change in their living pattern. There has been a continuous effort since independence by the government to raise their socio-economic standards. For their social and economic upliftment, Government has launched a number of development programmes which have brought a drastic change in their way of life by improving their status of education, economy, communication, health and sanitation etc. Emphasis has been laid on their educational development. As the tribal community, the Santal avail themselves of the maximum facilities provided to them. The openings of residential schools and hostels, and the provision of scholarships, have provided plentiful opportunity for the Santal to educate their children. For this changing scenario in West Bengal, we observed the literacy rate of the Santal was 12.48 per cent in 1981, now it has raised at 42.2 per cent, male 57.3 per cent and female is 27.0 per cent in 2001. At present their village is electrified with '*Rajiv Gandhi Vidyut Yojana*' and '*Biju Grama Jyoti Yojana*'. There is also a lot of change in their leadership pattern. Traditional political leaders are replaced by elected people's representatives. Use of modern medicines, mill made clothes; cosmetics etc. are now a fashion among the Santal youths. Their family circle articles no longer constitute their indigenous equipment, which they make themselves or collect from the forest. Now, many well-to-do families have radio, cycle, television, mobile phone and wooden furniture. The young men wear pants, shirts and banyan instead of their customary coarse cloths. The women wear mill-made saris, blouses, petticoats, and glass or plastic ornaments imitating local caste women. The habit of taking tea, smoking *bidis* and cigarettes has been acquired by Santal living in towns and urban centers. Artifacts like dress and ornaments, combs, agricultural, hunting and fishing implements, household objects, musical instruments and *dhokra* objects of the Santal tribe as well

as a replica of Santal hut have also been displayed in this fashionable museum. Besides, the Santals artists are on a regular basis performing their dances and Adivasi *Mela* held every year and many such events exhibiting their talents. As a result the Santal have overcome their inertia and announce them as the imperative part of this beautiful world. Anthropologists have time and again demonstrated the symbiotic relationship between the Santal economy, culture and society with their ecology at the given time and space notwithstanding diversity of cultural practices, therefore the Santals of India represents certain uniformities. But, tribal society and culture witnessed several changes particularly since independence in west Bengal and India as well. Because, one of major factors influencing them and bringing them close to other groups and societies of the countries is spread of education and modern technology.

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