



Socio -Cultural Changes of Tribes and Their Impacts on Environment with Special Reference to Santhal in West Bengal

Subrata Guha & Md Ismail**

**Department of Geography, Aliah University, Kolkata, 700014

Abstract

A tribe is a group of people living under primitive condition and still not popularly known to more modern culture. There are numbers of tribes living all over India as well as various parts in the World. More than 55% of the total tribal population of India are living in central India like Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh and remaining tribal population is concentrated in the Himalayan belt, Western India, the Dravidian region and Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands. According to D.N Majumdar, tribes as 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 tribes or castes. Out of them, Santhal is an important tribe which contributes more than 50% of the Indian tribal population. The paper tries to explain heartening situation of Indian tribes with reference to Santhal communities in Birbhum district and also finds out various cultural as well as food habits, religious practices, social system like marriage and various types of awareness. Social change is one of the important issues which can determined 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 relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions.

Keywords: Tribal culture, social change, environmental impacts, festivals, food habits, religion.

Introduction

Santhal are the largest Hindu religious believer adivasi community in India and can be found mainly in the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Orissa. In India, 90 million people belong to the indigenous communities known as adivasis or tribals. According to the 2011 census, India has 8.10% of tribal population and about 14.8% of Gujarat's total population is tribal. The Santhals constitutes more than half of the total ST population of the West Bengal (51.8 per cent). According to Oxford Dictionary "A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. Social change refer to change of society and change of social relationship through social process which made by the system of web. It is includes reciprocal activities and developed the new relationship by society in different parts of the countries. It may be defined in other ways,' social change is explained to various aspects of social phenomena, social system, custom, tradition, social interaction, common habits and organizational setup. According to Merrill and Eldredge, "Social Change means that large numbers of population are engaging in activities that differ from those which they or their immediate forefathers engaged in some time before". According to M.D. Jenson, "Social change may be defined as modification in ways of doing and thinking of people. According to Jones "Social change is defined variations in or modifications of any aspect of social system, processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organization".

Review of literature

Puttaraja and O. D. Heggade (2012) Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the various walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Empowering may be understood as enabling weaker sections like poor women, especially tribal women to acquire and to possess power and resources Verma (1959-1960) has discussed the socio-cultural organisations of the Sanria paharias, Mai- paharias and Knmarbhag. He has examined various phases of the tribal life, pregnancy and birth, puberty, widow remarriage, place of women in the society, religion, village council and political institutions. Pradeep Kumar Bose (1981), in his paper, questions the validity of observing stratification pattern among Indian tribes on the basis of caste hierarchy or 'Sacred' hierarchy or division on class basis. This is observed in the context of Gujarat tribes. Tribal population in modern market and production systems and their incorporation into 99 modern political systems are shown regional variations in occupations, use of modern machinery etc. Data were collected from seven districts of Gujarat, through survey method and random sampling, identifying four distinct classes: rich peasant, middle peasant, poor peasant and agricultural labourers. Renuka Pameche (1985) has studied political aspects of the Bhils and the process of the formation of elite in Bhil Society - Elaborate accounts of the traditional political system of Bhils and the impact of the modern system on them is given. A serious limitation of this book is that, it is has not taken into consideration the socioeconomic aspects of the poor tribal. To be specific, Vyas (1971) describes the tribal development in Rajasthan. Jagannath Dash and Kabiraj Behera (2010) for a traditional society especially tribal community like that of "Paraja" in south Orissa, the fundamental features are always in favour of the maintenance of their socio cultural tradition. Like others they also need money (in cash) for their livelihood but it should not be at the cost of their socio-cultural tradition. It is easier to lose traditional values to acquire economic development. Day-by-day due to the impact of globalization, people are tending towards new economic order which may ultimately fade away their traditional values.

Objectives of the Study

- I. To highlight the Socio-cultural changing status of tribal community.
- II. To study the existing opportunities facilitating the preservation, promotion and dissemination of tribal and folk art & culture;
- III. To trace out the socio-cultural and socio-economic factors which are hindering the promotion of tribal and folk art & culture

Data Based and Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data, but more emphasis given on primary data which are collected by authors through field survey. On basis of random sample, 80 household has been taken from study areas. The secondary data have been collected from BDO (block development officer) office and Gram Panchayat. Lastly all the data are arranged in the suitable table form and prepare chart and diagram for better understanding through analysis. At last all the data are represented through graphical method and used statistical method.

Study Area

Sonajhuri is a unique rural area of Birbhum district in West Bengal that makes the Tourist enjoy the lost charm of Shantiniketan as one journey across the winding village roads, untouched, unspoiled forests, Adivasi Villages, the Kopai River and the Khoai region. With an assortment of blushed greenery along with Santhali settlements and the famous Khoai region a canyon that is created by water and wind erosion this is an idle place to look out for peace that one otherwise misses in the busy city life. The traditional life of the Santhali community with their local art and culture make Sonajhuri a heritage destination. Moreover, one can find the local crafts along with the traditional delicacies being sold at the famous Shonajhuri Haat (weekly market) on every Saturday. The famous Baul singers of Shantiniketan also perform in this Haat. The main attraction here is the Sonajhuri jungle that offers a serene atmosphere and is the perfect place to take a leisure walk. This is probably the cleanest forest area on earth. The Khowai region - canyons created by wind and water is worth experiencing here. The hanging trees and the view of the roots at the edges of these rifts within the forest area will make one fall in love with the region. The slow flowing Kopai River (Rabindranath Tagore's Amader Choto Nadi) and the Baul songs of the singers along the banks are special attractions (Wikipedia).

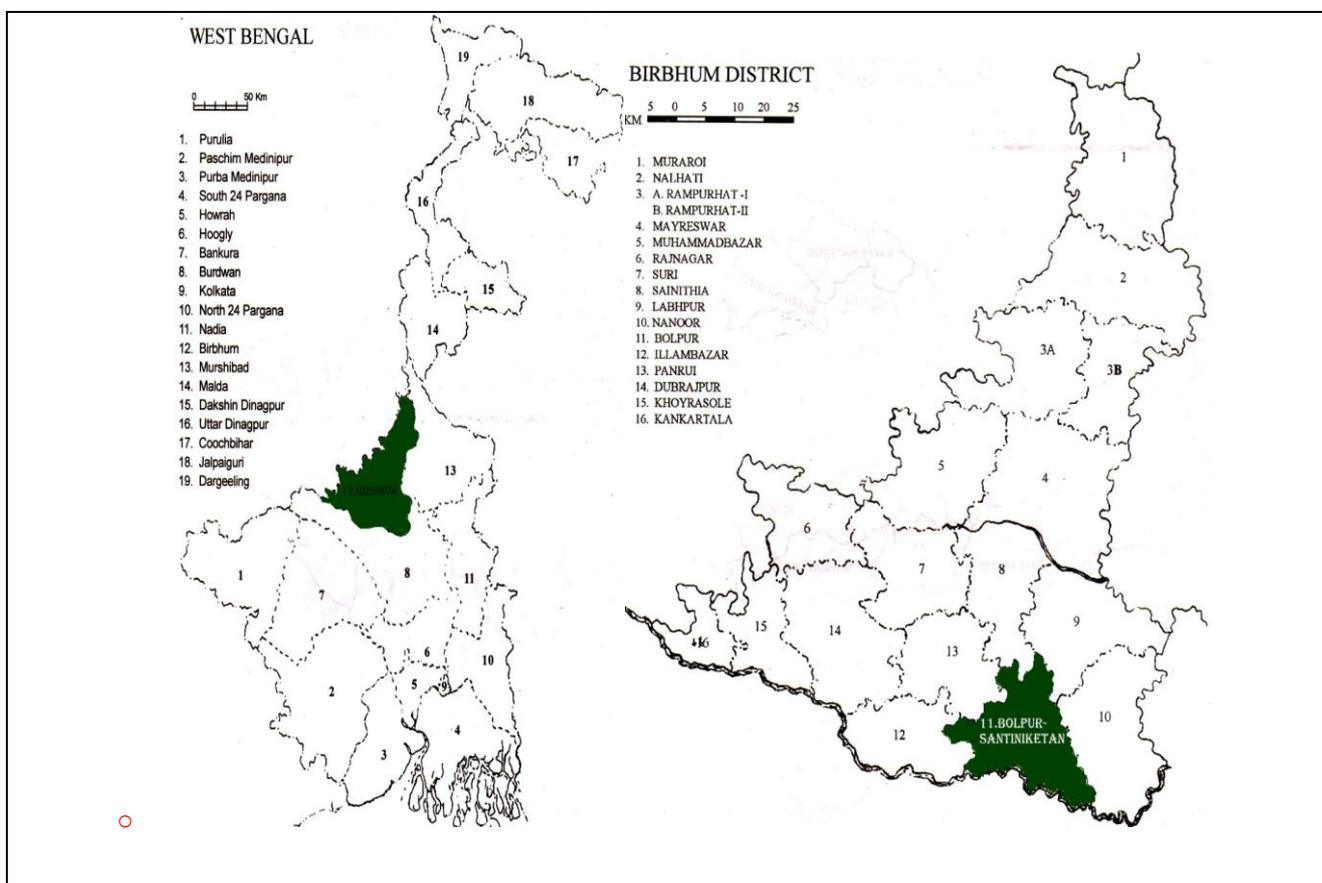


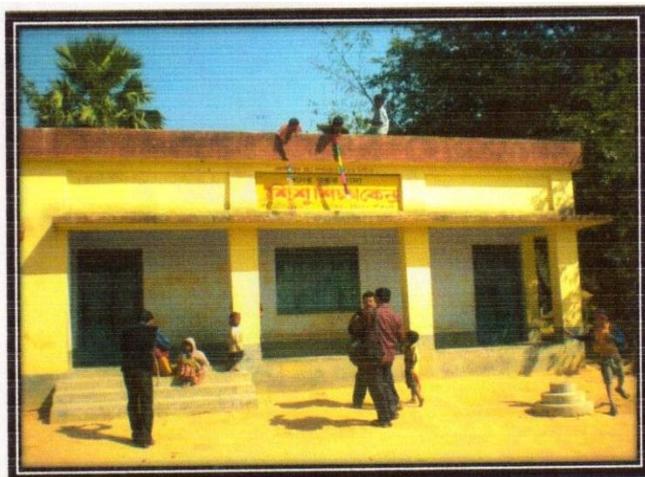
Figure:1

Discussion and Results

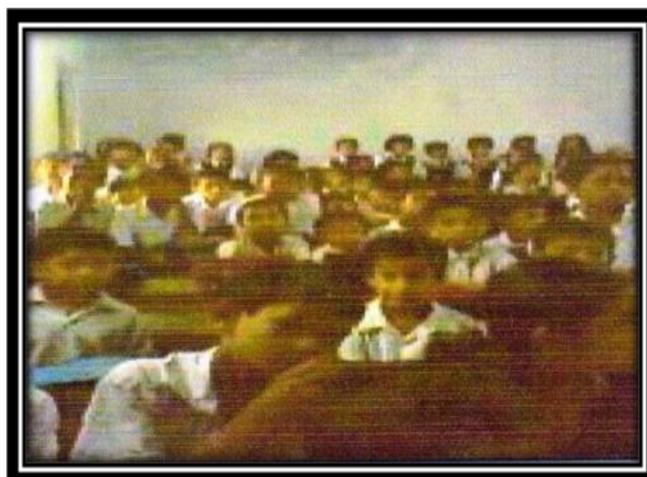
Education

Education as an instrument of social change and education play great role and determined of his/ her direction. Due to the low participation of education attainment tribal community are back behind of modern streams. Literacy is considered as a fairly reliable index of socio-culture and economic advancement. It can define as skills of reading and writing, it is an important factor of socio-economic development of not only particular area, as well as any countries because the processes of development of an area depend on the level of education of the people. According to field survey, only 30.69 people are literate among sample people in Sonajhuri Village and literacy gap is not far, out of this 34.73% male are literate and 27.10% female are literate. The most of the literate population are primary educated. Field

reported that, more than 47% educated people are primary passed followed by middle pass more than 36%. About 11% people are senior secondary passed and remaining are graduate or post graduate passed.



Primary School in Sonajhuri



Student of Primary School

In this age of globalization these tribal community still live very much in an underdeveloped society. However, in spite of this backwardness they are still remain contented with their typical Khoai culture with traditional tribal art and rituals.

Physical form of the People

Physically the Santhal people are characterized by dark to very dark brown in complexion with dolichocephalism and hypsicephalic head form with a high vault; narrow forehead. They have coarse black, straight and occasionally curly hair. Scanty beard and less hair on the body is another characteristic feature. Their eyes are black coloured and medium sized with usually straight or rarely oblique eye-slit. Their nose is straight and prominent with depression at the root, large mouth with thick projecting lips. Bodding (1994) observed that frizzy hair among some of the Santhal and the physical characteristics in general have doubted the existence of a Negroid element among them.

Religion

Santhals people are practice Hinduism and believe in God. They worship numerous Gods, deities and spirits. 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. They have belief on numerous bongas. Some important bongas are as follows:

- 1) Marang-Buru
- 2) Gosai-Era
- 3) Pargana-Bonga
- 4) Taher-Era
- 5) Manjhi-Bonga-i) Manjhi Haram & ii) Manjhi-Burhi
- 6) Sing-Bongra
- 7) Mareiko
- 8) Turuiko
- 9) Manjhi-Burhi.

The first 4 reside in Jaher-Than and Manjhi-Bongarecides at Manjhi Than especially by the side of the house of Manjhi or Headman. Other supernatural beings are also supposed to have power, like Sima-bonga(or deity of village boundaries); Bahre-bonga(household deity), Qrak-bonga(household deity), Abge-bonga(secret family Gods). There are 178 different bongas in the beliefs of the Santhals. Also they believe in numerous evil spirits, commonly known as Bhut, Rakes etc. the concept of Dine or Witchcraft (the evil spirit which, as they believe, often enter into the soul of some persons in the community) also prevails among the Santhal. Women those who are practicing witchcraft are locally known as "Dine". Women are supposed to have a monopoly in this art. They are considered as dangerous and anti-social elements. According to their belief witchcrafts can easily cause disease and death to a person. However, with the spread of education and under the growing influence of urbanization this belief is gradually fading away from the mind people.

Language

Language is a vocal identity of the society. Santali language is called Al-Chiki. It is their mother tongue. All Santhali people in this village speak in this language. However, they are used to make conversation in Bengali language with their Bengali neighbours.

Knowledge about Santhali Language

Since Santhali people live in this village in large numbers, a study was conducted about the knowledge of their own language AL-CHIKI. Interestingly it was noted that only 67.5% people can speak & understand this language and 22.5% people can speak, read & write their own language. Many of them get used to speaking & being educated in Bengali medium.

Table 1: - Level of Knowledge of the people in their own Santali Language.

Level of knowledge	No's responded	%
--------------------	----------------	---

Can read, write & speak	6	15
Can read only	12	30
Can neither read nor write	22	55
Total nos. interviewed	40	100

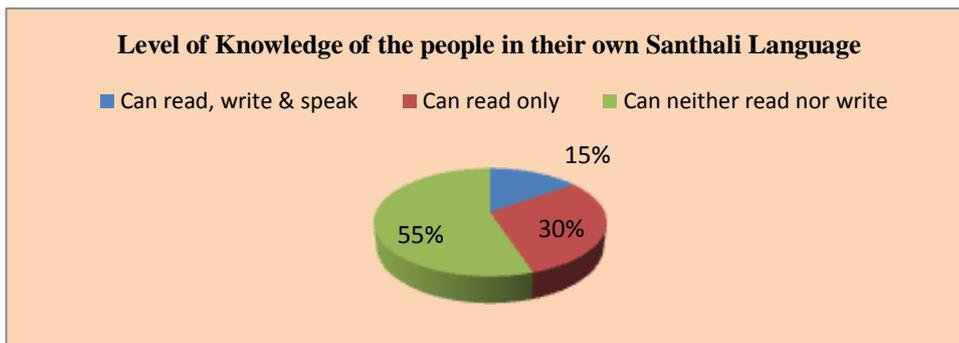


Figure: 2

Dress of Santhal People

Indian tribes are the heritage of traditional culture because most of the tribal people still lived under primitive belief. So, their cultural habits are very interesting and they are the identity of Indian tradition culture. Santhal people wearing of typical dresses that is totally different from modern culture and still they are strongly followed by their own traditional dresses. Normally male members are wearing with a medium piece of cloth wearing round his waist which is commonly known as Dhoti and during the time of working, they usually wear a small piece of cloth which is called **kopni**. Generally Santali women are dresses with a larger piece of cloth or saree, the white Saree with red border is of common use during the time of festival. But their traditional dress is Panchi Parhat. All these clothes are made of cotton. They have a fascination to decorate themselves with flowers, feathers and similar things. The Santali women like to wear various types of ornaments; these include necklace, ear ring, bangles, wristlets, ring, girdles etc. these are commonly made of (brass) silver nickel.

Desire for Wearing Traditional Dress

An interview taken with the tribal people about the choice of their traditional dress has been presented below in tabular as well as in diagrammatic forms.

Table 2: -Desire for wearing of traditional dresses

Desire for wearing traditional dresses	Yes in %
Like to wear all time	30
Likes to wear in the festival times	56
Like to wear only modern dress	14
Total no. of persons interviewed	100

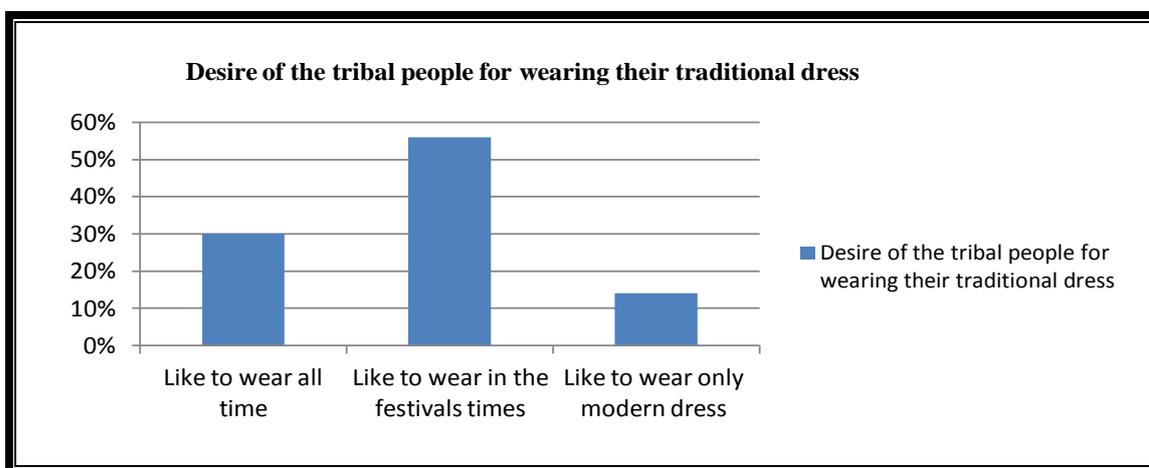


Figure: 3

This gives a very interesting picture. Only 30% of the people like to wear their traditional dress at all times, more than 56% like to wear only during the festivals times & as few as 14% people (mostly modern generation) do not like their traditional dress & have completely switched over to the modern dresses.

Food

Santhals people food habits are fully depending on nature and they are gather food from their nearest forest. The most of the Santhal people engaged as primary worker which is mainly hunting, gathering, collecting of foods, woods and various type of animals. Santhal people food habit is as much as simple as in their life and they do not like oil and species food, so their health condition is slim type and very little number of people are fatty. Most of the interesting thing is that, most of people are lived in nature and their buildings are made by natural materials and they take all the nutrition from nature itself. Rice is the staple food of Santhal but the cooking habits of rice and eating rice is different as compared

to other communities. After cooking of rice, they put into the water and take whole day in it's and it is called Da Madi in Santali language that means, Da means water and Madi means food. With Da Madi they mainly take Onion, chilly, vegetables which is either collected from nearby Jungle or grown around their house. Santhal people are mainly like non vegetables food in regular basis and mainly collected through hunting which consist of varieties of wild animals, birds, rats, crabs, fox, fish, frog, ants, rodents, wild cat, eggs etc. Santhal are not take milk as a food but presently they also take milk as their food menu. Handia is the popular beverage of the Santhal people which mainly made by rice with mixed with same chemical. . In all family as well as social festivals and rituals Haria is the main drink for all of them, irrespective of men, women and children. They also drink intoxicating liquor from dried flower of Mahua. Tobacco being rolled into Sal leaf is used for smoking.

Settlement pattern

Settlement pattern among Santhal people are also maintain special pattern and most of the settlement are randomly spread of particular areas. All the settlements are hamlet types and the houses are situated in hilly tracts and mountainous regions and mainly houses consist of small door for safe of wild animals and have not proper ventilation. The village is generally surrounded by trees, clumps of bamboo bushes and brushes Most of the house wall are made mad and natural material which is collected from forest. The general extensions of a Santhal dwelling are cattle-shed, pig shed, manure pit, kitchen-garden, and a rectangular or square courtyard. A small space in a corner of the principle hut, called Bhtar is kept apart by low wall. This place is regarded as the abode of the family daises and ancestral spirits. The huts are generally without any windows; through sometimes lattices are there in it. The walls are built of and plastered with mud and the rafters are of Sal wood. The gable-shaped roof is structured by bamboo and thatched with straw.

Festivals

The Santhal celebrate their festivals quite often throughout the year. They celebrate many festivals; among them seven festivals are their traditional important annual festivals. This are-

- i) Ero-sim: It's observed before the sowing of seeds in the field.
- ii) Hariar-sim: It is organized at the time of spouting seedling.
- iii) Iri-Gundli-Manwai: offering of the first fruits of the millet crops.
- iv) Janthw: celebrates during first winter rice crop.
- v) Sohrai: Harvest Festival, during Oct-Nov. This Festival is celebrates because their animal helps them to grow crops in field. Therefore tribes are acknowledging them by this festival.
- vi) Magh-sim: A year ending festivals.
- vii) Baha: It is spring festivals and is the festival of flowers. The festival falls the day before Holi. The attractive feature of this festival is their traditional dance displayed by the women folk the village with the tune of 'dhanisa and inadal' beaten by this men folks.

Knowledge about the Festivals

Now a day, due to the impacts of globalization Santhal people are also change their traditional festivals and adapts new socio- modern culture. According to field survey, more than 35 % people among sample households in study area of Santhal are not following and have not good ideas and practices of their ancestor festival due to level of modern influences. But still they are lived in the same village. More than 65% Santhal people are strongly participate and have a good knowledge about their festivals.

Table 3: - knowledge of the people about their festival & Rituals

Knowledge about festivals & Rituals	No's said Yes %
Know all about them	65%
Know some about them	35%
Do not know	0
Total	100

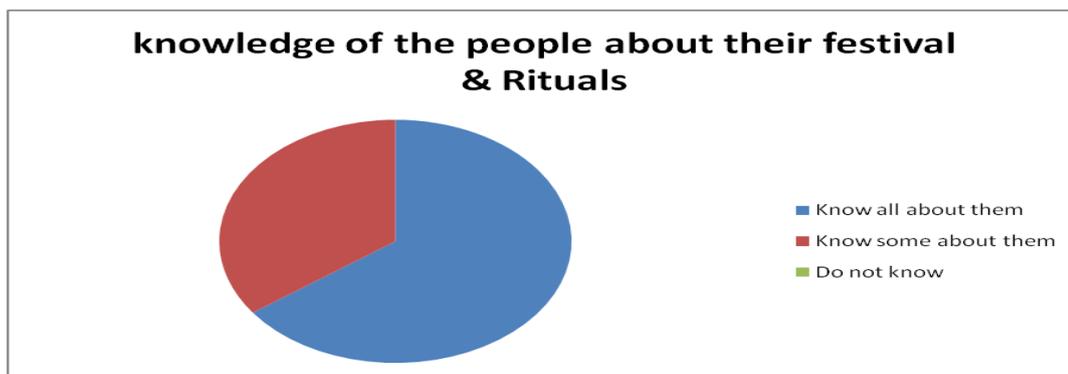


Figure 4

Marriage System and Ceremony

The marriage system of this tribal community is very interesting. They are monogamous in general. They are avoiding the practice of payment of a bride-price in getting a mate among them. Neither parallel-cousin marriage, nor cross-cousin marriage is allowed. Among the Santhals there are 8 different ways of marriage. These are:-

- i. Kirin BahuBapla- This is a type of arranged marriage of young men and women who have not previously been married. It is arranged by a Rae baric or the Matchmaker.

- ii. TunkiBipilBapla- Here no payment is made, Bamboo basket (tunki) plays an important role here.
- iii. GhardiJawaeBapla- This type of marriage is preferred by the father of the bride who has no son but a daughter.
- iv. ItutBapla- This type of marriage done by capture.
- v. NirbalakBapla. 6) Kirin JawalBapla. 7)GolantiBapla. 8)RajarajiBapla.

Age of Marriage (Female)

Age of marriage of the female persons in the family as has been studied is given in the following table & diagram.

Table 4:-Average age of marriage of the female persons in the family.

Average age of marriage (Female)	Number of responded %
Within 10 years age	0
Within 15 years age	35
Within 20 years age	50
After the age of 20 years	15
Total nos. interviewed	100

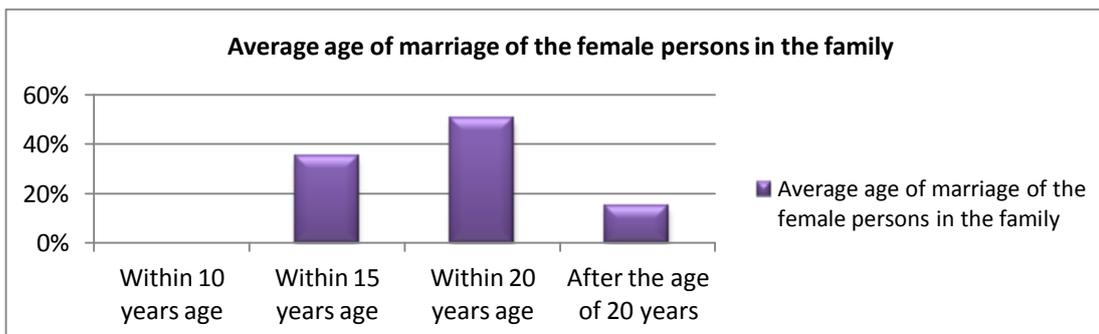


Figure 5

Art & Crafts

Different traditional art & Crafts are associated with the daily life of this tribal community. Santhals in this part of Birbhum district have unique 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 modified in the present day under the influence of modernization. Through an interview it has been explored that in the present time only 17.5% of the villagers practices their own traditional art & craft and as much as 82.5% are not interested in nurturing their skill in this matter. This feature has a certain explanation. During the field investigation it was found that mostly the people of old generation and middle age are engaged in this work of tribal art & culture; because of the fact that these matured people believe in their inherited ethical value and have devotion to maintain their inherited education of art. 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. Unfortunately they do not get good value of their products because in most cases they become obliged to sell them to the middle- me at low price. Hence their quality And caliber get appreciated but never get properly rewarded.

Decoration of the House Wall With Typical Tribal Artwork

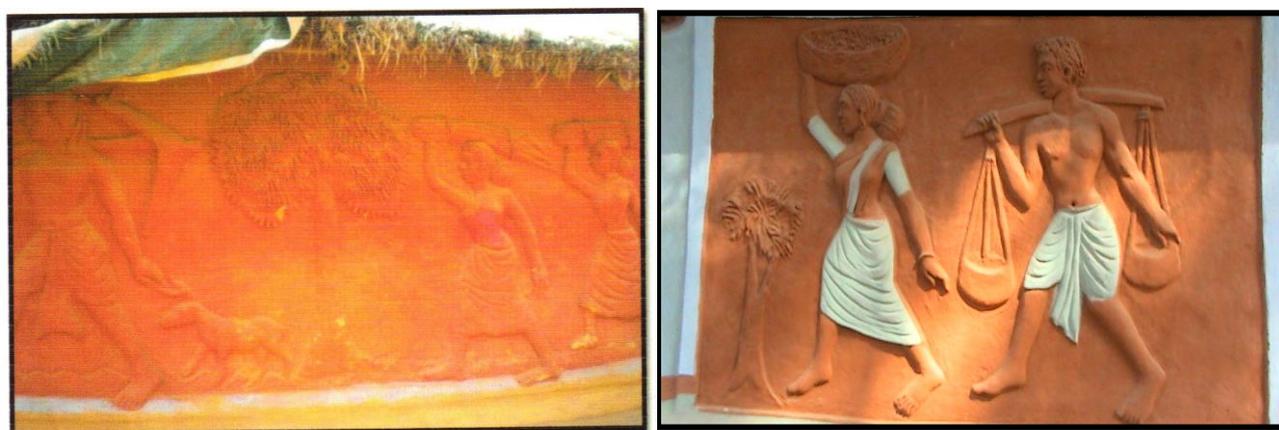


Figure 6

Proud of their products but sad for the low market demand



Figure 7
Their Art & Craft products are selling in the village fair



Figure 8
Studies on perceptions of the people towards their environment

In order to conduct a complete study on man-environment relationship it is very important to have knowledge about the people’s perception towards the different aspect of the environment they are living in. In this area a thorough study report this presented on the perception of the people towards their environment in Banner Pukur Danga Village.

Nature of changing Jobs

Changing of job can be usually expected with the change of generation. The field survey on it has brought out a data which is presented in the table below & also in the diagram following it.

Table 5: - Whether changed job in this generation

Whether changed job in this generation	Yes in %
Continues through generation	67.5
Changed job in this generation	32.5
Total nos. interviewed	100

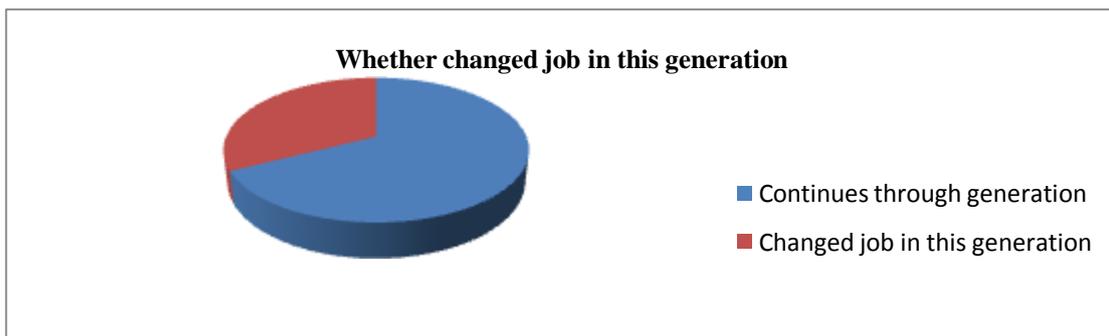


Figure 9

Environmental Problems

The types of environmental problems that the village people have to negotiate were investigated upon. The village people were asked to express their views over these problems. The data thus generated have been presented here in the table & in the diagram following it.

Table 6: - Concerns of the villagers about the environmental hazards.

Types of environmental hazards faced	Yes in %
Deforestation	60
Flood	0
Soil Erosion	22.5
Cyclone	0
Do not know	17.5
Total no. of persons interviewed	100

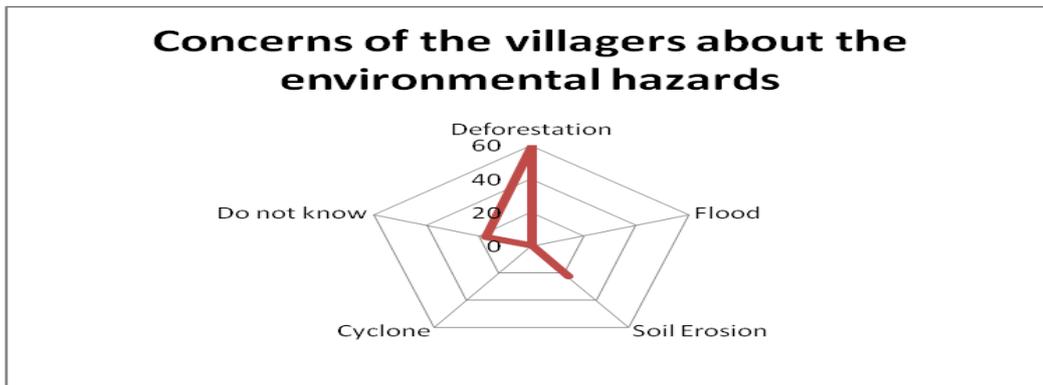


Figure 10

It can be seen that most common natural hazards, such as flood & cyclone, do not affect the inhabitants here. However, maximum proportion of the inhabitants is very much concerned about the deforestation which continues to take place around their area. Some people also insisted upon soil erosion as one of the hazards.

Hazards in Agriculture

It has already been mentioned that a significant proportion of the working people are engaged in work as daily labour & it was explored during the field investigation most of these daily labours are absorbed in agriculture as agricultural labours. An interview was thus taken with people to have their perception about the types of hazards in agriculture. The result has been demonstrated in table & in diagram below:-

Table 7: Types of hazard in Agriculture that affect the farmers

Types of Agricultural Hazards	Number of Yes%
Infertile soil/Low productive land	32.50
Problems of water for irrigation	40.00
Lack of Bio-fertilizer	5.00
Do not know	22.50
Total nos. interviewed	100

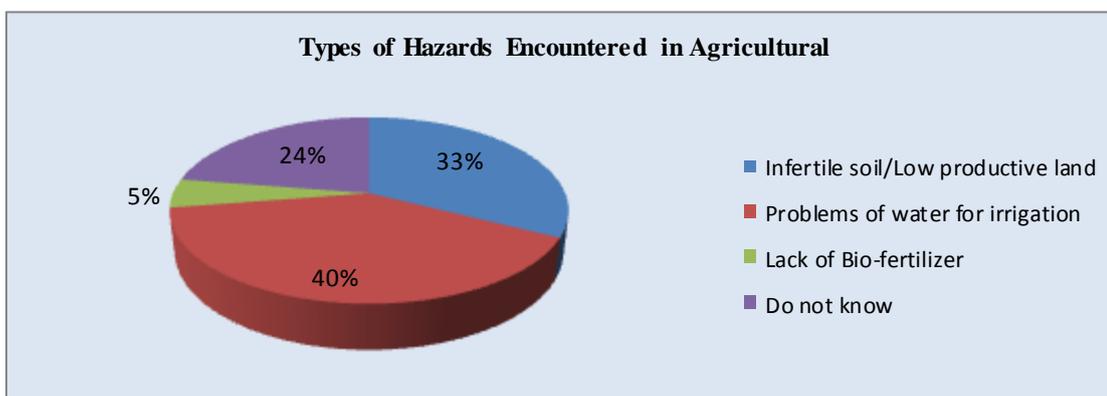


Figure 11

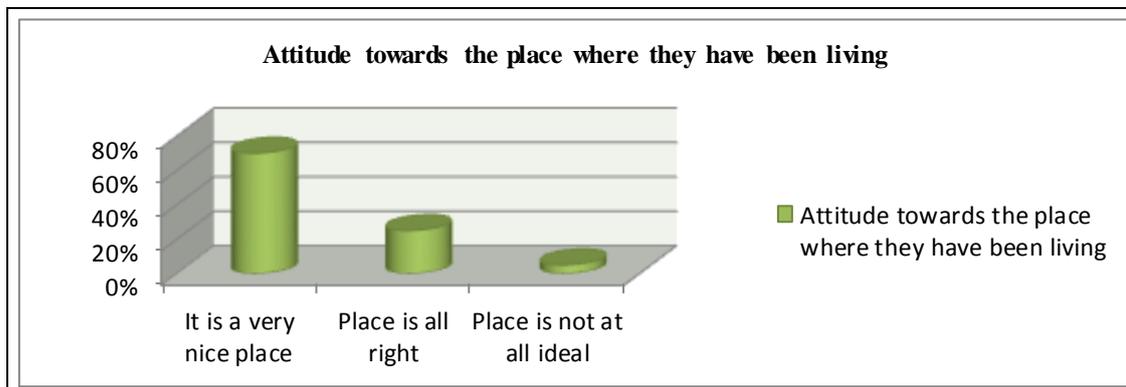
It can be seen from the above presentation that as much as 40% of the people consider problems of water for irrigation stand as the most acute hazard & 32.50% find infertility of soil as the marked hazard in agriculture.

Attitude towards the place of living

Residents' desire as well as devotion to their place of living was again investigation the result of which is presented below:-

Table 8: - Attitude towards the place where they have been living

Attitude towards the place of living	Number of Yes %
It is a very nice place	70
Place is all right	25
Place is not at all ideal	5
Total nos. interviewed	100

**Figure 12**

It appears from the above table & the supporting diagram that although the people of this village encounter several drawbacks & face some hazards in daily life a large proportion (70%) of them still consider that their place very nice & thus they would not prefer to go away anywhere else.

Conclusion

It has already been mentioned that Santali people are the largest community & ethnic group in West Bengal. Traditional art & crafts are a part in their life. They celebrate their festivals and rituals throughout the year wearing their traditional dresses. These celebrations are made with tribal songs & dances in the open courtyard of the village as with beating drums of various types locally known as Madol, Dhol etc. They speak among themselves in their own language called Al-Chiki. At the same time they got used to speaking in Bengali as well with the outsiders when they come to visit their village. In general these people are peace-loving & friendly with the outside visitors.

Acknowledgements

We especially thank to Shri Biraj Kanti Mondal, Assistant professor, Geography Dept. Netaji Subhas Open University who have provided us a Chance to work in this issue & help us with his invaluable information. We also thankful to Prof. Guru Prasad Chottopadhyay (Geo Dept. Visva-Bharati University) without whose help & support would not have been able to complete this project.

Reference

1. Puttaraja and O. D. Heggade (2012), Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women in Karnataka: A Case Study in Mysore and Chamarajanagara Districts, Studies of Tribes and Tribals, Vol. 10(2): pp. 173-181
2. Verma P. (1960). Socio-cultural Organizations of Tribals. Metro Publishers, Rajasthan.
3. Bose, P.K. (1979): Agrarian Structure, Peasant Society and Social Change: A Study of Selected Regions in West Bengal. Ph. D. Thesis, JNU, New Delhi.
4. Renuka P. (1985). Elite in Indian Society, Jaipur: Print Well Publishers.
5. Vyas, N.N. (1971). "Tribal Development in Rajasthan", Tribe, 7, (4), pp. 1-3.
6. Dash J & K Behera K. (2010). "The State of Shamanistic Knowledge System in the Face of Globalizations: Need for a Policy Dialogue", in (Ed.) Ed. Behera M.C. & Jummyr Basar. Interventions and Tribal Development, Challenges before Tribes in India in the era of Globalization, New Delhi: Serials Publications.
7. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/tribal-society/>
8. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/tribal-society/tribal-struggles.php>
9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_change.