

Changing Tribal Culture: A Photo-Geographical Explanation

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Abstract: Tribes are the part of our earthen-culture and are living with the science of nature. Their all socio-economic and traditional life-styles bear the print of natural environment. *Sonajhuri* was a purely tribal village of *Santhal* community in *Birbhum* district which till-date exists with its partial nature-oriented traditional identity. *Khoai* is the adjoining landscape (lateritic) to this village and is a matter of attraction to local, regional as well as global tourists. Recently, there are more than 50 families living in this village with more than 250 people in it. It is a matter of worry that our age-old traditional earthen culture becomes gradual losses and this village is not free from that cultural modification. The reason is particularly due to increasing influx of tourists as well as the changing taste of the people in this *Santhal*-community. *Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan*, at a distance of only one and a half kilometer, receives huge number of tourists, almost round the year and many of them come to visit in this tribal village. So at advent, the *multi-culturalism* is being gathered and gradually the episode of the erosion of cultural resource has been accelerated. This study encompasses on the view of changing tribal culture, its related impacts and the revamp measures to conserve the cultural identity of *Sonajhuri* village through *photo-Geographical explanation*.

Key words: Cultural resource, earthen-culture, multi-culturalism, photo-geographical explanation

INTRODUCTION

Man and society have been the subjects of study in India from time immemorial (Vidyarathi and Rai, 1976). Tribes and tribal are the cultural resource of every society. In recently we are more advanced in technological way but during this phase of development we sometime feel that we are missing something. We are enjoying T.V. radio, laptop, fashion designing, colour's VIBGYOR, cosmetics, heavy metal life but we know that it is our present. Once upon a time, Geographer *James Hutton* (1785) told that '*present is the key to the past*'. So a question is raised in our geographical-heart- "what was our past?". Tribal life gives us the answer. The term 'tribe' means an unit of social organization, especially among primitive people but surviving in some modern societies, consisting of a group of people calming a common ancestry, usually sharing a common culture, and originally living together under a chief of head-man (Tiwari and Sharma, 1989). But our immeasurable tourism and also the enquiring behavior i.e., 'interest about unknown to known' of our tribal brothers are trying to change the originality of the age-old traditional culture.

An identical geograpy of sonajhuri village: West Bengal is a state where we find many tribal societies (Sen, 2003). *Sonajhuri* village is situated to the southern part of *Birbhum* district in West Bengal. The latitudes and longitudes of this village are 23°30' -24°45' N and 87°81' -88°10' E, respectively. The people of this village are busy in handicraft industry, pottery and other cottage industries. The practice of this tribal religion, which

recognized the earth and all its bounty as female, depended on women and their work (Peters, 2000). The literacy ratio is not high enough and standard of living is also low. *Santhals* are the only community and ethnic group in this village. Traditional arts and crafts are the part in their life. They rejoice their festivals and rituals with tribal songs, dances, *Madol*, *Dhol* (type of beating drums) and traditional dresses. Along with their traditional language they are fluent speaker of Bengali as well, with the outsiders when they come to visit their village. In general these people are peace-loving and friendly with the visitors. This tribal people were very much dependent on the surrounding forest and woodland. But because of mass deforestation, the inherited tradition of economy of the village people has changed. Most of them now earn their livelihood as an agricultural labour. Progress of education among the *Santhal* people has been noticed. But being educated there has been a tendency among the young generation to ignore their own cultural heritage. They are more interested to copy all the bad and good things from the educated persons from outside than upgrading their quality as human being. They often brag of their own language *Al-Chiki*.

Objectives: The objectives behind this work are as follows:

- To search the changing scenario of *Santhal* environment in *Sonajhuri* village and search the situation through photo-geographic explanation
- To investigate the impacts of these changes through author's annotations

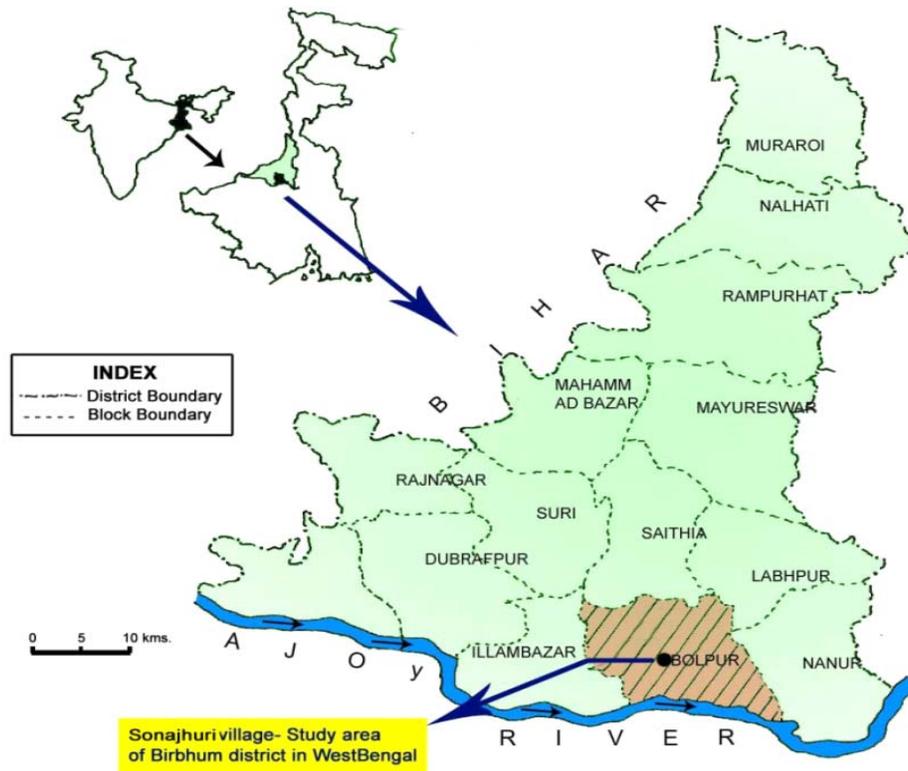


Fig. 1: Location of Sonajhuri village in Birbhum district, W.B

- To recommend against the negativity of the changes to conserve the real identity of *Santhal*-life

Data sources: To do the work in respect of objectivities, I visited in the village and made personal contacts with the folks. On the other side to strengthen the investigation, at-first, I concentrated in literature survey like the writings of different scholars on ‘tribal life and their changing patterns’. The writings are ‘Tribal Thought And Culture: Essays In Honour Of Surajit Chandra of Sinha and Saraswati (1991), ‘Changing Tribal Life: A Socio-Philosophical Perspective’ of Sen (2003), ‘Women Of The Earth Lodges: Tribal Life On The Plain’ of Peters (2000), ‘Changing Tribal Life In British Orissa’ of Mojumdar (1998) and ‘Tribal Ecosystem And Malnutrition In India: Proceedings Of The National Seminar’ of Tiwari and Sharma (1989) etc.

METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the study I surveyed the whole village on the basis of random sampling method. And on the basis of total 40 households the concept has been evaluated and revamps prescription has been formatted. The attributes contributing to the development of the existing physical environment and the society and daily life have been studied separately and systematically. Field investigation for this purpose was conducted during the period August

2009-September 2011. During the course of field investigation, the pattern and characteristics of man and environment relationship has been studied carefully. Changes that took place in the physical surrounding and the impact on the human environment have been studied using primary and secondary data. During the presentation of all data’s at first the study area has been demarcated on the (Fig. 1) of Birbhum district. To explain the changing scenario I used different plates, those I got from field and presented on the basis of traditional and changed culture among them.

Changing scenario: In social sciences the culture is used and refers to ‘social heritage’ which stands for all knowledge, beliefs, customs and skills that are available to the members of a society (Majhi, 2010). The worldview of the tribal groups in India is not a static picture of their universe nor is it a closed system; it incorporates of the world which, in turn, guides their day-to-day life and culture (Sinha and Saraswati, 1991). So the changing perceptions and tastes of the people in this village changed their surrounded environment. Now-a-days, a trend of modernization is common in this village. For example - use of television, electric fan, pressure cooker, cycle, radio, mobile, dish TV are being used in this village. About 70% of people use electric fans, radios, cycles. Modern concretization has joined in their daily life, e.g., concretization of tube wells and dug wells.

Organized grouping concept by means of 'club' is also a part of their life which acts as a functional improvement of the society. Due to higher demand of hand-made fashionable goods and commodities in local market as well as global market most of the villagers changed their occupational bases i.e. they try to devote their physical and mental labor to develop cottage goods. Which has largely demand on their local "Hut"? On the other hand due to higher needs of agricultural products now-a-days some people move to their labour forces to produce agricultural production. Again due to development of a handicraft industry in this village some people also join to earn money in this small scale industry. Now-a-days the educational level of this village has changed remarkably. Around 36% are literate in this village. This village has primary school. Some children of this village also go as far as to the schools of *Bolpur* and *Goalpara* for higher education. The present status states that already eight people have passed from school and one person graduated. Their traditional background has slightly changed from being 'deep rooted' due to adaptation of modernized behavior. For instance, some *Santhal* of this village do not wear their traditional dress during festivals and also do not follow the cultural behavior during special occasions in their life. Due to inflow of outer people as temporal/daily tourists or as a permanent resident, effect the local people's socio-cultural behavior severely. An interesting picture came out from the direct interview that only 30% of the people like to wear their traditional dress all the times, more than 56% like to wear only during the festival and 14% people (mostly the modern generation) do not like their traditional dress and have completely switched over to the modern dresses. The study of the villagers' knowledge about their festivals and rituals is presented that 60% people have knowledge about their festivals. And 40% (mostly the new generations) have only limited and outward idea about their festivals. Interestingly it was noted that only 65% people can speak and understand their own language and 25% people can speak, read and write their own language. Many of them get used to speaking and being educated in Bengali medium. The average age of marriage in this village is about 51% of the female get married at age below 20 and 34% at the age within 15 years and only 15% after the age of 20 years. So it can be assumed that early marriage for the women in the tribal society is a general custom. Changing of job can be usually expected with the change of generation as well as cultural aspiration. From field survey it can be seen from the result that only 20% continues with the same job as their ancestors practiced and as much as 80% has changed their job in this recent generation. With rapid urbanization around the area *Sonajhuri* village has been facing certain cultural degradation. Maximum proportion of the inhabitants is very much concerned about the deforestation which continues to take place around their area. Different household industries are the part of this villagers' daily

life. Household Pottery industry, small scale handicraft industry, cottage industry, small scale wood industry locally known as 'terracotta industry' are the causes of generation of different toxic elements (aerosols-fly ash, wood dust, smoke) from chimney in air as well as in physical landscape. Newspapers, different type of cans, bottles, plastic containers, polythene bags, ashes, domestic garbage etc. are included in the solid waste group, when these solid wastes are not garbage and dumped in a proper way those create solid waste pollution in this village. It has already seen that peoples of this area adopted modern technologies in their agriculture and which ultimately will generate hazards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Photo-geographical explanation of the changing culture in tribal-life: It should be appropriate 'helping verb' for the explanation of any geographical theme/event/concept through/with the photos. A photo is not a visual expression of the theme/item but a photo can speak, express, analyze and bear something. So a photo/still/plate bears a life. When we apply this photo in our geographical explanation/clarification it would be referred as '*Photo-Geographical explanation*' of any event. To analyze and express the original changing scenario of *Santhal*-culture we can use that way and first of all we have to know what the traditions present in this village are and have to search the altering culture scenario.

What are present in their traditional culture after changing as relic part?

Photogeographical explanation: Originality of *Santhal*-culture changed from its core-root in recent day-this statement is right yet some traditional items could be seen in their culture till now as relic. To support these comment different photos are displayed here and these plates are stamped by people's traditional cultural resources. These are: Fig. 2A (indicates *Santhal*-man roasting crab / '*kankra*' for food); Fig. 2B (a '*Hola*' /soil made pitcher is being used for preparing and conserving '*Tadri*' /tribal-liquor made from '*Tal*' /fan-palm); Fig. 2C (broom of *Santhal* which is made by '*Kush*' / a kind of grass); Fig. 2D1 and D2 (indicates room for hens); Fig. 2E (indicates the defective '*Hola*' which is using for nest of pigeons or other birds and hanging on wall. These birds are used as food item for *Santhal*.); Fig. 2F (indicates '*Batul*' / '*Gulti*' is used for killing birds in nature); Fig. G (indicates '*Jali*' is used for fishing); Fig. 2H (indicates cane/ '*bate*' made curtain); Fig. 2I (indicates '*Kulo*' / flat light vessel made of bamboo-slips for winnowing used for rice-threshing); Fig. 2J ('*Talai*' is used for seating on ground/ arena); Fig. 2H (indicates '*Jhuri*' / '*Dali*' /wicker bucket is used for caring items like sands, rocks, soil etc); Fig. 2M (indicates '*Silpata*' / '*silnora*' / stone slab for



Fig. 2: Visual explanation through photos



Plate1- 29: Changing culture of tribal - life in Sonajhuri village

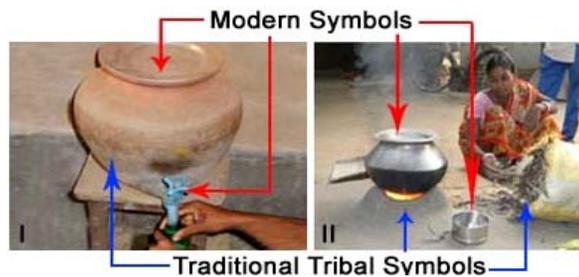


Plate 30: Mixing traditional and moderan cultural in Sonajhuri village

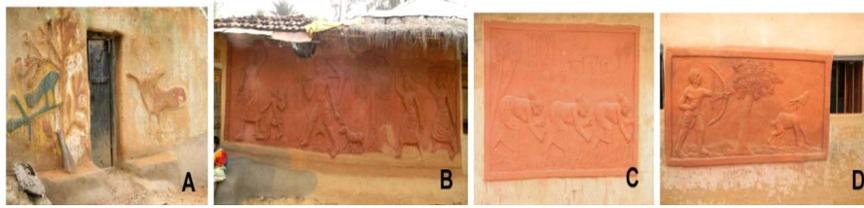


Plate 40: wall cultural in sonajhuri village

preparing and smashing spices); Fig. 2L ('Khatiya'/ an improvised cot used for sleeping); Fig. 2K (bullock-cart).

What has changed after modernization as the sign of cultural erosion?

Photogeographical explanation:

"...there are no injunctions against changing and transformation ..." (Champagne, 2007).

This great truth can be inspected in *Sonajhuri* village. Different changing scenario has been identified within this tribal life. These are in: Plate 1 (indicates concrete/cemented well); Plate 2 (indicates the signboard of the 'Rajib Gandhi National Child Protection Centre' for child improvement which is being conducted under 'West Bengal Social Welfare Executive Council'); Plate 3 (indicates the presence of modern symbol like 'dishtv'); Plate 4 (tribal's perception about conservation of valuable items in Tin-framed Trunk); Plate 5 (hanging *Jeans* pant i.e. *Santhal*-dresses are not free from the touch of globalization); Plate 6 (indicates a mini handicraft industry in tribal life that bears the view that they are engaged in globalized market-oriented item production); Plate 7 (modernized cemented *sacred temple* in tribal village rather than open air nature based worship); Plate 9 (cemented well); Plate 10 (interior part of the well that have shown in Plate 9. It indicated the unconsciousness and the lack of demand of well-water among people; the reason may be tube-well in this area. In this photo another touch of globalization can be identified that is deposit of plastic bottles in well-water that bears the standing of modern ideas in tribal life); Plate 10 (use of cycle in tribal life); Plate 12 (access of modern utensils like aluminum pitcher and brass-pitcher); Plate 11 (indicates the mosquito-net that highlight the modern medical consciousness among *Santhal*-life); Plate 14 (small plastic-pitcher is used during worshipping); Plate 15 (cemented drain); Plate 16 (brass pitcher in *Santhal's* mud-house); Plate 17 (a shop that bears the updated knowledge of business and profit maximization among tribal due to friendship with global perception); Plate 18 (modern clock, jar of coconut oil, plastic jar, modern calendar are hanging on wall with shelf); Plate 19 (tumbler / 'korai' which made of stainless steel, plastic bottles and urn shaped pot of aluminum for

drinking water storage); Plate 20 (indicates the kind of wearing modern dress like 'maxi' or 'nighty'); Plate 21 (modern 'Kopikal'/pulley); Plate 22 (invasion of electricity); Plate 23 (door decoration with modern way like by fringe of *digha-bivalve mollusc*); Plate 24 (use of 'bala'/ wrist bangle of iron as the symbol of modern fashion among younger); Plate 25 (tube-well); Plate 26 (*Santhal* child used pearl-string); Plate 27 (present of school named 'Sishu Siksha Kendra'); Plate 28 (use of modern lock on door) and Plate 29 (means outer religion has invades within *Santhal* community and the plate described it through the wearing *Christ-locket* on neck as string. May be it is not the reflectance of religion but we can also told that the nature of wearing string has changed and modern fashion has replaced on that place).

Impacts of the changes and author's annotation: Every development plants two aspects i.e. eco-friendly fruitful picture on one side and adverse-eroded picture on another. Due to the walk of modernization and globalization within this tribal village, also in their perceptions, thoughts, daily life-styles, food habits, dresses, festival and rule-rituals, the eco-specimen nature oriented culture is being deteriorated from its root. So modernization/globalization is a slow-poisoning for tribal life because it will destroy the cultural resource of *Santhal* community. Through the friendship with globalization tribal-Childs and most of the dwellers of this village have changed their knowledge and experience like they are developing their:

- Theoretical school education
- Knowledge about the outer world, their dresses, languages, behaviors, food-habits, rule, rituals, religions, cultures, utensils, ornaments
- Political attention and experiences
- Infrastructural improvement like tube-well, concrete well, club, DisT.V
- Modern medical knowledge
- Business geography i.e. the type of business knowledge and related economic status
- Tourism knowledge
- Economic stability due to implementation of '100 day's work opportunity'

But according to Newton's third law: 'The mutual forces of action and reaction between two bodies are equal, opposite and collinear'. So a tribal life can get or

adopt the chair of globalization; but he/she has to keep in mind that against this they will have to deposit their traditional resource under the bank of Bisshwayan (globalization) permanently and ultimately they will lose their own all specimen heritage: their racial identity, cultural knowledge, rituals, systems, festivals, life-style and environmental knowledge. So ultimately, a mixed up situation came fore-front to geographical-eyes through the following Photo-Geographical expression (Plate 30I and II).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Santhal-life and their cultural panorama is a resource to our 'Cultural-Bank'. So we have to manage, preserve the traditional cultural life of Santhal's community. Cultural resource must be managed because they are threatened. Primary threats include development, looting, erosion, and inadvertent impact from recreationists (Stapp and Buurney, 2002). Since the inception of Five Year Plans, and more so of the Tribal Development Programme, since the mid fifties, there has been abrupt growth of strong network of agencies to work for tribal development and changes (Mann and Mann, 1989). The anthropologists wanted civilization to gently seep through tribal life, not swamp it, so that the aboriginal man gets 'a breathing time and sufficient space to adjust himself' with the new environment (Mojumdar, 1998). To conserve the tribal-culture in this village I would like prescribe under the following revamp measures.

Conserve the wall-culture -key of cultural resource: 'Wall-Culture' (Pal, 2010) is the cultural resource of tribal-life. When we visit in any tribal village there are sporadic art found on the wall of the houses (both interior and outer walls of the house, in the entrance door of their house). Tribes' paint different themes (like plough by farmers, *baul* culture, love of mother and her child etc.) on the wall by soil. And this art and paint bear the earthen-culture of tribal and the eco-perception/ nature-oriented perceptions. Global tourists are very much interested about to see these wall-culture and most of them visit these tribal-village. So we have to conserve the wall culture of Sonajhuri village for conserving their age-old cultural resource and ultimately a day will come when this village will be highlighted as the role model of Wall-Culture of Santhal-life (Plate 40A, B, C and D).

Reforestation programme: It should be taken up under Social Forestry programme through which tribal people can get their original identity and utility.

Assurance of food and fuel for tribal inhabitants: Food and fuel from the regenerated forest environment would be assured for the inhabitants so that they can live

happily. This will keep them contended and would feel less inclined in adopting the western world abandoning their identical ethnicity.

Preparing items with minor forest produce: Villagers can be self sufficient with a proper standard of living by preparing items with minor forest products like *Sal* leaf plates, *kendu* leaves for *Bidi* making etc. Proper infrastructure for these cottage industries should be set in the village.

Apply the service of self help groups and NGO: These institutions are to be formed among the people living here, so that they can gain economic stability in their life.

Training programmes: Funding as well as special training programmes should be arranged to rejuvenate their skill as well as encourage production of artworks which now suffers serious setback.

Organize the proper market: The village craftsmen do not get good value of their produce in the present day because of the role of middle men in trading. Government enterprise is required here to find proper market for their crafts and artworks.

Adult education programme: Programmes should also be launched for giving adult education for both men and women in the village.

Apply the panchayati schemes: Above all a proper planning should be made at the Panchayat level for a total infrastructural development of this village including transport, medical facilities and others.

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