

Impact of globalizations on the Santals: A study on migration in West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT: *The Santals are involved themselves to migrate to rice bowl area from the drought prone areas to rice bowl areas in West Bengal to sustain their livelihood. During the process of migration, they come across the modernity as an important aspect in their daily life. The paper scans the influence of modernity in socio-cultural aspects of the Santal migrants and how they have carried forward various modern values in their tribal society. It also delves into how the new agricultural practices have been utilized after going back at the place of origin and how it promotes the modern their values in their daily life.*

KEYWORDS: *migration, modernity, Santals*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study concentrates on the influences of modern values and institutions in the day to day life of Santal migrants. Like many other tribes, Santals have been migrating to tea gardens and other places of work since time immemorial. But, in recent years, the volume of such migration has intensified due to growing socio-economic hardship of the members of this marginalised community. Today, the tribals migrate to various industrial and agriculturally rich areas with the sole aim of sustenance of their livelihood. Sociologists have noted changes in the social, economic and cultural life of the tribals due to such migration. More particularly, they have been exposed to the processes related to modernisation and globalization. The effect of such changes can be seen in their changing cultural values, institutions and role perceptions. More particularly, the diminishing significance of patriarchies in the social life of Santal is evident. In the traditional tribal society, specific role was assigned to man and women for maintenance of their age old tradition, customs etc. Dependency on forest based economy also influenced their cultural norms, traditions and values. But as a result of exposure to modern way of life and economy, these tribals have come close to new forms of life, institutions and values that have encouraged social transformation in their society. The basic objective of this chapter is to understand the impact of migration on the Santals.

It has been stated earlier that push and pull factors have played pivotal roles in the process of migration. The tribals have migrated from their hinterlands to various agriculturally rich areas and urban city centres mainly in search of jobs. They have depended on their team leaders called sardar¹ and also on the experienced migrants for such job placement including movement. These leaders and senior migrants also provide them information required for making a suitable living in the place of destination. Yet, it often becomes difficult to make adjustment with the changing situation at the new place. In addition to that they are often subjugated physical, financial and even sexual exploitation. The new comers and good looking girls become the target of non-tribals and the employers at the place of destination and/or during the journey.

The process of migration of the tribals has brought various changes in their day to day activities, age old customs and traditions. They have been influenced by the people and new cultural traits at the place of destination. In this sense, migration has exposed them to various aspects of modernity. It is often argued that migration does not necessarily bring any qualitative change in the life pattern of migrants as they maintain their contact with natal village being failed to completely adjust and accommodate in the new set up. But another school of thought discourages the tribals to migrate as it would destroy their age old practices of traditions and customs.

Keeping these arguments in mind, this paper has been dealt with linkages between migration and modernity as well as the facets of modernisation and its impact on the tribal society. This sections deals with the qualitative data obtained on roles and perceptions of the adivasi² elites on the process of socio-cultural changes among the Santals. Such discussion would also focus attention on the questions of adivasi identity and the impact of modernity on adivasi society as a whole and migrant as an individual.

¹ The middleman who plays a pivotal role between the migrants and employers

² Indigenous people of India

II. IMPACT OF MODERN INFLUENCES:

The process of migration is a complex one as it involves variety of challenges both for the migrants and for the locality as well. The society and social institutions of migrants are subjected to change and they undergo several changes or modifications to fit into this changing system. Theoretically speaking, there remains the possibility of the migrants adopting the new cultural perspectives, new ideologies and beliefs from the very first moment they join the new society and consequently they may also bring these changes to the place of origin. But, in reality, these changes might not be revolutionary to replace 'tradition' with 'modernity'. The experience of socio-cultural changes in India during the last century reflects the resilience of cultural tradition irrespective of social and cultural differences of communities. Hence, we need to study the cultural changes among the seasonal migrants from a critical point of view. It is also to be kept in mind the seasonal migrants do not stay at the place of destination for long and they maintain close link with their natal village and society. Hence, it would of much interest to locate change and continuity in the socio-cultural life of these migrants. Let me now explore the different dimensions of the impact of migration on seasonal migrants:

(a) Impact on tribal society and culture

Since time immemorial the tribals are practicing various traditional norms, values, cultural practices in their effort to adjust with the nature and environment available at a particular area. Anthropologists have time and again demonstrated the symbiotic relationship between tribal economy, culture and society with the ecology at a given time and space. Notwithstanding diversity of cultural practices, therefore, tribes of India represent certain uniformities. But, tribal society and culture witnessed several changes particularly since independence in India. And one of the major factors influencing them and bringing them close to other groups and societies of the country is migration. The process of migration is argued to have exposed the tribal to non-tribal and often urban way of life. The impact can be seen in the field of culture, language, traditions, occupation, customs and so on. Given such knowledge base, it would be of much interest to understand the impact of seasonal migration on the Santals. In order to do so, we have attempted to address the issue at two levels: one at the level of social and cultural identity of the Santals and another at the level of their day-to-day practices related to agriculture, education, health, economy and governance.

We have also tried to identify the areas of changes in the life and culture of the migrants. Table 1.1 portrays these areas of changes. Interestingly, respondents acknowledging the impact of migration have asserted that it is difficult for them to sustain the age old belief and practice in the society today. On the one hand, these migrants have realised that the process of migration has helped them to fight starvation and various economic problems. On the other hand, it has directly influenced them to accept certain aspects of Bengali culture at Barddhaman and Hooghly districts of West Bengal leading to deterioration of traditional culture. One areas of such change is cooking style and ingredients. The Bengali way of cooking fish, for instance, has been adapted by the migrants. Similarly, new types of western dresses have found entry particularly among the youngsters. All these have led not only to the entry of new cultural symbols and practices among them; they have also started either ignoring the dictates of traditional leaders or trying to impress upon these leaders as well as educate them about various new norms and values.

Table 1.1: Types of Changes in Culture and Society

Rank	Areas of Changes	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Towards acculturation	29 (30.52%)	14 (26.92%)	43 (29.25%)
2	Deterioration of traditional culture	21 (22.11%)	12 (23.08%)	33 (22.45%)
3	Evolve new culture	15 (15.79%)	11 (21.15%)	26(17.69%)
4	Ignore the traditional leaders	12 (12.63%)	07 (13.46%)	19 (12.93%)
5	Educate themselves about changing norms and values	10 (10.53%)	05 (09.62%)	15 (10.20%)
6	To make understand the traditional leaders	08 (08.42%)	03 (05.77%)	11 (07.48%)
Total		95 (100.00%)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

i) Agriculture

It appears that exposure to improved agricultural practices have been identified by a large majority of migrants. This is also due to the fact that they are brought to Bardhaman and Hooghly to carry out farming. Moreover, agriculture is the backbone of tribal society as it is needed for their survival. Due to development of new technology and advancement in research, the rice and vegetable production in West Bengal has been increased many times since early 1980s. There are various developments with hybrid yielding variety of seeds and development in technological instruments leading to diversification and commercialisation along with many other types of changes in the plains of West Bengal. But remote places of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur, from where the seasonal migrants are coming, face drought every year. The land is hilly and undulating in nature. It is not so good for agriculture and only crops like millet can grow there. Hence, tribal people rely on rain fed agriculture which is very less productive and cannot sustain their livelihood. As a result they depend on various minor forest produce (MFP) and are forced to migrate as a strategy to survive.

In this context we shall have to understand the impact of migration on the Santals. Table 1.2 shows that extent of the impact of migration on agriculture in some detail. It clearly depicts that many of the migrating Santals have been deeply influenced by modern agricultural practices in terms of uses of fertilizers, pesticides, modern equipments and other necessary instruments in the field of agricultural practices. At the place of destination, these migrants learn about various modern methods of agriculture and they carry forward to practice it at the place of origin. Further, they try to grow new crops like potato and maize seeds at their land during the rainy season along with rice. It is a fact that modern agricultural practices have enlightened their mind set and allowed them to go for diversification and enhance production capacity of their land to some extent.

Table 1.2: Extent of Impact on Agriculture

Rank	Extent of Impact	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1	To understand the modern agricultural system fully	37 (38.95%)	13 (25.00%)	50 (34.01%)
2	To understand the modern agricultural system to a large extent	17 (17.89%)	18 (34.62%)	35 (23.81%)
3	To understand the modern agricultural system to some extent	15 (15.89%)	10 (19.23%)	25 (17.01%)
4	Do not have any impact	14 (14.74%)	07 (13.46%)	21 (14.29%)
5	Do not know	12 (12.63%)	04 (07.69%)	16 (10.88%)
Total		95 (100.00%)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

ii) Economy

The tribals use the traditional form of economy and its sole objective to sustain their livelihood through subsistence agriculture. Hence, their economy is often called "underdeveloped", if not "primitive". This economy is also based on custom and tradition. There are specific customs stressing participatory function and specific role to be played by each member of the family and community. The tribal economy is predominantly forest based and they also take care to preserve the ecological balances with the nature and sustain their livelihood. But exposure to modern economic practices teaches them to exploit the nature and 'consume' its products. As a result, the traditional tribal leaders often face a dilemma while accommodating modern influences. Table no. 1.3 portrays the impact of migration on the seasonal migrants. It clearly shows that more than 63 per cent of migrants have realised that migration has

Table 1.3: Impact on economy

Rank	Level of Impact	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1.	To a great extent	61 (64.21%)	32 (61.54%)	93 (63.27%)
2.	To a little extent	20 (21.05%)	12 (23.08%)	32 (21.77%)
3.	No impact	04 (04.21%)	03 (05.77%)	07 (04.76%)
4.	Do not know	10 (10.53%)	05 (09.61%)	15 (10.20%)
Total		95 (100.00%)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

influenced their economic to a large extent. And only about 15 per cent of the respondents have either replied in the negative or do not know about the level of impact. It is worth noting that as the migrants suffer from various economic problems at the place of origin, the migration process has helped them to a great extent to minimise their economic problems. Migration has particularly broadened the scope of the tribal people in terms of availability of jobs in the market and to exploit the situations for their own betterment and development of their society.

iii) Education

The education is the backbone of any society. As education spread among the people it enables them to educate themselves and their community so that they can develop and utilize methods exploits the situation in the society for their own development. Education is the key to the future for the emerging nations. Without education, modernity cannot progress beyond imitation and duplication; without education, the individual can rarely improve the quality of his/her life; without education, he cannot contribute his full potential to the task of nation-building. When one considers the high rate of literacy in the developed countries, one is tempted to conclude that a prerequisite for social, economic and political development is the eradication of illiteracy and the universalization of education.

Quite reasonable therefore, illiteracy and lack of proper education has been one of the major issues of tribal development in India and elsewhere. Despite several governmental provisions for reservation of seats in educational institutions as well as economic incentives, tribals (and members of similar other backward communities) lag behind in school education, not to speak about higher education. We have noticed this earlier while discussing the educational background of the migrants themselves. It is in this respect that migration proves to be positive for the Santals. Table 1.4 depicts the impact of migration on the desire for better education of the seasonal migrants.

Table 1.4: Impact on education

Rank	Level of Impact	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1	To a great extent	56 (58.95%)	21 (40.39%)	77 (52.38%)
2	To a little extent	15 (15.79%)	14 (26.92%)	29 (19.73%)
3	No impact	11 (11.58%)	10 (19.23%)	21 (14.28%)
4	Do not know	13(13.68%)	07 (13.46%)	20 (13.61%)
Total		95 (100.00)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

It has been realised that most of the migrants feel the necessity of better education for their children and family members. They have experienced students at Barddhaman and Hooghly towns attending school, college and university. They also wish to see their children going to college and university and thereby become eligible for government jobs. They consider this to be the only option left for them to get rid of their age old problems like poverty and hunger. It is interesting to note that the migrants have stated objecting to students dropping out from school at their place of origin and joining work.

iv) Health

Health is one of the important aspects of human life. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has also emphasized 'Health for All'. This goal has become important in view of the poor health status of many tribal men and women at the place of origin. On the one hand, these people continues to rely on age old practice of herbal medicines which is sustainable given their closeness to nature and forests. But, on a large scale, diseases caused by polluted water and lack of nutrients remain untreated. On the other hand, the involvement of Ojhas including practices black magic and sorcery for healing from various diseases make them vulnerable. It is here that migrants see a new role of modern medicines to cure their ailments and serious types of diseases. The access to modern medicines available at district hospitals at Barddhaman, Hooghly, Bankura and Medinipur has helped many of them to regain lost health conditions and increases their life span. Such exposure also limits their loyalty towards traditional priests and practices like sorcery. This is certainly an improvement given the negative impact of such practices on the tribal life and society. These migrants therefore feel the need to change the psychic of the tribal elites and aged persons towards the modern medicines and develop strategy to ignore the practice of black magic, sorcery for leading a healthy life. It is evident from table 1.5 that majority of my respondents consider migration to be very positive for changing their health status. This is despite the fact that many migrants still have deep faith on the indigenous system of medicines which includes an important role of Ojhas and superstitions. Ironically, the modern health practices have yet to reach all of them.

Table 1.5: Impact on health

Rank	Degree of Impact	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1.	Yes	46 (48.42%)	31 (59.62%)	77 (52.38%)
2.	No	38 (40.00%)	14 (26.92%)	52 (35.38%)
3.	Do not know	11 (11.58%)	07 (13.46%)	18(12.24%)
Total		95 (100.00%)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

v) Politicisation

Table 1.6 shows the impact of migration on level of political awareness of the seasonal migrants. It has influenced them to become more aware about their political rights and thereby franchise their votes during the elections. The migrants have also started joining local political party at the place of destination with the hope to address their

Table 1.6: Impact on Political Socialisation

Rank	Levels of Impact	Number of respondents		
		Male	Female	Total
1.	Just franchise their votes	37 (38.95%)	28 (53.85%)	65 (44.22%)
2.	Affiliation in political party	21 (22.11%)	07 (13.46%)	28 (19.05%)
3.	Understand the political system	12 (12.63%)	11 (21.15%)	23 (15.64%)
4.	Participate in active politics	16 (16.84%)	04 (07.69%)	20 (13.61%)
5.	Not shown interest in political party	09 (09.47%)	02 (03.85%)	11 (07.48%)
Total		95 (100.00%)	52 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)

various socio-economic problems during their crisis. A few migrants 13.61 per cent have started participating in politics actively and only 7.48 per cent have not shown any interest in politics. On the whole, intense political competition at the place of destination has helped them to learn about modern political system actively at the place of destination. More particularly, activities of the members of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at village level have been eye opener for them.

III. CONCLUSION

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that migration has several direct and indirect impacts on the traditional culture, tradition and social norms of the Santals. The impact is evident in their day to day activities. The processes of migration has helped them to learn about new method of agriculture, cooking style and food habits, language, dress pattern, accustomed to ready made clothes, aware of political mobilisations, learn habit of savings etc. Through the seasonal migration, the migrants could learn about other types migration, i.e. migration to cities and towns, understand the need of education for their children, get exposure to modern health practices and could doubt superstitious practices like witchcraft and sorcery performance by the priests and Ojhas.

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