

Existence of A Community For Searching Their Socio-Cultural Identity in Society : Santhals in West Bengal

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Abstract

The definition of the concept of identity is difficult to confine since it has to address many interconnected levels of meaning and numerous approaches. In South-West Bengal the varying identity of the Santhals look about to search the progression of Santhal socio-culture identity. It take into account the changes that the Santhals have gone through in their psychological and material world. The tribal people in most of the assembly have always been identified and marked as fierce and uncivilized among all ethnic groups in India. Modernity always impact tribal consciousness thoughtfully and ever more available conveniences are pushing tribal groups to search for identity among majority in the Indian other societies. This paper tries to explain the very aspects of the changing socio-cultural structure in tribal society and the acuity about such changes in these ethnic inhabitants. Santhal's struggle to discover the altering philosophy of their ethnic identity in the process of their identity affirmation described very thoughtfully. The present study is a study on the development of tribal transformation and their struggle to find their existence in the society. It only seeks to take a hard look at the Santhals from different circumstances in the light of their own identity crisis symbolizing a template of socio-cultural problems.

Keywords: ethnic identity, existence, identity crisis, socio-cultural, tribal transformation

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Introduction

The subject of tribal identity forms an essential part of the literature on tribal studies. The concept of tribe after so many years of independence, is still a subject matter of extreme debate. Recent revisionist scholars believe to define it according their perception. Still today we do not find any decisive factor in the Constitution of India to identify a community as a tribe. On the topic of the condition of tribal characteristics, there is no identical opinion among the anthropologists too as to what constitute a group of people as a tribe. There is also a lot of uncertainty in the term tribe itself. Possibly the best way to classify them is to see them in terms of a continuum in comparison with other groups living in India. As such issue has been addressed from various perspectives by scholars across disciplines. A quick look at some of these discourses will set the basis of the present study.

Concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity

Ethnicity or ethnic group is an alliance of the people who recognized each other on the base of communal imputes. This is a system to distinguish them from other groups. This assign include common sets of customs, lineage, compete, language, history, society, nation, religion, or social treatment within their residing area. Ethnicity is often used interchangeably with the nation, particularly in cases of ethnic nationalism. The term 'ethnicity' was perhaps first used by David Reisman in 1953 and has come to contain a vast range of remarkable absorbed under tribal, racial, social, cultural, linguistic and religious categories (Pradip 2014). It is important to note that there has never been a single discourse on ethnicity. Sociologists and others believe that the term ethnicity is difficult to describe as it stands for multiple, complex and often confusing meanings. Today, the term ethnicity has come to represent as incomprehensible and varying a series of phenomena as the black-white racial conflict in the USA, the problems of the minorities in different parts of the world, the problem of the French-speaking population in Canada, the linguistic, tribal and caste conflicts in India and so on.

Ethnicity is a psychological assemble, referring to an attitude or set of attitudes and values. An ethnic group is a sociological conception. Ethnicity refers to the primitive and primordial concentration of association and commitment to one's ethnic group. This is to say that ethnic commitment limits out other forms of allegiances in the case of clashes between the members of two groups. The rise of ethnic aggression to an over-emphasis of certain cultural traits of an ethnic group, that lay the foundation of their propensity of demand for a separate state. This view is disputed by others as many believe that it would be an oversimplification. Individuals always choose ethnic identification over other kinds of identification whenever the situation arises. Ethnicity is a kind of identity irrespective of differentiation in color, language, religion and

covers tribes, races, nationalities even castes. To define ethnicity, Susana Davalle says that an "ethnic group is a historical entity whose members in large part conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of certain common stable features located in language, culture, stereotypes, territory, ancestry- real or fictitious specific nomenclature and endogamy and are so regarded by the members of other ethnic groups" (18).

The question of identity arises from one's feeling of insecurity. It is a marginal feeling afraid of getting lost in the sea of the mainstream. A feeling of security has to be present in order to use its creative energy for a better future. A society may be defined in terms of comparatively tighter standard like language or religion, or in terms of broader standard of region and culture. If culture simply means a unique way of life, the tribals of West Bengal were definitely not without it. But today where some tribes are vying for political power on regional point and state level, while smaller ones are greatly trying to defend their interest. How far it is possible for a group to lead a 'distinctive way of life' is a matter to be seen. However, there is still a distinctive focus on culture as a symptom of group identity. All the tribes are virtually obsessed with the question of identity at the higher group or at the individual group level. Now identity can operate as a broad cultural symbol or as an pointer of the realistic characteristic of a people's behavior. As David (1977) states: "Identity is a cultural sign that operates both as a symbol, with semantic meanings, and as an index, with pragmatic meanings".

Elements of tribal society: Situational study

This study aims to find the identity perception of the Santhals. It would not be unrelated here to mention the important elements on which the ethnic identity of the Santhals was based in the society. The first form in the list is the geographical ambiance in which the Santhals lived and under which their socio-cultural life developed. Santhals lived accompanied by natural world, enclosed with hill, forest, river and other natural manifestations. These elements provided them their sources of nourishment and also constituted an essential part of their culture. The Sonthal villages border are situated in the slender slip of broken high country west of the East Indian Railway, lying between the hills of the Sonthal Parganas, where these hills move away from the border as in the south-west of Murarai thana .Thus, their absorption for hills, forests and soil as essential components for developing settlements for them. In fact, all the symbols of Santhal identity like gods and goddesses, totem and tattoos, fairs and festivals, including several other values and practices, were related to nature (Chattopadhyay 2014). So nature not only provided the framework but also acted as an important changeable for the development of Santhal identity.

The society of tribal people gives a sense of a society based upon association. In this society, social assortment of any outward appearance is absent. The position of tribal society of India today gives an overall different picture. It is necessary to classify the social position in the perspective of improvement. A community has to get total observation of the social, ecological, political, economic, and technical component. According to Ronald Cohen (1976), "ethnicity is

first and foremost situational, the interactive situation as a major determinant of the level of inclusiveness employed in labeling self and others” (379-403). Definitely, recent change in the form of state development, acceptance of town essentials, fractional learning, marginalization in conventional economic tricks, effect of renovation and keen implementation of new ways intended traditional ways of life that extensive the traditional tribal societies. The value and norm of cultural society are transmissible only but linguistic symbols of tradition are dying out. This is parting a space in people's life occupied full integration of unknown morals. It is seldom possible in the context of new time-space and natural-social ecological situation. At the same time, there has been important impact of group communication, through radio and television, with identical effects of wider contact and hasty circulation.

The tribal society stay behind at the margin of the conventional culture. Sometimes the tribal society is trying to correlate with symbols, myths and codes. They are disagree with their own individual contributions to the national culture situation. National policies are not ethnically acceptable to the tribal society. It involves exploratory the cultural consistency of the people and make them to understand their existence strategies. In the economic stage, the tribal society is facing distressed style that noticed among the non-tribal society. The primary sector will employ the maximum labor force in society. In the absence of major industrialization, the tribals are unable of employing the growing labor strength. This is the reason that there is an increasement in urban areas, mostly their markets. The quest of identity must start with an investigation of the social relation at its base. It is a social problem. But what is social may to some point be explained in economic terms, as the definite features of any economy are mainly within society resolute.

All these lead us to the eventual question of the authority of tribe as a society in the existing world. It is not a new question, but it is an unanswered one and a crucial one too, predominantly from the development point of view. The growing appearance of tribal identity has to be seen in the total context. It has to take into deliberation all facets of life pattern which are terminology of culture, the way a people define himself or herself. There is no range for a basic clarification of the determination of tribal affiliations and tribal ideology even in situations of diverse sets of social associations.

Tribal Society: Search for a New Identity

Tribal society refers to a shared cultural identity that has a range of unique behavioral and probably linguistic features passed on through socialization from one generation to another. Circumstances may vary depending on the center aspect of culture. In one condition the emphasis may be on profession, in another it may be education, it still another ethnicity. Tribes and low castes in India are no longer eager to be ‘Sanskritized’. But a look at recent events

would reveal that not Sanskritization, but de-Sanskritization, a new occurrence, in economic, political and social life in India now just to get themselves scheduled as a tribe or caste for having the special treatment and human rights. M. K. Gautam (1973) described this aspect of Santhal life in Bengal an aspect of Santalization, where "the cultural phenomenon works as mechanisms for self-restraint. Revivalism is based on local ethnic traditions and ideals of golden age, a happy period in remote past and provides internal unity by conforming to or relating the Santal standard behaviour".

Identity of the tribal group defines on the collective level as a communal sentiment of oneness. The point is why it has become required for the tribals of West Bengal to prove and affirm their identity? No doubt, it is one of the contiguous problems of today and the problem is not limited to the tribals of West Bengal alone. The problem of identity has become a more or less worldwide phenomenon and almost all the communities, irrespective of whether they are tribes or not, are concerned with it in some way or the other. Identity here refers to 'ethnic identity'. To the tribes it means almost the same thing as 'tribal identity'. The concept of tribal identity, to be truly useful, must account for cultural, political and social boundary. It must always leave a space for the strategizing individual who can move from one identity to another, changing disguise identity in the development. There is still an issue or a question whether the word tribal and their identity and dignity can be conserved or respected and treated them as equal citizens and active partner in the society and its development process. There could be any substitute in ensuing the word tribal that comprises and provide somewhere to stay the whole people living in the north eastern part of India. Different people groups living in the north eastern parts of India do really need a term that provide accommodation and comprises all of them. These are the endless debate and question which we now could not give an precise theory that can be termed as a practical method to identify the true identity of the north eastern people. However, there can be a suggestion to mark a line of retrieving the identity and dignity that was lost for hundreds of years before.

The tribal groups are now excited to establish and maintain their separate cultural identity in order to gain themselves of the economic and other opportunities ensured in the Constitution and given to them by the Government. The growing political perception and the leftist political parties have led the tribal people and the low castes to resist the advantaged and exploiting high caste Hindus. Thus there is no longer a desire to shake off the tribal mark and incorporate the features of the life of high caste Hindus is found. Rather, the tribes and low castes are now engaged in a bitter struggle to establish their identity as separate socio-cultural-linguistic groups and to make their position secure in socio-economic order of the country.

Conclusion

The present study is on the process of socio-cultural of tribal transformation as such evolving a set of indicators of tribal ideology that helps them to realized their own status in the society. It

only seeks to take a hard look at the Santhals of West Bengal from different situation in the light of their own identity crisis symbolizing a template of socio-cultural problems. This paper is written with the purpose to analysis of the situation of the Santhals of West Bengal, several significant features of change have been noticed during the study. Former to adaptation, all members of the tribe were in the same and socially equal. With conversion and sanskritization the Santhals converts now make a sharp distinction among the people of the society. Each of them particularly the younger generations tries to entreat the dominance of its own creed over the other and advances several cultural and religious reasons to justify its attitudes and evaluations. Such attitudes have precious their social relations and created a set of existence for the Santhals. The people of Santhals community have lost their identity and now willing to re-establish to maintain their separate cultural identity in order to advantage themselves of the economic and other opportunities ensured in the Constitution of India and given to them by the Government. Such respect for diversity can only be premised on an ethics of cultural rights that respects and protects more vulnerable people giving them both voices and choices to identify their true identity. With the swift changing of development and the shifting of people's interest thought to repeal the created identity for a better common identity which suits the people's feeling either to accept it completely or search for a better identity.

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