

Material Culture and Mass Media: A Study on the Changing Status among the Tribals

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Abstract: *The changing status of the material culture of the Santals is a significant aspect of modernization. Being the oldest ethnological section of the population, they still pursue their primitive way of living. If not the major, but most of the Santal communities gradually dived into the ever-changing modern society. Mass media play a significant role in the upbringing of the livelihood of the people and also among the Santals, as far as previous research had been concerned. Accordingly, mass media played an active role in the significant change of the material culture among the Santals. This paper deals with the role of mass media towards the changing patterns of household objects, quest for good personal care, dress, adornments, religious objects and musical instruments. Giving an ethnographic account of the different aspects of material culture, the analysis also finds out what aspects of their culture has changed overtime and what primitive and traditional aspects still exists among the Santals. For the purpose of the research work the study has been conducted in a Santal village of the Birbhum district of West Bengal.*

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Introduction

India, devoted to the idea of democratic socialism, aims at providing a minimum desirable standard of living for the people of her country without any discrimination. To meet this objective, India is imbued to provide equal distribution of resources with a continuous development. To that, various precautions are being taken for the upliftment of the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society. This process involves overcoming the helplessness of the economically backward classes and bringing

them closer to the normal living standard of the citizens. Various legislative and welfare measures have been envisaged in the Indian constitution to raise their position in the social ladder as well as their economic advancement. Indian society is based on rural economy. Rural people especially tribal people are the most unorganized and powerless to improve their own status. India has the second largest tribal community after Africa. According to the 2011 census, there are about 698 Scheduled Tribes that constitutes about 8.6% of the total population of India. The tribes are simple people with unique custom, traditions, and practices. They live a life of geographical isolation. In India aboriginal tribes have lived for 1000 years in forests and hilly areas without any communication. Among the various tribes, the ‘Santals’ are a Munda ethnic group native to India and Bangladesh. Santal is one of the largest tribes in Eastern India. The Santals are the Austric language speaking group. The primary source of livelihood for most of them is agriculture. The Santal is one of the largest tribal communities in West Bengal and is known as the agriculturist tribes. They have retained their separate social identity yet, change can be signified in various aspects of their life, both socially and economically. Santali culture has attracted many scholars and Anthropologists from time to time. Santali culture is depicted by the paintings and artworks in the walls of their houses. The santal people love music and dance. Like other Indian ethnic groups, their culture also is influenced by mainstream Indian culture and by Western culture, but traditional music and dance remain on domain. The material culture among the Santals has also changed due to the modernization and globalization. Change in material culture is foster than non-material culture.

The information space, mankind has entered a few decades ago corresponds to a whole new state of culture. Estimating this cultural state changes have been observed among all the social class and a cross-correlation can be established between the mass media and material culture development of the society. Mass media refers to a diverse array of media technologies that reach a large audience via mass communication. It includes films, radios, recorded music, television, internet, mobile, books, magazines, public speaking, and many others. Mass media has brought about changes in every aspect of human life be it economically, culturally, or politically. The rapid changing society has its own pattern of revolution, which was made easy to adopt among people by the mass media. Media played the role of a catalyst in the process of modernization and industrialization. The consequence of mass media is so authoritative that it reaches to the ground level of the society at an ease. Nevertheless, the tribes being such an isolated community, mass media still have a huge influence on their overall life. Material cultural changes have been significant among the tribal community. Therefore, this paper elaborates on the material cultural changes that had occurred in the life of the Santals and had come up with new changes in each sphere of life.

Concept and Definition of Tribe

Tribal population constitute a considerable percentage in our country. The tribals in our country are known as Adivasis in the ordinary usage of the term. In general, it is applied to people, who are considered primitive and who live in backward areas and do not know the use of writing. Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous section of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the original population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. The term “Tribe” has not been defined in the Indian Constitution instead the term ‘Scheduled Tribe’ was inserted in the Constitution vide article 342 (i), which empowered the President of India to specify the Tribal community by public notification. The scheduled tribe has been specified in 27 State/Union Territories under Article 342 (i) of Indian Constitution. In the Dictionary of Anthropology, Tribe is defined as, “A social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity, and unifying

social organization". The word "Tribe" originates from the Latin word "Tribus" which means "one third". The tribal population are the aboriginal or indigenous inhabitants of our country and are found in all parts of India. For centuries they have been living in a simple life based on the natural resources and developed cultural patterns congenial to their physical and the consequent social environment. This community originates from one of the oldest ethnological sections of population, lives in isolated areas as distinct group – both culturally and ethnically, and is usually backward – socially, educationally, and economically.

Material Culture

"Material culture is the aspect of social reality grounded in the objects and architecture that surround people. It includes the usage, consumption, creation, and trade of objects as well as the behaviours, norms, and rituals that the objects create or take part in." as defined by Wikipedia. The study of material culture is less distinctive than the study on language, art, ceremonies, and social organization of the tribes. But this being an important aspect of tribal life which is changing drastically at per with modernization has immense importance for the study. Material culture is an interdisciplinary subject, and the methodology talks about the interrelationship between people and their things. Tribals are considered as the special group of people whose socio-economic structure are different with the non-Tribals or advanced group of people. They have a very simple technology which fits well with their ecological surroundings and conservative attitude. They practice different types of occupations to sustain themselves and live on marginal economy. The Santal of West Bengal is broadly known as an agriculturist tribe. In agrarian sector, the santals are mainly marginal and small farmer and cultivate for their own consumption without hankering after profit. Very few among them practice commercial agriculture and others are involved as landless agricultural labourer or day labourer. Recently, some of the Santal families have adopted modern agricultural technology. Collecting, hunting, and fishing were once very important source of their living but now have become reduced to a subsidiary status. Now the Santals have adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs for their livelihood. Even the Santals are changing their lifestyle using modern things for their better livelihood.

Material Culture and the Santals

It is widely accepted that mass media is a term used for dissemination of information, ideas, and entertainment by uses of technological media such as radio and television, cinema, press and advertising. They continue to coexist with important traditional media such as folk song and dance, drama, puppetry, etc. These all are referred to as mass media, because it communicates to a mass audience comprised of very large number of people. Mass media has brought a process of digital revolution, in which a society prior to its traditional form of communication mode, changes rapidly in various forms and modes like socio-cultural, psychological, economic, political, etc. It is an agent of social change. Mass media has been introduced in India through the process of Westernization. Mass media is a device that can spread the requisite knowledge and attitudes quickly and widely.

Related Literature

There have occurred many changes in the aspects of social organization and cultural activities among the Santals. It may be admitted that socio-cultural changes observed among them are due to the economic and political life of the people in general as mentioned by Paul (2015) in his book. T.C. Das (1943) studied the modern trends of primitive culture on the borders of West Bengal. K.L. Bhowmik

(1971) also describes the social organization and the material culture of the Santals and observed the changes of the material culture occurred in west Bengal. Monographic materials on community were presented in terms of total study, change and interdependence with the Hindus among the Santals of west Bengal by Culshaw (1947), Dutta-Majumdar (1956) and B. Mukherjee (1960). C. Wissler (1914) states “tribal individuality appears only in decoration and a few essential features, but even so rarely restricted to a single tribe and tends towards geographical rather than a random grouping.” He also states, “we are brought to the view that the association of traits in material culture has no important intra-functional significance and that we must seek for extraneous causes to account for their observed correlations.” H.S. Shivaraju (2015) stated that the media has not done much justice in the development of tribal life and a systematic media intervention will be needful. V. Subramanyam and K.R. Rama Mohan (2006) mentioned in their study that mass media has brought the tribal communities, from isolation, into the limelight and integrates them into the mainstream.

Study Area and Research Methodology

The study has been conducted in Patharghata Village of Birbhum district in West Bengal. The village is selected purposively. The village comes under the Bolpur Sriniketan Block (highest concentration of Santal population in Birbhum district) and Kankalitala Gram Panchayat (highest concentration of Santal population in Bolpur-Sriniketan Block). Patharghata village has a total of 91 households and the male female distribution is 44.85% and 55.15% respectively. The methodological techniques like observation, interview and group discussion have been used for collection of data. Focus group discussion has also been conducted to supplement the data and fact. Qualitative analysis of the data has been prioritized quantifying the data wherever necessary. Personal Interview of the respondents with structured survey schedule was done. Besides, secondary data has been collected through books, journals, government records, and e-resources.

Results and Discussion

Mass media has played a dynamic role in the modernization of the society. The grasp of mass media is alarming, from the remote places to the upper strata of the society. Certain pros and cons are there but neglecting the cons, this paper highlights the proficiency of mass media on the Santal livelihood, primarily their material cultural change. Though the Santals are rigid and stick to their primitive culture, still there has found an enormous change in their material culture. “Unity in Diversity” can be rightly used in defining the Santals as there is less hierarchy and no economic specialization. They themselves are a basic unit of society. The Santals enjoys four main qualities: Distinctiveness, Smallness, Homogeneity and Self-Sufficiency. They have their own cultural tradition, and they live far away from the society. Regardless of that many of them emerge inevitably and become a part of the modern society.

The material culture change that has been observed during the field visit can be jot down broadly:

Utensils

The traditional utensils used by the Santals were made of clay and Kansha and cooking was done using hearth or fireplace. The modern touch is distinctive in all their cooking utensils. Mostly they use aluminium utensils instead of their traditional one. According to the Santals the aluminium utensils are user friendly and pocket friendly whereas Kansha is costly and heavier in nature than aluminium and costly. Taking care of Kansha is also difficult as they had to wash it with mud and tamarind paste while aluminium utensils can be easily washed with the bar soaps available in the market. Glass, melamine, plastic utensils are found in their houses. Also, they started cooking using gas and cylinder

instead of a fireplace. To meet the clean cooking fuel needs of the poor and thereby safeguarding the health of women and children, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched in 2016. Government is taking various initiatives to develop the tribal people. They are getting these initiatives either from local panchayat people or from the television or radio. All these changes are either heard over, effect of tv serials and by watching the culture of the Hindu people of their surroundings. Some of the Santals (mostly the women) have chosen themselves as house help for the urban people and they come to Bolpur from their village Patharghata for work. They work in hotels, restaurants, shops and in the houses for their living. They started to follow the cultural traits of these people and slowly adopted them. These Santal women spread the modern culture in oral conversation with the other women. Another important changing factor is the serial on the TV. The serials are mostly related to a rich family culture and this deeply provide impact on the viewers. The Santals start espousing those culture along with their culture, creating a cultural mix n' match. Also, the aluminium utensils are easily available in the market at a lower price than the clay and Kansha utensils. Cooking has also been easier and quicker by the use of gas and cylinder for the past 3-4 years now. Transition is also seen in using of coal and logs for lightning the fireplace, instead they use matchsticks or gas lighter.

Clothes

Santal women used to wear 'Lungi and Panchi' but largely due to the adverse effect of mass media their dressing trends are changing. TV and smart phones have played a vital role here. They now wear sarees available in the market. They also follow the recent fashion trend. They try to find the sarees and dresses worn by actresses and also, what they see in social media. Some even wear night gowns, kurta, leggings, jeans, tops, salwar suits. These dresses are much easier to carry than their traditional one and not as costly as Lungi and Panchi. But they still wear Lungi and Panchi during some special occasions to mark their uniqueness. Besides clothes, they also wear fancy shoes available in the markets.

Shopping

Online shopping trend also prevails among the Santals in a very mere manner. They now travel to the nearby market places in the town for buying things. People with goods also visits their village and they buy from them.

Beauty Products

The Santals have a unique way of fashion trends. They dress up beautifully in a cotton Lungi and Panchi with a flower on their buns. Their way of wearing a saree is also different and they use silver jewelleryes. Tribal jewelleryes have a different craze in the fashion industry till date. They wear nose pins, toe rings, earrings, and various hair ornaments. They had tattoos on their hands and chest which indicates their culture. But the modernization has led a shift in their beauty products too. Indian culture, still now, focuses on being fair specially for a woman. This somehow affected the Santal culture and they started using whitening creams available in the market. Modern oxidised jewelleryes, other metal jewelleryes made of beads, stones, glass, dokra are worn by them. Some of them visits the salon and use various soaps, creams and shampoos that they see in tv advertisements. They trim their hairs at home and leave their hairs open during the nights for attending social functions; breaking the myth that women should not leave their hair open and go out of the house during the night. Also married women were not supposed to open their hairs in front of other male members of their family except the husband. But now the change in their hair styles have made them left open their hair. Nail polish, lipsticks, kajal and other beauty products available in the market are also in use among them.

Marriage

Previously the Santals used to wear a white saree soaked in yellow colour and sit in a wicker basket which is to be carried by people. All these rituals still exist with a touch of modernity in it. They have adopted some rituals from the Hindu people. They now wear Banarasi sarees while going to their in-law's house. Vermicelli and bangles made of Sankha and Pola exists in their culture. Santals have the ritual of giving 12 rupees to the bride's house by the groom while taking her away; dowry system now prevails in them, adopted from the Hindus. They now wear gold jewellery during their marriage and also appoints a makeup artist for that day. The makeup artists are easily found nearby on the social media who charges for their services provided at home. Those who are unable to afford them they are being helped by their relative and neighbours for the makeup. Also, the perception of age of marriage is changing among them slowly.

Furniture

Santals used to make 'Talai' with date palm leaves and sit and sleep on them. Modernization and influence of media has made them use almirah, sofas, chairs, beds and tables made of wood or as available in the market. They also use electronic fans, stand fan, tube lights and bulbs instead of hurricanes and candles.

Health

Health condition of the Santals is restoring by the time. Earlier both male and female suffer from malnutrition, malaria, ulcers, stomach-ache, eye-ache and anaemia was prevalent among the women. Ojha practice still prevails among the Santals widely. For any health-related issues, they visit the ojha in their village. They use local plants and roots for treatment. But now, besides these ayurvedic treatments they have adopted the modern medical science, allopathy. The awareness of health check-up during pregnancy has emerged in them and they visit doctors for the check-up. Santals are also aware of the birth control methods, but instead of using condoms they are more dependent on contraceptive pills. The Santal women are unaware of the pills they take, the husband purchase the pills either by asking at the drug store or by gaining information from the advertisements that comes up in television. The women having difficulties in conceiving visits the doctor and take allopathy medicines besides their primitive ayurvedic medicines. Also, the rate of using sanitary napkins, instead of cotton clothes, during menstruation is increasing and awareness has also been raised about the ill effects of using the cotton clothes. Mass media has played a vital role in changing this perspective by various advertisements. Children are also taken to the doctors for medicines and vaccinations. C- section delivery has also made its way among the Santal community.

Food

Another noticeable change due to the adverse effect of mass media is the change in their food habit. Santals have their own unique food habits along with that they have adopted the modern way of delicacies. Fast foods and packet foods are in use among them. Children eat chocolates, chips, health drinks, Maggie, cornflakes, various powdered milk etc. the people who worked as house help has imbibed the culture of that house and brought changes in their way of living too as changes could be observed in their way of cooking and serving people. 'Haria' is the traditional liquor which still persists both among men and women of the Santals, but the drinking of local liquor is also in practice among the youths. Haria is made from rice, as a result it takes long time to prepare and keeps them

full for a long time restricting them to eat further; are the reasons for them to adopt the local liquors available in the market.

Religious Ceremonies

The tribal being the agriculturist tribe, most of their ceremonies and rituals are related to agro-ecosystem. The different phases of agriculture are always accompanied by various rituals and ceremonies that are held communally first and then individually in their houses. All the festivals of the Santals are either 'vegetation' ceremony or 'fecundity' ceremony. The Santals have now realized that all the ceremonies could not be performed, which hampers in their adoption of modern agricultural facilities. The non-tribes, who are good cultivators, have made them understand that extra-rational forces of 'Bongas' or Gods and Goddesses did have no adverse effect on them. Earlier only single crop was cultivated depending on the desire of the 'Bongas', but now, the Santals go for double even triple-cropping. The educated Santal youths do not even know all the names of their rituals and ceremonies that prevailed. They now take deep interests in non-tribe rituals and festivals like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Nabanna and many others. Saraswathi Puja is also performed by them for their betterment of educational activities.

'Baha Parab' is one of the significant festivals of the Santals. In their language 'Baha' means 'Flower'. During this festival the naikey performs all the rituals and then visits every house of the village. The young girls and women wash the feet of the naikey with water and take blessings. After that they play with water followed by singing, dancing and archery practices. Now, they use colours along with the water they play. They welcome spring in that way as we do by playing Holi. Also, they celebrate Holi separately now.

Folklore and Music

Cinema, music videos and other films have tackled current social problems like untouchability, drug addiction, AIDS, tribal identity, etc. In order to educate the masses, the film division has produced documentaries dealing with health, hygiene, farming, environment, illiteracy and other subjects and screened it throughout the country. It has made people aware about their rights and duties through programmes and campaigns, etc. Santals have their own forms of folklores which they sung while they return home from work walking together. They also sung being intoxicated during the festivals. But due to the quick transportation system their walking while returning home has reduced to a greater extent. Also, the songs were orally transmitted from one another and not available in written forms. The youths are not much familiar with their folklores which represents their culture but they are more into the modern songs that they hear in television, mobile and radios. Only the elderly now sings those songs during their festivals while drinking Haria and as a result their folklore is at stake.

House Types

As the Santals previously used to live in forests, hills or on the river banks, their housing condition was extremely poor, made by mud and thatched roof with straw. Now, the condition of their house is improving as they started living in mostly isolated but plain lands. They have three house types: 'Kutchra', 'Pucca' and 'Mixed'. Changes have also been made in the structure by replacing thatch on the roof with corrugated iron sheets, cement flooring and the walls are made of bricks, cement, and masonry instead of mud. This has mainly been done due to the availability of government initiatives through Gram Panchayats.

Sanitation

Cleanliness and tidiness are the imbibed characteristics of the Santal community, but the sense of personal hygiene is very poor. Their house and surroundings are absolutely unsoiled. Due to the lack of awareness they used to excrete in the open areas. Almost every household of the village now has a bathroom and they maintain proper sanitation. They also use soaps for washing their hands and feet before they eat. Parents use diapers for their children for going somewhere. They have separate kitchen and cattle shed. Mosquito net mosquito repellents are used by them.

Cosmo Politeness

The Santals were a non-political entity but now they are participating in political affairs. They have their own traditional Panchayats and were the only means of settlement and justice dispensed in the tribal communities. Since 1949, Gram Panchayats were established in rural and tribal areas through Government efforts. They participate in the national political system bestowed with some special privileges and discrimination. Still, they did not make use of the Gram Panchayat on a largely basis. Now, the situation has changed; they visit the Gram Panchayat for settlement of issues and making decisions. They also allow police to handle situations and visits courts too. They actively participate in Panchayat elections and make decisions. They listen to news and know the where abouts of the society. Hence, their Cosmo politeness has also increased with the increasing effect of mass media.

Government Policies

Along with Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) various Government policies and schemes were undertaken for the Tribal community. Reservations were made for their upliftment. Many other Government policies are there which help them to their upliftment. Mass media plays a pivotal role in emerging awareness about these policies. MGNREGA, NRLM, NHM, Kanyashree, Rupashree, SwasthoSathi, Swach Bharat Mission, Mann kiBaat, DuwareySarkar, SaboojSathi, Digital India Mission and many other schemes prevail. The Santal people comes to know this from the schools, colleges, oral conversations, electronic media (a man comes with a toto and roams around the village announcing important information), camps in Panchayat, radio announcements, television advertisements and smart phones.

Influence of Mass Media on the Material Cultural Changes among the Santals

The strong effect of Mass media had played a vivacious role in setting up the mindset of the tribal population. It has increased the productivity of the Santals. Social change has been palpable among them leading to the alteration in perceptions of viewing things. Mass media has its own inimitable way of communication, reframing thoughts, ideas and the way of looking towards their surroundings. Media played the role of tool that brings about social change at an ease drastically. In a country like India, where literacy level is low and many people are poor, the choice of communication media is of vital importance. In this regard the television and radio are significant, as they transfer modern agricultural technology, other information related to government initiatives for development and many other social and economic issues to literate and illiterate people of the country alike even in interior areas, within short time. The most influential mass media being the Television has its reach and prognosis of social values. Television projects both the presence of women in significant manner and their importance in terms of the theme projected. This has led the Santal women come out of their shell and be confident in achieving their goal. They have their own voice now breaking the stereotypes

of the women culture as respondents have mentioned. Women now take actions for whatever unfair acts they suffer and have their own identity. Not only women but men are also equally benefited from the adverse effect of mass media. Television has played the most important role in all these change as a visual media, whereas the print Medias, like magazines, newspapers journals, etc lags because of the illiteracy prevailed among them. Visual media has helped them gain knowledge about various aspects of life like health issues, change in food habits, education, fashion sense, birth control, adoption of modern articles, marriage, language, pattern of celebrations and many others. On the other hand, the media have come up with different developmental programmes that have positively contributed to the change in tribal people's way of life. These include programmes on farming, health, marital values, environment, cultural issues, human rights, democracy, law and order, religious teachings and peace and reconciliation. The Santals also enjoy Governmental benefits that are being commenced for them and those benefits are being brought to light through numerous Medias. Women empowerment and occupational diversification also paves the way to their material cultural changes. They are now involved into various occupations along with their traditional one. Various television advertisements, TV-shows, radio have helped them grow in every field. Mobile is one of the most powerful mass media that has rehabilitated the life of people together with the Santals in recent times. Hitherto, the Santals were unaware of the benefits they should enjoy or were in the dark phase of life where the light of Modernization could not reach. Mass media played a pivotal role to reach out to the grass root level and bring about the revolution in every sphere of human life with an ease.

The canvas of tribal economy and culture is changing fast because of its contact with outsiders and alien ways of life. It may be admitted that some of the social and cultural changes observed among the Santals of the study area are due to the changes in the economic and political life of the people in general with the influence of mass media. Mass media has its impact in bringing about material, social, economic and cultural changes in the study area. Overall, the respondents are of the view that mass media has changed their quality of life to a prodigious amount.

Conclusion

Tribes are indigenous, they have their own identity, and their rich culture is encompassing an important aspect in Indian civilization. The Santals are going through a period of modern transition which has brought about significant changes in their material culture. Mass media played a pivotal role in their transition of material culture. The effect of Hindu culture is also evident among the Santals. This paper reveals the transformation of Santal culture by adopting modern activities. Such activities would undoubtedly disintegrate the homogeneity of the Santal community. The Santal youths are different from their ancestors, they are the first-generation learners, and their mindset is also changing rapidly. If this process of transition continues, it would be evident that the culture of the Santals is at stake and would lose the essence of their own identity. But change is the only constant in the society. More systematic intervention of Mass media is the need of the hour. This would help them to achieve modernization rapidly. With time, it is essential for them to get acquainted with the modern tools, techniques and technology.

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