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SANSKRITIZATION, AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF BHUMIJ COMMUNITY IN WEST BENGAL

Dr. Biswajit Goswami
Faculty, Department of Education, Lalbaba College, Howrah, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The Bhumij are a tribal group with a notable presence in West Bengal. Their historical presence has been notable in the areas of Purulia, Bankura, and Jhargram. The Bhumij, inspired by Hinduism and incorporating certain Hindu deities and traditions, also preserve their ancient beliefs. Their principal god is frequently regarded as the Sun God (Sing Bonga), with the veneration of several local deities and spirits within holy woods. Animal sacrifices constitute a component of their ceremonies aimed at placating these deities. Sanskritization and social integration has profoundly impacted the Bhumij population in West Bengal, shaping their religious rituals, social conventions, and language. Social integration is a multifaceted process marked by partial assimilation, enduring social borders, and continuous endeavours for socio-political empowerment to attain a more inclusive and equal status within the state's heterogeneous social structure. The present has pure qualitative study from secondary as well as primary sources. At first, the researcher has collected data from the secondary sources as the researcher wants to seek advice from previous works in his field of study and correlate relevant information obtained from the review of related literatures, tools related experiences.

KEY WORDS: *Bhumij Community, Sanskritization, Social Integration*

INTRODUCTION

Dalton and others have categorized the Bhumijs primarily based on language, considering them to be part of the Kolarian group. Although the Bhumijs have a close relationship with the Mundas, there is less evidence to support the notion that they possessed their own distinctive language. Risley posits that the Bhumijs are simply a sub-group of the Mundas who relocated towards the east, intermingled with Hindus, and thus experienced a certain degree of separation from their original tribes. This theory seems to be supported by present-day observations, as the Bhumijs in western Manbhum are undeniably pure Mundas. Similar cases can be found in other areas as well. Only the Bhumijs of Pargana Patkum, which borders Tamar Pargana in the Ranchi district, still intermarry with the Mundas. In fact, the Bhumij-Mundas of Tamar and the adjacent Parganas in the Manbhum district seem to belong to the same tribe as the Mundas. They inhabit the region on both sides of the Subarnarekha and kangsabati River, which is known to have numerous Mundari graveyards and is considered one of the earliest settlements of the Munda people. Like other Kolarian groups, the Bhumijs share similar religious and cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, although they are adopting Hindu traditions and are rapidly aligning themselves with Hinduism, it is undeniable that they are the offspring of the Mundas who initially established themselves in the area and were labeled as Bhumij (indigenous) by Hindu migrants who discovered them already residing on the land. The Bhumijs are renowned for their courage and defiance, frequently engaging in several uprisings and resisting authoritarian decrees imposed by their leaders.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To know the Sanskritization, and social integration of Bhumij community in West Bengal.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study has been conducted 255 households of Bhumij community in 3 districts in West Bengal. The study includes three districts in West Bengal, namely Bankura, Purulia, and Jhargram. The present study from secondary as well as primary sources. At first, the researcher has collected data from the secondary sources as the researcher wants to seek advice from previous works in his field of study and correlate relevant information obtained from the review of related literatures, tools related experiences.
Tool used for primary data collection -Check list cum interview schedule for household survey.

DISCUSSION

Prof. M.N. Srinivas, coined the term 'Sanskritization' to describe the cultural dynamics within the traditional caste system in India. In his book "Religion and society among the coorgs of South India", he introduced this concept to explain how lower castes in the coorgs of Mysore were trying to elevate their social status by adopting the cultural practices of the Brahmins. This process involved the abandonment of certain customs considered impure by the Brahmins, which Srinivas initially referred to as 'Brahminization' before later terming it 'Sanskritization' in a broader sense. According to Srinivas, Sanskritization is a phenomenon whereby a lower caste, tribe, or any other group gradually adopts the customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life of a higher or twice-born caste.

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According to K.S. Singh, the middle and lower castes find it easier to accept and conform to tribal customs. They often migrate in search of land or to serve the tribal leaders without affecting the upper castes, such as the Brahmins. (Singh,K.S: 1990)

Biswanath Bandopadhyay's analysis of "Ceremonial Friendship Among the Bhumij of Manbhum," discusses how the Bhumij community establishes ceremonial friendships with individuals from other communities using the practices of *phul* and *soya*. *Phul* is a bond between two men or two women from different castes or tribes, usually of similar ages, either before or after marriage. *Soya*, on the other hand, occurs between two married women or widows who either have no children or have an equal number of male or female children. While *phul* can occur at any time, *soya* is timing-specific, following certain events.

Bandopadhyay extensively collects and analyses detailed data on the various aspects of soya-friendship within the Bhagat Bhumij settlement in Manbhum. Through this research, the author discovers that the fear of negative consequences, which may befall a woman's family if she were to reject the advances of another woman, is the driving force behind reciprocity. Once the *phul* or *soya* friendship is established, not only do the partners benefit, but their respective families do as well.

Bose. N.K. (1941) talks about the Hindu method of absorption through the organization of production, where tribes find protection within a non-competitive system. Sanskritisation is also seen as a way tribes are absorbed into Hindu society.

Ghurye. G.S. disagrees with the idea that Hinduization leads to social degradation. Instead, he believes that a tribe's status in Hindu society depends on factors such as land ownership, wealth, and rank within the tribe. If a tribe lacks these resources, they tend to align themselves with a caste group that matches their economic and occupational level. Upward mobility within the caste system is also possible, with lower castes sometimes becoming kings or joining the Kshatriya caste through the support of Brahmins. The Brahmins play a crucial role in determining social status, as they can trace genealogy and invest high caste status onto individuals. They also dictate the lifestyles of different social orders and approve changes when necessary. This pursuit of higher caste status by lower castes is known as Sanskritization.

Roy Choudhuri. P.C. (1957) focused that The Hinduisation of the Bhumij people occurred in the 15th century, although there was no political pressure to force them to become Hindu. By this time, Hinduism had developed a strong sense of identity and did not readily accept tribes with different beliefs. Nevertheless, some members of the Bhumij tribe made an effort to assimilate into Hinduism, even though they were initially rejected. Over time, the Bhumij people living in the eastern part of the Ayodhya hill began to identify as Hindus. This transformation was not forced or influenced by persecution or conversion attempts, but rather happened gradually. The Bhumij considered themselves the original inhabitants of the Manbhum (present in part of Puruliya district) district and likely lived there for a period of time.

Table-01: Average percentage of having maintain the traditional ritual and customs of Bhumij community in the state of west Bengal.

STATE	HOUSE	MAINTAIN THE TRADITIONAL RITUAL AND CUSTOMS OF OWN SOCIETY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
West Bengal	**255**	Yes	216	84.71
		No	39	15.29

Source- Field Survey

It was found that 84.71% of the Bhumij family in West Bengal maintains their own traditional rituals, customs, and social norms; 15.29% of the family does not maintain their own tradition. Due to the influence of Hinduism and other castes, some Bhumij people have lost their own traditional culture, rituals, and customs.

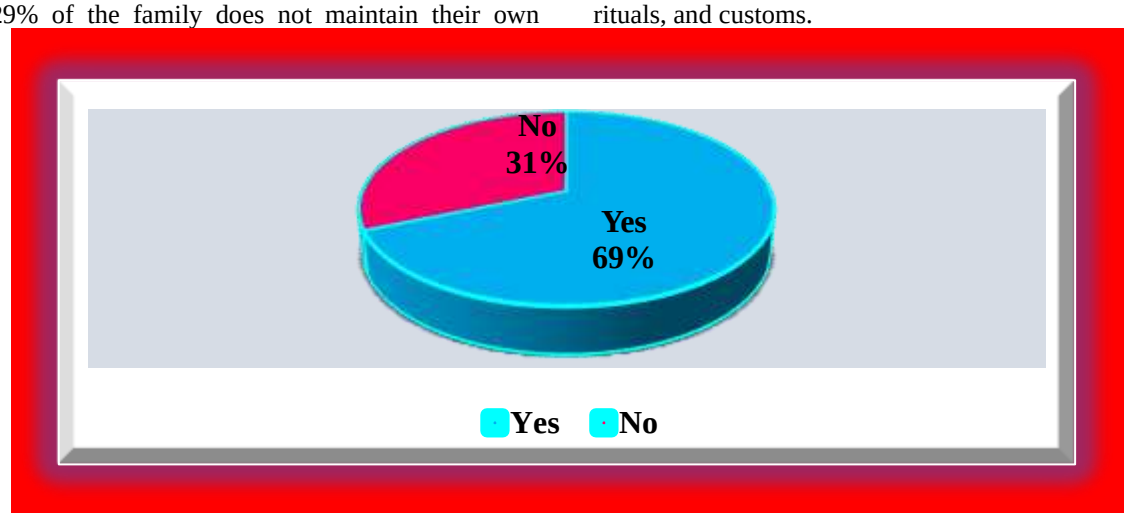


Figure-01: Other religion or community have any influence on the Bhumij rituals (source- field survey)

It was found that 68.63% (175) of families said that the different rituals of the Bhumij community are influenced by other religions or communities, and 31.7% of families said that the rituals of the Bhumij community are not influenced by other

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religions or communities. This interpretation implies that Bhumij rituals are largely influenced by other religions or communities in the state of West Bengal. Mainly the Hindu religion and Brahmin, Kshatriya culture and ritual influence the Bhumij ritual and culture.

Table-02: The upper caste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other's ceremonies: average percentage of house hold in the state of west Bengal.

State	House	Upper caste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other event	Number	Percentage (%)
West Bengal	255	Yes	103	40.39
		No	152	59.61

Source- Field Survey

Out of 255 Bhumij families in West Bengal, 40.39% (103) of the family opinion is that upper caste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other to their ceremonies, and 59.61% (152) of the family opinion was that upper caste people and Bhumij people were not invited to each other.

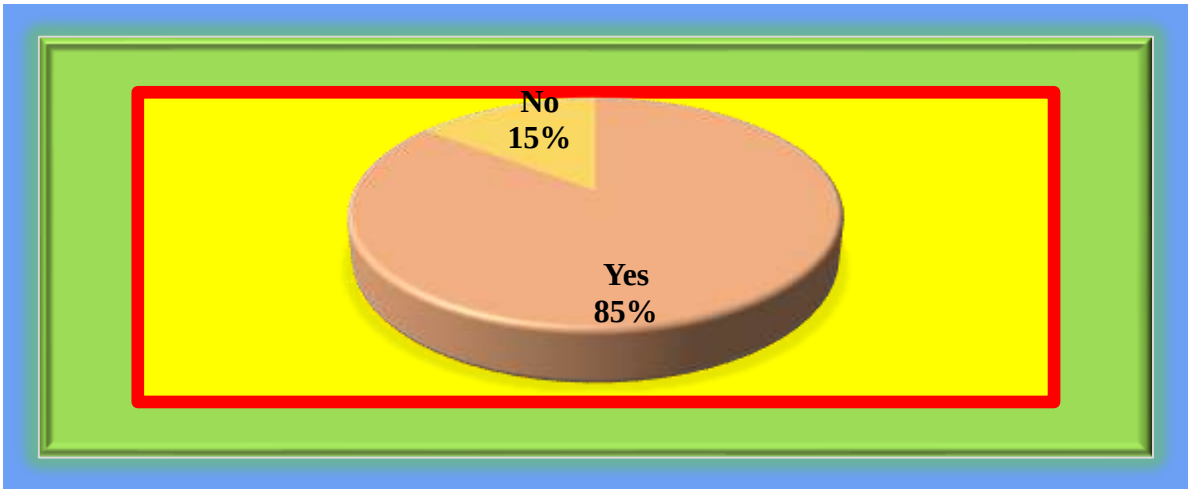


Figure-02: Average percentage of join in worship or ceremonies of other religion in the state of west Bengal. (Source- Field Survey)

It is found that 85.49% (218) of the Bhumij family participate in worship or ceremonies of other religions in the state of West Bengal, while 14.51% (37) of the family does not participate in worship or ceremonies of other religions. It is clear that the majority of the Bhumij community in West Bengal participates in other religions worship or ceremonies.

FINDINGS

- Bhumij community establishes ceremonial friendships with individuals from other communities.
- The Hinduisation of the Bhumij people occurred in the 15th century, although there was no political pressure to force them to become Hindu.
- The Bhumij people living in the eastern part of the Ayodhya hill began to identify as Hindus.
- 84.71% of the Bhumij family in West Bengal maintains their own traditional rituals, customs, and social norms.
- 68.63% (175) of families said that the different rituals of the Bhumij community are influenced by other religions or communities
- In West Bengal, 40.39% (103) of the family opinion is that upper caste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other to their ceremonies.
- 85.49% (218) of the Bhumij family participate in worship or ceremonies of Hindu religion in the state of West Bengal.

CONCLUSION

Hinduism has a deep cultural influence on the Bhumij people of West Bengal. The lower caste Hindu and Bhumij invite each other to their festivals. They worship Hindu deities, but they maintain their own culture. Such behaviour represent type of change is a form of cultural assimilation. Most Bhumij families in West Bengal have lost their native language and now use Bengali as their mother tongue; nonetheless, they continue to uphold their clan identity and totems. The marriage system is characterised by strictness and uniformity, and it is strongly limited to their community. The rituals, customs, and beliefs are heavily influenced by Hindu traditions and Brahman priests perform their social and religion programme. Despite their assertions of being Kshatriya, they are a subset of the Munda tribe. some traditional Bhumij culture is lost but they still maintain its unique identity and tribal essence.

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