



ECONOMIC CONDITION OF SANTHAL TRIBE IN LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Tarali Das

PhD Research Scholar, Sociology, USTM

ABSTRACT

Santhals are one of the largest tribal community in India and their principle settlement mainly consisting in the state of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Orissa. Santhal belongs to pre Aryan period. They were the great fighters during the British regime in India. They waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1857. Many call them as 'the tribes at extreme', they have their own script called Olchiki. Apart from Santhali, they also speak Bengali, Oriya and Hindi in Assam. They have a typical lifestyle. Basic needs are fulfilled by forest trees and plants and are also engaged in fishing and cultivation. These tribes of India also poses a magnificent skill of making musical equipment, mats and baskets out is worth watching. With a hope of economic prosperity they migrated to Assam to work in tea gardens as wage labourers during British period, after arrival in Assam, they lost their whole identity along with their culture, custom and tradition. They assimilated with local people. Here they are enlisted Other Backward Class. The main earning source of income for them are- tea-garden, agricultural activities, daily wage earning and so on. This paper is an attempt to study the economic condition of Santhal tribe in the Lakhimpur District.

INTRODUCTION

According to the census of 2001, India is the home to the largest tribal population in the world, total 10,42,81,034 tribal people live in India. In India indigenous people are known as 'Tribal people' or 'Tribals', they are at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. They are the poorest and the most marginalized, oppressed and deprived people in the country (Nathan and kekar, 2004; rath, 2006). Tribes Of This Land Are Heterogenous And Diversified In Respect Of Size Of The Population, Life Style, Culture and language. national Tribal policy (govt. of India 2006), identifies 698 tribal communities in India. Scheduled Tribe communities in India are found in different parts of the country. They occupy nearly 15% of the total land of the country and basically they live in the forest and hilly areas, though some of them also live in plains. On the

basis of ecological, social, economical, administrative and ethnic factors they are divided into five regional categories (tribal community report 2014) such as 1. Himalayan region. 2. Middle region 3. Southern region 4. Western Region. 5. Island Region. In Assam there are as many as 23 tribal communities which constitute 12.82 per cent of the total population of the state. The tribes of Assam may broadly be divided into two categories: plain tribes and hill tribes. The plain tribes mainly inhabit the plain areas of the state and the hill tribes are mainly concentrated in the hilly areas. Apart from this, another group of people found in Assam called as "Tea-Tribe". These are the heterogenous group which includes many tribal and caste groups. They found mainly in the districts of upper Assam and Northern Brahmaputra belt where there is high concentration of tea-gardens like ; kokrajhar, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Nagao, Golaghat,

Lakhimpur, sivsagar dibrugarh , tinsukia.Many tribes like –munda,santhal,oraon are scattered in Brahmaputra as well as Barak Valley . Santhal are the third largest tribes of India.

The tribe habitation is mainly in the state of west Bengal ,Bihar , Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam. They belong to pre-aryan period and were the great fighters during the British regime in India. A bantam bunch comprising of the Santhals can also be traced back to Bangladesh. Santhals were brave and courageous people who waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1795. In 1850 Santhals hero Sidhu had accumulated around 10 thousand Santhals to run parallel government against British Government . The first Santhal leader who raised weapons against Britishers in 1789 was Baba Tilka Majhi .their population is around 49,000. The scientists have conjectured that the individuals of the Santhal in Jharkhand had Proto Austroids as their ancestors and these so-called Proto-Austroids had embarked upon a journey towards the eastern frontier of India and eventually settled there. Many called them as “the tribes at extreme”.

According to Waddel(1893) the Santhals story Of their advancement from Hihri Pipri via Champa to their present location in the Santhal parganas is manifestly a record of actual tribal progress, not as is usually believed, from one part of the Hazaribagh Hills to another but from the central alluvial valley of the Gnges South-Westwards to the hills, under pressure of the Aryan invasion of the valley.

STUDY AREA

Lakhimpur district occupies an area of 2,277 square kilometers.(879 sq mi). Located in the North-East corner of the Indian State of Assam, the district of Lakhimpur lies on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is bounded on north by lower Subansiri and Pamupare districts of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and on the east by Dhemaji district. Majuli, the largest river-island district is on the south and Biswanath district is on the west. The exact location of the district is 26.48’ and 27.53’ northern latitude and 93.42’ and 94.20’ east longitude (approx).

The name of Lakhimpur is believed to be originated from the word Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. The district is mainly dependent upon agriculture and paddy. Paddy is regarded locally as Lakshmi, the word pur means full. Lakhimpur therefore means full of paddy or the place where paddies are grown abundantly. Besides , the soil of the district is alluvial and fertile for which crops flourish without use of any artificial manure or hard labour. It has all total 9 tea-garden and tea-estates.among all, Harmutty tea-garden is the oldest one. This Harmutty Tea-Garden is selected for the current study.

Harmutty Tea-Garden is situated on the bank of River Dikrong a tributary of the Brahmaputra. It lies 12km East of Tezpur and 37km west of Lakhimpur. The garden boundaries are Arunachal Pradesh on the North, National Highway No.15 on the south, Dikrong River on the west and rolling paddy fields on the East. The Tea-Garden was founded in the year 1878. As per the local legend the garden derives its name from Queen Hiramati, wife of King Arimatta whose kingdom is thought to have been lower Assam, his capital being at ‘Baidargarh’ near Betna in Kamrup. The burial mound of the Queen can still be seen the majh Bungalow Kitchen Garden.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study the different occupational pattern of the Santhal

To study the lifestyle of the Santhal in Harmutty tea-garden.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study follows both explorative and descriptive Research Design’. The data collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data collected from journal, census books and other periodicals, and primary data collected through non-participant observation. The sample selected for the study was 30.simple random sampling was used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The occupation of the Santhals revolve around the forests in which they resides. Their basic needs are fulfilled from the trees and plants of the forests. They are also engaged in the hunting, fishing and cultivation for their livelihood. The Britishers bought them Assam from central Indian states like- Orissa, Jharkhand, chatisgarh, bihar, and west Bengal. Their life in tea-gardens was pathetic. Planters used to make barracks known as *Coolie line* for the labourer and these were overcrowded. *Coolie* was a term used by Tea garden authorities to denote labourers (now considered derogatory by the community). In the barracks, each tea-garden labourer got hardly twenty-five square feet of area for their personal use. They were engaged in tea-garden at a very lower cost. These groups of people are original inhabitant and original tribal in India. But here in Assam they are enlisted as Other backward class. In Assam Tea-Tribes are found as- Munda, Santhal, Oraon etc. In the Harmutty tea garden , the total number of permanent worker are 920, among these 604 permanent worker are getting household. Among 30 respondents, 20 Santhal were temporary worker and 10 were permanent worker. They work in tea-garden and earn 137rs per day which is very less for maintainence of family. The amount of wage is same for all the workers. There is no difference between permanent worker and temporary worker, and between man and women worker. The tea-garden authority pay their money every 15days. Apart from working in tea-garden Santhal are also engaged in doing

other economic activities , i.e- agricultural activities, collecting of firewood and selling them nearby village, carpenter etc.

The Santhal women are also engaging different activities like- doing household activities, agricultural activities, weaving, cleaning etc.

The literacy rate among Santhal is very poor. Among 30 , only 4respondents were going to school upto upper primary i.e class 4. Others hardly knew their sign. But they are now sending their children to school. The Santhal women do not understand other language.

The lifestyles of Santhal in Harmutty tea-garden is very pathetic, the household patterns are semi pakka . All the respondents have katcha toilet . they have common well for drinking water and other purpose . Tea garden authorities provides them Rason card . According to authority –they are providing health facility to the tea-garden workers. But Santhal community have their own ethnic medicine. They still practice ethnic medicine. They have their own language and very unique culture. But here in Assam they are now assimilating with Assamese culture. They are now loosing their own tribal identity.

CONCLUSION

The daily wages of Santhal are very low and not-satisfactory. In the field Mr.X said – 137rs is so little money ,I cannot fulfill everybody’s needs in my family. as I am the only earner of the family .

Santhal community is one of the deprived and backward groups among the ethnic community of our country. As they are ethnic people , they share common culture, beliefs , norms, values ,rituals and festivals etc. besides ,most of the Santhal are illiterate and cannot know how to read or write. They face a lot of problem to continue their livelihood because of illiteracy , high growth of population , unemployment problem ,landless, lack of money and also ethnicity .

REFERENCES

1. Ashikur S.M; *‘the socio-economic condition of Santhal community in rajshahi, Bangladesh: a case study’*,
2. Daritya,Sk; *‘socio-economic status of the tribals of purulia district in the post colonial period’*,ijrds,vol8,February 2018
3. *Government Of India.(2013). Annual Report 2012-2013, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, New Delhi: Government of India.*
4. *Statistics of School Education. (2011). Ministry Of Human Resource Development Bureau Of Planning monitoring and statistics, New Delhi, Government of India*

5. *Statistical handbook n.lakhimpur.*
6. *Waddell, L.A. 1893, ‘The Traditional Migration of Santhal Tribe’, Indian Antiquary 22:294-6*
7. *Xaxa, Virginius, (2003). ‘Tribes in India’, in Veena das (ed), The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology (Vol.I). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 373-408.*