



Tribal Method of Hindu Absorptions: A Study on Transmission of Traits in Connectivity Context

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Abstract: Generally, within a given area of transmission of culture traits, dominant group holding political power, power of economy, language and above all numerical strength is found to be absorbing the surrounding dormant group of people of comparatively less-powerful within its cultural fold. This was the idea of Gandhiji but first noticed this phenomenon by N. K. Bose in a region of Orissa's Pal Lahara among the Juang tribal community. Later Bose presented his observations in a paper form at the Indian Science congress in 1941. The present paper deals with a reverse process practiced by the Santals, a little dormant group of people, in Birbhum district of West Bengal, in a connectivity context.

Keywords: Connectivity, social laboratory, loanwords, foreign words, hang around

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Introduction

Once permanent settlers in their 'homeland' Santal Parganas, the Santals have become 'new settlers' in the Birbhum district of West Bengal after leaving their permanent residency in the recent past. Their remote 'homeland' was chiefly full of jungle depended on primitive economy like hunting, gathering, fishing and little cultivation. In course of time their influxed population gradually raised pressure on jungle and jungle products. Earning of food became very tough. They naturally left their 'homeland' and dispersed to the adjoining states and districts like West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

A section of Santals came and infiltrated in Bolpur of Birbhum district, West Bengal. They are known as 'new settlers' selected the place of adjoining river basins of Ajoy and Kopai river where lands are open and fertile, devoid of jungles, nearer to their 'homeland' and have varied agro-suburban jobs and facilities of communication network system by rail and road ways within and

outside the district. This is the place where international educational seat, Santiniketan, is located, the district headquarter, Suri, is only 35km away, famous mythical religious seats (*pitha*) - the centre of congregation of people, are within 35-40km radius. All these factors lead to groom an active connectivity of the place.

According to 2011 census, Bolpur is consisting of 89.77% Bengali-speaking Hindus while Santals of the river basins are only 05%. The Bengali-speaker Hindus hold a lion's share of agricultural land, logistical property, political power, economy, participation of social/cultural activities including language and establish a potential dominant group of the locality. With the fast growing of connectivity of the district the Santals became closer to this larger dominant group, and involved in deep interfacing in every sector of their way of life. Under huge pressure of this dominant group of people on them in daily life, comparatively smaller group, the Santals, find no other way but to keep balance between their life and culture with the dominancy of the dominant group by their own 'inherent and innovative' method of absorptions of the culture traits.

Methodology and techniques applied

The place between the two adjoining river basins of Ajoy and Kopai are selected for the study for the following reasons:

1. High concentration of the Santals' settlements in comparison to other paces of the district
2. The place having active communication network system within and outside the district
3. The place for deep interactions with the dominant Bengali-speaking Hindus
4. Agro-Suburban jobs potentiality of the place

Since the study was a purposive ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes 1964) emphasis on obtaining qualitative data from the social laboratory (field) was given priority. Unit of study is social/cultural traits to get the nature of trait transmissions from Hindus. Muslims and other religious groups like Christian, Jainas and Buddhists were not selected for the study because of their insignificant presence in comparison to Hindus.

A swift village survey was also made to get basic background information of the Santal's way of life, and side by side, printed census figures 2011 were also kept aside for a considerable check and verification. Standard

anthropological techniques like unstructured interviews, observations, participant observer and Goffman's (1959) 'hang around' techniques were applied to obtain data.

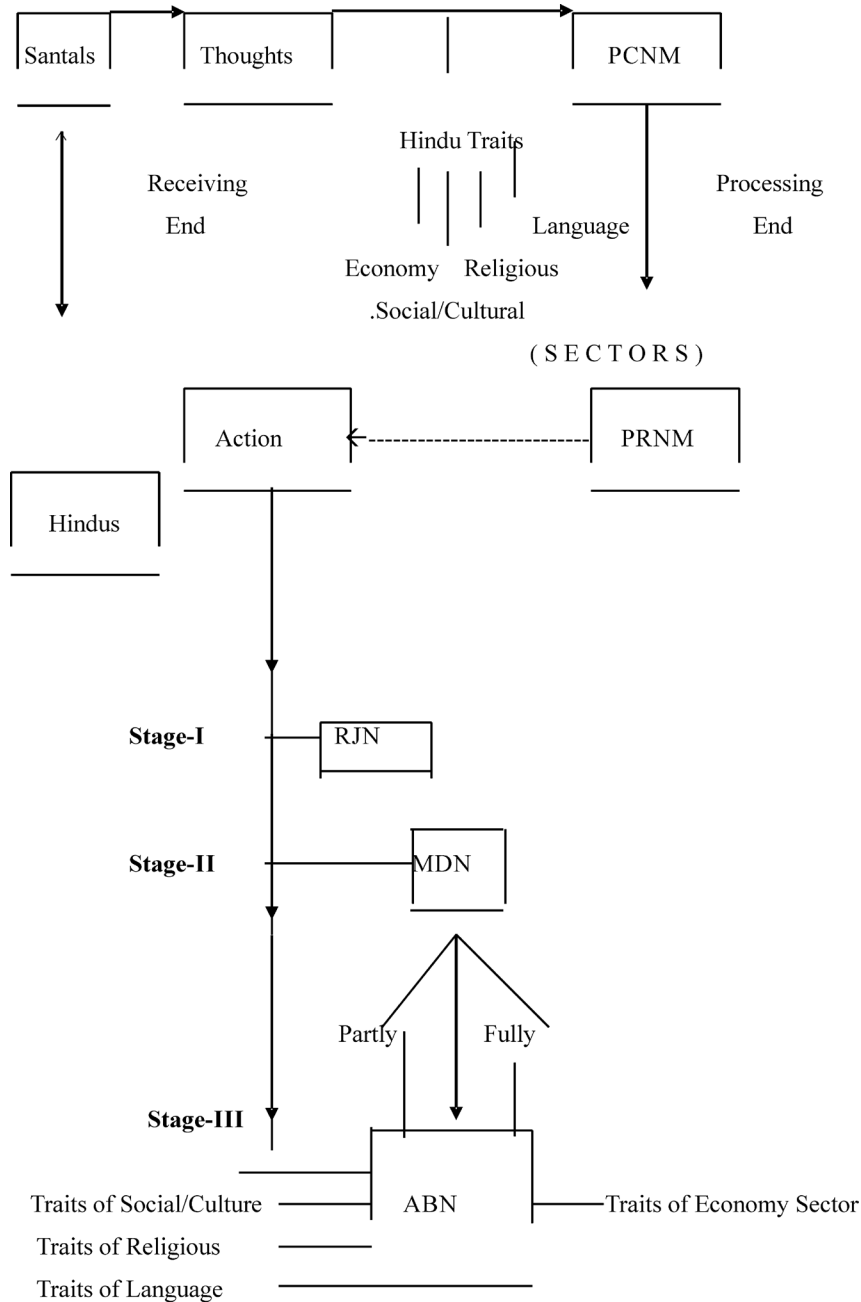
Findings and Interpretations of Data

In the social laboratory, it is seen that the comparatively new settler Santals are interfacing with the existing old settler Hindu of the river basins and trying to adjust them, by applying their inherent and innovative method of absorptions. Following diagrams show how the Santals are receiving different traits of the Hindus by their inherent capacity of absorptions. At the time of interfacing the Hindus, the Santals envisage different traits of the Hindus to opt for absorptions. In economy sector, they get different agro-suburban occupations of the Hindus like rice mill workers, mason workers, stone mine laborers, domestic servants, teachers in schools/college/university, hawkers, rickshaw pullers, prostitution which are new to them. The Santals of river basins are found to have been absorbed these traits straight way without any modifications or changes. Selections of all these traits are done by them in mind area (receiving area) first where thoughts are choosing these 'foreign traits' to absorb with the instruction of 'Perceptual norms' (PCNM) guided by the norms and values that gives signals to 'Procedural Norms' (PRNM) for action for absorptions (ABN) (see diagram below).

The same process of trait absorptions is found in the other sectors like Social/Cultural, Religious and language also. But in these cases, traits are not fully absorbed like the traits of economy sector. It is observed that in the sectors of Social/Cultural, Religious and Language the Santals modify the receiving traits partially and adjust these with their life and culture. In the social sector, kin-relationships and kin-addressing terms are unaltered especially at their relative congregations in different social/cultural events like familial affairs or fairs and festivals, but at the time of conversations with the Hindus they modify it partially. They do it only when they are interfacing with the Hindus in daily life.

The Santals now very often marry a Hindu boys or girls and establish kin-relationships with the bride or bridegroom's family. The addressing terms of these new kins are found a considerably modified by them accordingly. It is found that in many times, local Hindu political leaders come and solve the disputes arising from the marrying Hindu boys or girls even after the verdict of village council of the Santals.

Diagram I: Inherent method of absorptions of the Santals



Abbreviations: PCNM – Perceptual Norms, PRNM – Procedural Norms, MDN-Modification, RJN- Rejection, ABN – Absorption

What is found among the Santals of river basins is that infiltration of number of cultural traits from the Hindus is now found admitted and absorbed by the Santals. In marriage ceremony, the Santals are now, though little in number, practicing bride-price like the Hindus unofficially along with the bridegroom-price of their traditional norms. In some Santal families adjacent to the Bolpur town, it is observed that Hindu low cast Pandits are invited for conducting their marriage rituals. It is observed that the Santals of Bolpur area are now frequently using different media like Video/VCR, Microphones, folk-drama shows, press/printing on the occasion of their marriage, birth ceremony and different festivals they observed. It is not uncommon that the Santals of this area invite the selected friends of Hindu origin on these occasions except death rituals that are performed as per their traditional norms. No Hindu-flavored folk can be allowed at the death rituals.

Religiously, the Santals do not have any idol-worshipping. But in the social laboratory, data shows, in many cases Santals place the different idols of Hindu Gods and Goddess at the community religious centre of the village. They also take part in different puja festivals organized by the local Hindus throughout the year. The Hindus of the locality also, in turn, come and participate in different festivals of the Santals. I was invited by a Santal friend of 'Bandhlo danga' village adjacent to Kopai river basin, to take part in their *badhna parab* (festival).

Traits Analysis

When we analyze sector-wise status of the traits the Santals received from Hindus, it is observed that out of the total 19 traits as found in the social laboratory only two traits (t9 and t15) of the Hindus were rejected (RJN). The Santals of the river basins did not receive or absorb t9 and t15 traits (only 10.52% of the total number of traits), but the rest 17 traits of the Hindus are absorbed. (Table I)

Meticulously trait analyzing reveals that out of the eight number of traits of material culture (t1 to t8) all are absorbed, either modified partly or fully, by the Santals, while the traits of the social/cultural sector only two traits, t9 and t15, are rejected, i.e., it is not absorbed. These two traits are traditionally continuing without confronting with the Hindu traits. Besides, the rest of the traits (t10 to t14) of the social/cultural sector are modified and absorbed.

In case of religious sector, the traits of worshipping deities and associated materials for worships (t16 and t17) are received and absorbed by the Santals. But worshipping of traditional deities is found continued with the Hindu deities simultaneously. At the holy place of deity placed at the fringe of the village the

Santals of the river basin keep many idols of the Hindus like 'Manasa', 'Kali', 'Shiva' along with their traditional deity. Moreover, they take active part in other Hindu religious fairs and festivals throughout the year.

In Language sector, it is seen that the Santals of river basins absorb different Bengali words from dominant Bengali speaker Hindus at the time of day-to-day interactions or interfacing, that changes both in their vocabulary and morphology of the words. With the application of their inherent and innovative method of absorptions they adjust and adopt these words by drawing "loanwords" or "foreign words" from the interactive half -the Hindus.

Bright and Ramanujan (1972:157-66) also found such similar changes in Tamil Brahman and non-Brahman in south India. The authors identified "loanwords" to borrow from the interactive group of people Brahmins and adjust these with the language (vocabulary) of the "native" group (non-Brahmins) of people. The authors remarked: "in most of the cases noted, it is the group (non-Brahmin natives) who has innovated by introducing the loanwords". With changes in the vocabulary these "loanwords" were made possible to bring changes in morphology of the words for conversations.

Table I: Status of sector-wise Traits received by the Santals from Hindus
Hindus----- RECEIVING OF TRAITS ----- > Santals

Traits	Receivings as
A. Material Culture	
t1. House type and technology ----->	MDN and ABN
t2. Kitchenware ----->	MDN and ABN
t3. Dress and ornaments ----->	ABN
t4. Food items ----->	MDN and ABN
t5. Musical Instruments ----->	MDN and ABN
t6. Media materials----->	ABN
t7. Vehicles uses ----->	ABN
t8. Amusement kits ----->	MDN and ABN
B. Social/Cultural	
t9. Addressing terms : Kins ----->	RJN
t10. Addressing terms : Non-Kins----->	ABN
t11. Relationships with Non-Kins ----->	ABN
t12. Marriage with Hindu Cast ----->	MDN and ABN
t13. Marriage rituals----->	MDN and ABN
t14. Birth rituals----->	MDN and ABN
t15. Death rituals----->	RJN
C. Religion	
t16. Worshipping deities ----->	MDN and ABN
t17. Worshipping materials----->	MDN and ABN
D. Language	
t18. Morphology of Words----->	MDN and ABN
t19. Vocabulary----->	MDN and ABN

Abbreviations: MDN: Modification, ABN: Absorption, RJN: Rejection

Though he did not mention the particular “loanwords” as Bright and Ramanujan did, Stephen Tylor also showed in his paper ‘Context and variation in Koya Kinship Terminology’ (1966) how variations in vocabulary and morphology were made possible in given context by receiving “foreign words” with changes by a inherent ‘innovative’ methods. Tylor studied Koya tribal group of people of Godavory river basin in South India.

Like the above two authors, I also observed almost similar incidents of trait absorptions both in vocabulary and morphology of the language among the river basin Santals. It is noted that the “native” Santals are also adjusting with the vocabulary and morphology of their language by inclusion of “loanwords” or “foreign words” by their ‘innovative’ and inherent method of additions and alternations for conversations with the Hindus surround them in daily life. The two traits (t18 and t19) are such type of traits which get “foreign words” as “loanwords” from the Hindus at the time of conversations, and adjusted these for absorption by the ‘innovative and inherent’ method of them.

Conclusions

While observing the transmission of culture traits in a given area of the two adjacent river basins of the river Ajoy and Kopai between the two different speech-people, the Hindus and the Santals, the dominant larger non-tribal group and the dormant comparatively smaller tribal group, it is thus found that Santals though they are less powerful in numbers, economy and politics is, language the culture trait of the surrounding dominant larger group, the Hindus absorbing frequently. In spite of absorbing the tribals by the dominant non-tribal Hindus within their fold, they themselves are absorbed by the tribals. Thus, a reverse process of absorbing the traits of the larger non-tribal group by the smaller tribals is seen in the social laboratory of the two adjacent river basins of the Ajoy and the Kopai ofr the Birbhum district West Bengal.

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