



Social Change

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change in the non-literate society is confined to the modification of social life. It also happens by a process of borrowing of cultural elements from some other contemporary culture which may take place by way of adoption. It also is a process of organization, i.e. gradual development of an integrated scheme of structure and function suited to a rather definite mode of life under specific conditions. This is called adoption (Kattakayam, 1983)¹. "Changes seems to be the dominant theme in our villages, various forces of modernization, improved means of communication, increases in the scale of economic and political activities and other factors largely ideological in nature have affected economic and social relationship in rural areas" (Yadav 1973)².

Social change among all communities is common but the level of change is not equal in all the cases. "Today most of these tribals have come in contact with advanced communities, have learnt traits of their neighbours, have borrowed patterns of their dress and developed in intricate material economy. Some of these tribes have progressed at a tremendous pace effecting in a few years changes which have taken centuries to achieve in other areas" (Majumdar, 1958)⁵. Changes in any aspect of society have affected directly or

indirectly all the spheres of life. Since Independence, India has entered into the era of directed or 'induced' change. There is a gradual but steady process of erosion in the nature and dimension of social inequality. Legal abolition of untouchability, political commitment to secularism, constitutional safeguard and privileges guaranteed forces of change (Mahapatra, 1980)⁴.

The Santals live side by side with other communities, and the long association and interactions with others have brought changes in their life style but still their cultural core remain unchanged (Das, 1990)⁵. Santals in the district have however, not changed much. Their thinking and way of life in most cases remain more or less the same. To cite an example, still now nearly 100 per cent of the delivery cases take place at home, helped by 'dai' or an untrained midwife. Many of them do not believe in family planning and those who believe, they use herbal medicines. A small percentage of them undergo operations. Literacy level is very low. Most of the income come from work as labour which means that poverty is mainly responsible for keeping them backward. The noticeable change, however, is found in their dresses which, at the same time, strongly indicates that as a people the Santals have not remained completely impervious to the current of life flowing around them. As a matter of fact, from time to time they have come under the influence of the christian missionaries, the British

Government and the Hindu culture, all of them leaving definite imprint on their life style. In order to understand the nature of social transformation in whatever degree it has taken place among the Santals of Birbhum district, it is necessary to consider it in terms of particular fields. Those fields are : education, dress, food habits, language, marriage, occupation structure and economic status which have been discussed in some detail below.

Education:

Education is an important medium which directly or indirectly change the life in all sphere. 'In all secular and modernizing societies, the role of education as a major force in social ^{changes} is now well accepted. It has an immediate and intimate relation with upward mobility as education opens all the avenue of acquiring high social status' (Mahapatra, 1980)⁶. In this area, education have brought in recognisable changes in the social as well as the economic status of the Santals. An educated person finds it difficult to mix with his family members when they are illiterate. Many of them who get education, get white colour jobs in many cases. Such parents want to give education to their children, mainly the sons, which increases the literacy rate. The girls of these families also go to school, but the financial condition do not permit them for taking higher education. As there are a limited number of junior high and secondary (Madhyamik)

schools are very few, expenditure on transport for attending such schools lying at a distance is rather quite high for the parent to afford. In spite of that, literacy level among both the males and females is increasing which was 6.1 per cent in 1961 rising to 12.5 per cent in 1981 for the males and from 0.5 per cent in 1961 to 2.1 per cent in 1981 for the females in the rural areas. The primary information shows that for the old generation the literacy level was upto class II but it has risen to class V in most cases of the present generation, in some cases going upto class X or XII or above. The most interesting thing is that if the females starts going to school, they often complete the study upto school level. The rate of drop outs (Table-20) shows that drop outs among the females is comparatively lower than that of the males.

Changes in Occupation :

The economic activity of the Santal population in this area shows a changing trend. Due to the changing character of occupation among the Santals, the economy is undergoing a rapid transformation, not only in the traditional occupations but also in the introduction of new ways of obtaining a livelihood (Datta Majumdar, 1955)⁷. For instance, during the last few decades agriculture is getting greater importance economically whereas hunting and collecting as an activity is losing importance as mentioned earlier. As a matter of fact, collecting has completely disappeared. Fishing, which was

practised mainly for food is now practised as a subsidiary occupation. Agriculture is the prime occupation, till now engaging more than 95 per cent⁽¹⁹⁸¹⁾ of the^{rural} working population. But the process of agriculture has changed. In early period they used to be engaged as independent farmers and permanent or casual labour. But the situation has changed to a great deal now. The type of crop has also changed to a great extent. In early period they used to produce corn and maize. Now they are cultivating paddy, mustard, potato, vegetables and wheat. Because of the transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal people through land alienation process the size of the farm has also decreased. They cultivate their own land along with the land taken from others on share basis. Sometimes, modern machines like pump sets, sprayers etc. are used by the farmers bringing a touch of modernization to agriculture. Besides agriculture, they are engaged in various types of activities in the organized and the unorganised sectors as already mentioned in a previous chapter.

Changes in Language :

Large percentage of the tribals 'speak the dialect of neighbouring peoples possessing a superior culture' (Fuchs, 1973)⁸. In this perspective, the study of changes in language becomes a problem. It may be noted in this connection that changes in Santali language has occurred due to its close contact with Indo-Aryan language which has

already resulted in the corruption of many words of Sanskrit' Origin (Datta-Majumdar, 1955)⁹. As for example, the word 'Thakur' denoting High God, such terms as 'Panchayat' for village council and 'Janam' in Janam Chatiar (birth rites) are derived from Sanskrit. Standard Santali is in constant contact and thereby influenced by Hindi in the west and Bengali in the east (Datta-Majumdar, 1955)¹⁰. The most effective way of adopting the superior language is always through education and after adopting the superior language the people feel rather ashamed to speak in their own language. As a matter of fact, the Santals in Birbhum district speak Bengali fluently where Bengali is the regional language and the tribal people speaking it to communicate more easily with the local population and make their contacts much wider. Among the old generation, however, some can not speak Bengali but understand the language. They feel uneasy to speak Bengali.

Changes in Marriage :

'Marriage is the mutual strengthening of two families' (Das, 1990)¹¹. Among the Santals of this district, 6 to 7 types of marriages used to be practised among them in early days, but now marriage arranged by 'Raibar' or the match maker has become a common feature. Besides, now-a-days marriage is also arranged by the couple themselves. In this case both has equal right to decide. Among the educated urban people this type of marriage is more than

the other type. Monogamy is generally the rule among them though polygamy may occur in case of maladjustment between wife and husband or due to sterility and death of wife. Previously, divorce was a more common practice. According to primary information (Table-15) most of the females representing more than 90 per cent of the total were married for once only. Remarriage among the males is prevalent but the percentage is very small and it is found among those of wealth or high status. The percentage of males practising polygamy varies from 70 per cent to 90 per cent. Inter-caste marriage also occurs among them. The most interesting change among them is in the case of a widow. They do not want to remarry. Some widows say, 'I have children and for that reason I do not remarry', because they realise that remarriage may detach the children from her.

Changes are also noticeable in bride price. The bride price in the form of property and money seems to have changed now to money and animal according to field study.

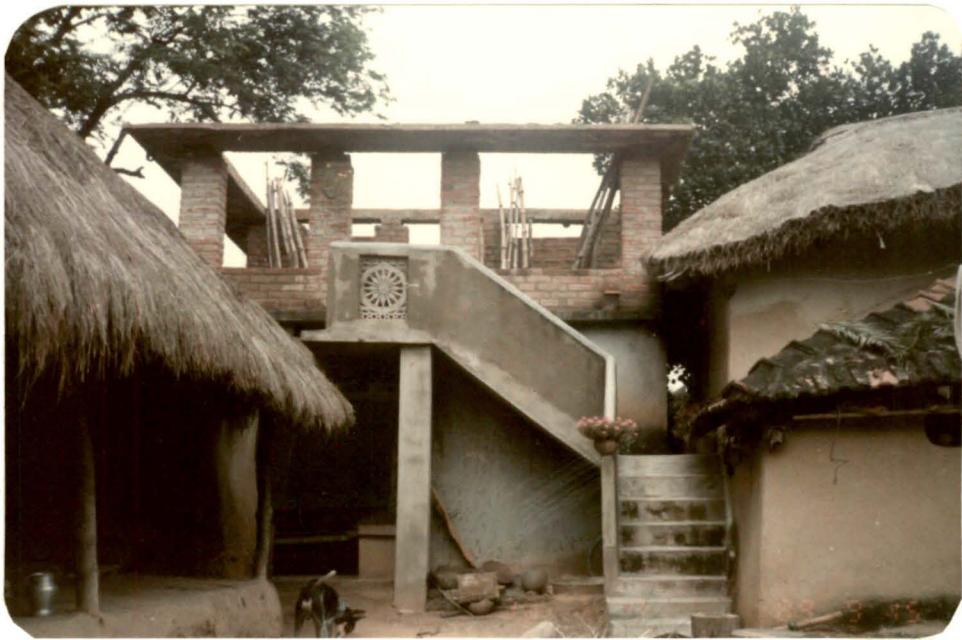
Changes in Economic Status

The Santals in this area are mostly rural, illiterate and hard-working people. Although they are in the lower level of the society with a poor economic condition, they have not escaped material changes in terms of their house types food habits and in the use of utensils, dresses, as other essential and non-essential commodities as discussed below.

(i) Settlement and House Type

The Santals in early period settled in forest areas where the houses used to be constructed with materials available from the forests. The process of deforestation, reservation and individual ownership of forests gradually shifted their settlements to the plains, developed in isolated patches on both sides of a road in most cases. It may be of interest to note here that in the development of Santal settlements in the second stage when they moved out of forest areas they had a preference for living close to the Hindus wherever possible as it is clearly demonstrated in the district of Birbhum .

In the recent decades, the paddy straw is getting replaced by tiles and asbestos or corrugated sheet in many cases. In some cases when the house-holders is engaged in service, the house type is further influenced by urban culture and they construct brick buildings complete with kitchen, latrine, bathroom and living room. Generally, however, they have one or two living rooms with a covered space and a courtyard constituting residential house without any bathroom, and for latrine the open space is used.



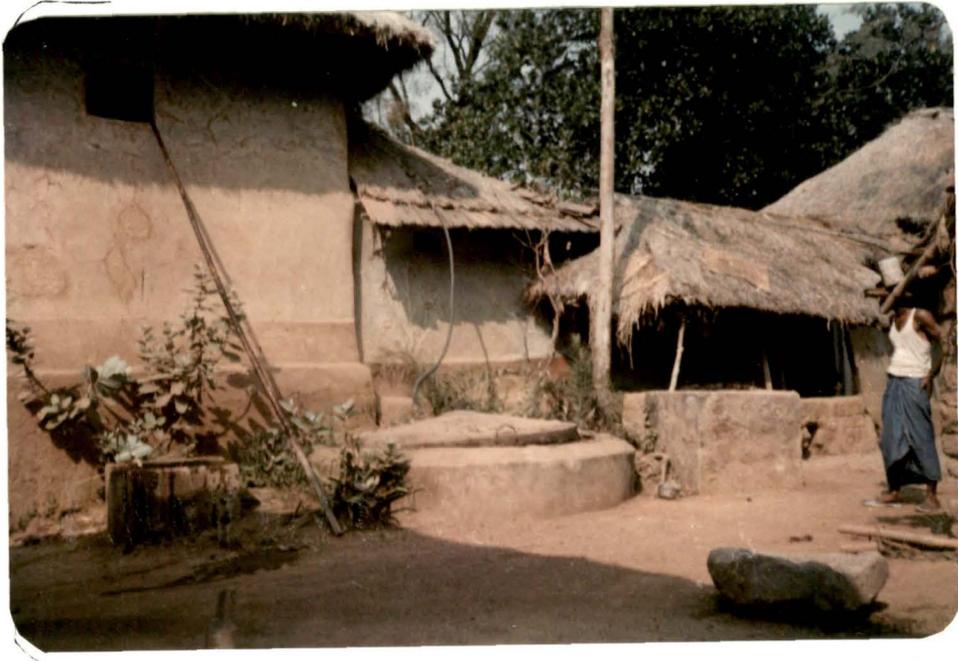
19. NEW AND OLD MERGE IN HOUSEBUILDING

(ii) Food & habits

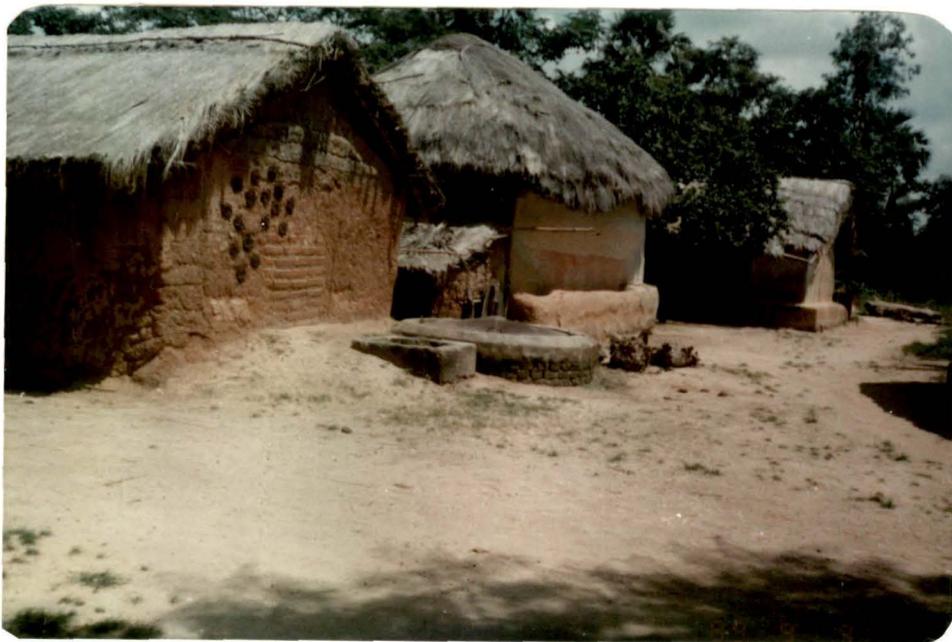
The food type has generally been affected by the reduction in the supply of wild fruits, roots, tubers, available from forests which used to form the main food of the Santals many decades ago and are now difficult to obtain. Rice has become the staple food now supplemented by spinach. Occasionally they take some other vegetables and non-vegetable items. In some families tea has also been introduced which they take with bread and crisp rice (muri). In some families milk is consumed by the children. On the other hand, the most striking feature is that the consumption of liquor has become rather occasional while some literates, do not take liquor at all though they have the habit of smoking in some cases.

In the use of utensils as well visible changes have taken place. Previously, they were in the habit of using earthen pots to cook rice and also some brass utensils. Now they use aluminium and steel utensils, porcelain cups plates etc.

The most noticeable change is found in the use of cooking gas (Gobar gas) but the percentage is yet negligible. The utilisation of this gas is being introduced by the Government through a programme. The District Industries Centre arranges for a training programme for the establishment of such plants using cow-dung for the generation of power



20. GOBAR GAS PLANT IN A SANTAL HOUSES AND
CHANGE IN MEN'S WEAR - SOCIAL CHANGE



21. AN UNUSED GOBAR GAS PLANT GETTING
DISMANTLED FOR SALE

and provides some financial assistance of which 50 per cent is given as subsidy. The rate of expenditure for establishing such a plant ranges between Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000, the cost depending on the size of the plant. In spite of all the advantages one might derive from such a plant, the local Santals are found reluctant to take advantage of these plants and in many cases, different parts of such plants are sold away in the event of any financial crisis. When they are used for other purposes. During 1983, the number of cooking gas sanctioned among the Santals in this district is nearly 150 and it gradually increasing.

(iii) Dress

The influence of the Hindu community on Santal men and women is clearly reflected in the dress they wear instead of traditional ones. This appears to be one of the major changes as a consequence of cultural contact with the people in the main stream of the society. Today, the Santal women wear cotton sarees with blouse and petticoat and men wear trousers and shirts as already mentioned in a previous chapter. The most interesting thing is that the widows have started wearing white cloth in few families and wear no ornaments as is the customs with Hindu widows.

(iv) Assets

As has been observed earlier, the Santals have two types of assets namely (a) livestock and (b) essential

and luxury goods.

Livestock or animal husbandry has become an important economic activity with the introduction of a number of domestics. Previously only cattle used to be reared mainly for agricultural and breeding purposes. Now pig and goat rearing along with poultry and duckery has become a common feature with the Santals of this district, giving them economic sustenance.

Over and above this, the character of material possessions of the Santals has undergone sweeping changes in the recent decades which include a large number of economic as well as luxury articles. In the case of such economic assets like the pump set, the sprayer etc., financial assistance provided by the Government for their purchase has a popular effect while possession of luxury items (for them) like cycle, radio, watch etc. indicates the degree of modernisation achieved by this people in their behaviouristic pattern.

Habits

The Santals in this district are also casual visitors to the cinema or video halls. According to primary information, 34.2 per cent go to the movies, going once or twice a month. Mainly the young generation prefer to see the movies. Besides, about 4.0 per cent of the people read magazines; daily papers etc. which also is completely a new habit with these people.

Acceptance of Family Planning

Acceptance of family planning programme among the Santals in this district is quite negligible. Most of them do not believe in planning. According to some respondents 'the children are gifts of god' and one becomes a sinner if he or she takes measures for birth control. Among those who believe in planning, they use herbal medicines. A small percentage undergo operations, no doubt. But it appears from the study that it is rather poverty responsible more for keeping people backward or reluctant to use family planning methods than knowledge. For instance, it has been observed that if medicines are available free of cost they are not reluctant to use them. The primary data (Table-81.) shows the number of males and females following the programmes responding to various methods.

In Rampurhat, Mayureswar, Dubrajpur, Suri, Sainthia and Bolpur number of females having accepted planning is more than in other police stations. This may be due to the availability of medical facilities, higher rate of literacy and the influence of the higher caste people (Fig.66).

Causes of Changes

After studying the nature and extent of change it is necessary to find out the factors responsible for such changes. According to field study, there are some particular factors behind these changes. In the early period,

Table-81

Acceptance of Family Planning Divorces among the Santals
of Birbhum district, (in % to total Surveyed population).

Police Stations	Use Con- traceptive		Use Con- traceptive & had ope- ration		Use Herbal Medicines		Believe in Family Planning		Not be- lieve in F.Planning	
	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.
Muraroi	-	10.0	-	30.0	-	10.0	-	20.0	100.0	30.0
Nalhati	-	3.5	-	10.7	-	14.3	-	14.3	100.0	57.1
Rampurhat	-	-	-	33.4	-	18.2	-	21.2	100.0	21.2
Mayureswar	-	-	-	18.1	3.2	4.8	-	33.3	96.8	43.8
Md.Bazar	-	1.5	-	13.8	-	3.2	-	9.2	100.0	72.3
Rajnagar	-	-	-	30.8	-	-	-	23.1	100.0	46.1
Khoyrasole	-	-	-	-	-	14.3	-	28.6	100.0	57.1
Dubrajpur	-	-	-	40.6	-	6.2	-	43.7	100.0	9.4
Suri	-	-	-	18.2	-	2.7	-	17.3	100.0	61.8
Illambazar	-	2.9	-	22.8	-	-	-	2.9	100.0	71.4
Sainthis	-	-	-	14.9	-	11.7	-	28.7	100.0	44.7
Bolpur	-	1.9	-	13.9	-	2.8	13.2	20.4	86.8	61.0
Labhpur	-	-	-	4.8	-	-	-	-	100.0	95.2
Nanur	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Investigation, 1989-90.

there used to be a wide gap between the tribal and the non-tribal people. The tribals always maintained a separate identity in their culture, religion, language and social status. In course of time, however, they have come to be economically exploited

by the Hindu elite, imperilling their identity in many cases. In recent times, however, the closer contact between the tribal people with their non-tribal neighbours has narrowed down the gap between them, and at the same time has brought in important changes in the socio-economic life of the tribal communities.

Before independence, the Santal Rebellion (1855) brought about some changes among the Santals. Since independence, implementation of several development programmes in several plan periods, the constitutional safeguards and reservation of quota for different opportunities together have affected the life-style by way of providing education and diversified occupational opportunities.

Regarding education, the Government has taken programmes like setting up of primary schools in most of the villages which provide dresses twice a year, books and necessary items free of cost to the students. This has effectively increased attendance as the primary investigation shows. 'Anganwari' is also another important programme taken up in this area to provide pre-primary knowledge to the children of an age from 3 to 6 years. Besides, at Junior High or Madhyamik stage the Santal children enjoy a number of facilities as mentioned in Chapter II, though the number of such schools is rather small. To name a few the Nagari Junior High School in Suri Police Station and the Nirbhaypur Junior High School in Md.Bazar Police Stations are both for male and female

scheduled castes and tribal students. There is one big girls' secondary school at Rampurhat Police Station and a few more boys schools in other places of the district catering to the needs of Santal children. The student get books and other necessary materials free of cost and free board and lodging. Apart from that there are arrangements for providing training on vocational trade and craft as mentioned earlier. All these have positively contributed to the rise of literacy level among the Santals in this district.

Together with education, the communication system in this district also takes an important role in changing their life style. Most of the village is accessible due to the development of communication system, mainly by roadways. This is visible in the development of bus services during the recent decades, making movement much easier and frequent, and encouraging communication among the Santals. All these have contributed to a greater exposure of the Santals, bringing them in closer contact with the higher caste people and the influence is already felt in the socio-economic transformation of the people.

Implementation of a number of self-employment schemes provide some new jobs for the Santals of this district such as weaving of bags, blacksmithy, carpentry, cycle repairing, leaf plate making etc. Thus, education on the one hand and availability of a larger scope of employment on the other have an important effect on the nature of occupations pushing

people more and more into the modern as well as newer types of activities than keeping them confined to cultivation alone. This happens to be one of the most important changes that has taken place in the Santal society. A specific example cited here will reveal the significance of such changes taking place due to educational opportunities and giving rise to cases of sharp cultural contrasts within the community. The two types of families cited as cases for study show different types of culture. In a family in Bolpur Police Station both the wife and the husband having passed the secondary examination from missionary school are engaged in good jobs. They provided higher education to their 3 children who are now engaged in good jobs and have married themselves without depending on their parents, as had been the usual custom of marriage. The old couple have constructed a two-storied house after retirement and possesses varying types of assets including a moped. In contrast, in a rich farming family who owning a large amount of land and the family - head having studied upto class V, got married for 8 times. He has 4 children and has a two - storied hut with tin roof along with only a few assets like a cycle and a watch and a pump set. This brings out the characteristic differences between the two families, one having comparatively higher education under the guidance and influence of missionaries and other higher caste culture in service sector. While the other with less education sticks to time old customs in his social behaviour. In some cases this type



22. LABOUR - CLASS HOUSEHOLD



23. SERVICE HOLDER HOUSEHOLD

of change has been observed. Over and above, this , in those families where the females are engaged in services, this type of change has also become a common feature. Further, political factors also take an important role in changing the life style of the Santals.

In short, the factors discussed in the foregoing paragraphs appear to have taken a direct role in affecting the life of the Santals and this is clearly manifest not only in the economic life but also in the behaviouralistic pattern of them.