

Tribal Cultures- Educational And Economic Enrichment Of The Future

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ABSTRACT :

The present scenario of tribal culture and their socio-economic conditions in West Bengal is not a very encouraging one, though things have improved due to government interventions at the State and Central level. Education suffers the most as a homogeneous national curriculum is alien to these children, and do not help in strengthening their knowledge in their craft or train them in making their talent well known to the world. Also, their unique talents and knowledge needs to be appreciated, celebrated through education for the country to show inclusive and all-round progress.

Keywords: Tribal culture, mask making, Chow Dance, Sutradhars, socio economic impact, Curriculum redesign.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal traditions and motifs form an important part of our country's heritage, in fact, every civilisation on earth relies heavily on their indigenous talent and knowledge, which get stymied, to an extent, due to a homogenised technology dependent contemporary world. But that world is now facing challenges due to environmental degradation, drug resistance, degenerative diseases and relationship breakdowns, and is moving back to traditional knowledge, particularly in India due to its long history of knowledge evolution. We see evidence of this long history in various folk cultures, in their food processing, medicine, art, handicrafts, dance, music and education. But somehow, it has not received the respect and recognition it deserves. We try to bring together the traditional culture of tribals, their present problems and concomitant solutions in the present paper.

PURULIA DISTRICT HAS A LONG AND RICH HISTORY OF TRIBAL CULTURES

Purulia District lies towards the northern side of the state of West Bengal in India. It has traditionally been home to diverse

tribal populations due to its unique geographical positioning, amongst forested areas and hilly zones, close to the foothills of the Himalayas. The Saheb-Bandh, a well-known body of water in the middle of the town of Purulia, is a haven for birds that migrate from all over the subcontinent. The region's important rivers are Kangsabati, Kumari, Dwarkeswar, Subarnarekha, and Damodar. Purulia's landscape is rocky and hilly, with hills, narrow rivers, and small patches of forest.

The main crop here is rice, but silk and lac are also grown. Due to its rocky soil, Purulia is not as good for farming as other districts in West Bengal. However, the area is known for its hills, forests, archaeological digs, and ruins of old buildings and temples. The natural beauty and charm of this land with red soil are made even better by the tribal way of life.

87.25 percent of the district's 2,927,965 people live in rural areas, according to the 2011 Census. The Kurmi-Mahato community is the largest social group in the district, but there are also a lot of tribal people in Purulia. In the Jangal Mahal area, tribal groups like the Santals live in patches of dense deciduous forest (the largest group). Some of these tribes have been able to keep their religious and cultural traditions and customs that make them unique. Local versions of Bengali and Hindi, as well as the different tribal languages, are the main ways people in the area talk to each other.

Folk art and festivals in Purulia show how many different kinds of people live there. In the Seraikella districts, the well-known Chhou dance is done in three different ways (Jharkhand). In 2010, Purulia (West Bengal) and Mayurbhanj were added to the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Performing Arts (Odisha). People all over the world want to collect Chhou masks made in Chorida village in the Baghmundi block. Natua is a Purulia-based folk dance with a martial arts theme that isn't as well known. Ritual songs like Bhadu and Tusu, which are tied to festivals with the same names, are still popular among rural women from indigenous castes. Most tribal performance arts, like Sohrai and Baha, are tied to their festivals (of the Santals). The Jhumur folk singing style has been around for hundreds of years.

The urban indifference

India has a vibrant folk culture. Our folk legacy and the Indian identity as an unique melting pot are enriched by folklore arts, beliefs, rites and rituals, and rural handicrafts. These were activities including singing, dancing, and crafts as well as information that was taught orally. Folklore plays a significant part in transmitting information, wisdom, and social conventions as well as in maintaining the social order. Due to their complexity, originality, and need of hard labour and discipline in all three domains of knowledge, cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor, tribal handicrafts and other art forms profoundly contribute to the cultural and educational heritage of our nation.

All our students need to learn about the rich history, culture, and traditions of our nation. But that has not happened in our country yet, and that is an unfortunate situation. We tend to look at these communities with an attitude of pity, wherein they need to be emancipated, urbanised, they are looked down upon for being backward and ignorant. Ironically, these communities have survived and conserved their environment for a very long time, they have suffered economically and culturally even more when their way of life has been intruded upon, due to rampant deforestation and unplanned urbanisation. Their traditional knowledge needs to be cherished as the future generations of our country need to understand survival instincts and skills. They will also acquire and put into practice many skills that will help them become independent and resilient. Right now, things are the other way round where tribal students are schooled with a curriculum they don't understand. The historic, contemporary, and developed sociocultural legacy of India needs to be the subject of educational research. Future citizens will be far more acclimated to a changing environment if these concepts are included into the classroom, and the present study is an attempt to find out how to do that.

The role of Ethnography

Through the practise of ethnography, a researcher gets to spend a lot of time interacting with and studying various cultures in their natural habitat. In such a study, the researcher's primary goal is not to present their own interpretation of the meanings of participants' behaviours, but rather to discover how they understand and give meaning to

events, particularly the discussions and actions of participants. Being able to directly access the lives of those being studied, to put oneself in their shoes, and attempt to gain a valid insight into their lives is also a necessary component of studying culture. This is in addition to analysing, interpreting, and identifying them through records, views, and information that already exist. These are anthropological methods where the researcher actively participates in the group's or community's life experiences.

RESEARCH DESIGN IN THE PRESENT STUDY:

Because the researcher was unable to "intervene" and exert control on the school curriculum's content or how tribal pupils were exposed to it, the study design was non-experimental. Control could only be exerted over the observed. Because statistics do not adequately capture the whole range of human affairs, perceptions, sentiments, and the actual situation in which they occur, the researcher justified the use of qualitative research. Although the social world may be outside of a person, the names, ideas, and labels that make it up are products of social and historical production. Subjectivists contend that since every cultural and historical situation is unique and must be analysed in the context in which it is situated. Therefore, human-centered studies like this one requires internal observation. It was crucial for the researcher to comprehend and take into account the perspectives of the individuals who would be impacted by the state government policies and initiatives on tribal education and livelihood.

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THE METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

At the very outset, the researcher interacted with people from the "Sutrdhar community" of Purulia and inquired about their lifestyle and culture. The researcher was at this point working to clarify her study issue, which would later aid her in choosing the best field location. The creation of specific research sub-topics was aided by a review of the material found online and in national libraries as well as conversations with other artists, performers, authors, and researchers who were both Santal and non-Santal. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher visited the field location many times and spoke with several of the community's older citizens. Among them were a Santal Chou dancer, Kartik Singmura from Charida, and Arjun Mahato, a local who assisted the researcher in getting to know the Santal peasants. For a better understanding of the current state of the tribes, the researcher also went to two seminars on tribal problems held at the Baghmundi forest office. These trips made it easier to formulate pertinent and acceptable inquiries about the chosen place. Following completion of these preliminaries, the researcher remained on the field site with the Santals to record their way of life, culture, and communication system in accordance with the predetermined goals.

The research focused on the Santal tribe in Purulia's culture, communication, and knowledge base. Santals who were living in their native socio-cultural setting became the topic of the study, because of their unique cultural traditions, music, dance, handicrafts etc. As a result, the research needed a field location where Santals were the predominant population. In the Purulia district's Baghmundi division, there are the majority of the Santal settlements.

The choice of an acceptable field location for data collecting came next. The study's subjects would be the Santals who reside at the field site's (village) community. The method the researcher utilised at this time to choose the volunteers was informal. The ethnographer has to choose the best location for fieldwork based on the purpose and goals of the research, using discretion and convenience.

When the researcher initially arrived in the hamlet, she saw groups of youngsters lounging around and men, women, and children standing on the thresholds of their homes, some of them holding children in their arms, others standing, sitting,

and chitchatting under trees, and some of them intoxicated. All of these individuals were giving the researcher strange looks. Arjun Mahato accompanied the researcher to this community. He explained the reason for the visit and presented the researcher to the people. The investigator wanted to speak with Kartick Singmura (son of Padmashree Gambhir Singmura, renowned Chou artist). Others in the group approached her while she waited for Kartick Singmura and began enquiring about the reason for her visit. The researcher found it challenging to describe them. They were somehow informed of the visit's objective.

They initially, had a hunch the researcher worked for a federal agency. That is why the school in the area and the teachers were reluctant to talk too. They were gradually explained so that they understood that the trip was entirely intellectual in nature. They didn't appear to be very persuaded and began to wonder what they would gain. Kartick Singmura had just arrived at that point and instructed them to leave. They continued to remain there, though, and listened to the whole exchange. After some time, Arjun Mahato and the researcher departed the area. The next several days saw visits to various settlements. The researcher was questioned the same way about her visit's aim at each visit. Kartick Singmura finally granted the researcher permission to conduct a number of interviews, and from such rigorous exercises, the following results were found out.

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS WHICH ARE HINDERING THE PROMOTION OF THESE PARTICULAR ART FORMS

In Purulia, tourism is thriving. The Deulghera temples, the terracotta sculptures, the waterfalls, hills, and dams that make up the area's natural beauty are among the popular destinations for tourists, though the socio-economic conditions of the residents have not seen much improvement.

The majority of Purulia's mask manufacturers are Bengalis and Hindus. They are Sutradhar according to the clan system. The Sutradhars, a group of mask-makers, once resided in West Bengal's Bardhaman area. In order to create fresh idols of the deities worshipped in his palace, Madan Mohan Singh Deo, the ruler of Baghmundi at the time, transported them to Charida around 150 years ago. Since since, they have lived there,

turning this place into a hamlet of artisans. Later, they entered the manufacture of masks. The villagers often utilise locally accessible raw materials such as clay, water, fabric, coal ash, paper, handmade glue, colour, varnish, beads, feathers, leaves, and flowers to create their masks. Because of the rising demand, simple accessibility, and cost-effectiveness, craftspeople are increasingly turning to plastic ornamental items bought in Kolkata's Burrabazar district. This was a compromise they are not emotionally comfortable with, and many of them very honestly stated that. Anil Sutradhar claims that all of the mask manufacturers originated in the Burdwan District. They were asked by the Baghmundi rulers to create God and goddess idols, but instead they got busy creating masks.

Problems of Chhow Mask makers:

We see that many of the present generation do not want to pursue this traditional profession.

Such colourful masks, which were mostly surrounded by dense foliage, were created to boost the spirits and morale of the natives. The aggressive art form was also intended to keep people alert and nimble so they could survive in the harsh environment. When the "Chhau" dance is based on tales from the same, the masks are often created in the shapes of Gods and Goddesses and characters from epics, or they assume the forms of wild creatures when the art form portrays the conflict between man and beast. The craftsmen themselves work really hard to make ends meet as they produce colourful looks and moods for the audience to immerse themselves in the colours of the art. They have to put up with escalating raw material prices, poor product advertising, and a plethora of middlemen whose hands need to be greased profusely in order for their masks to reach the purchasers. They have very little extra money for food because of these considerations.

The Mask Makers' Livelihood Issues: Mask manufacturers have a number of issues that affect their ability to earn a living, most notably a shortage of space, rooms, and water. According to 88 percent of survey participants, this problem is extremely serious. 75 percent of respondents reported having a serious issue with a Khapra-made roof, which results in rainwater infiltration during the monsoon season and negatively impacts their quality of life. Most homes lack a sanitation and sewerage

infrastructure, which is a very serious problem. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana is creating an impact, but that too for residents who are well informed and have a slightly better income.

Chhow dance performers' issues: The majority of Chhow dance performers are getting older, performing poorly, and quitting their jobs. Most of the time, the younger generation shows little interest in their parents' professions, such as performing Chhau dance or singing and telling tales at "palas." Due to poverty, unemployment, obstacles in everyday life, and uncertainty about the future, this well-liked dance genre that has garnered attention and reputation on a national and worldwide level is neglected by the current generation, who are more interested in reservations in government jobs.

So where are the answers?

Acknowledging and recognising: Different pragmatically helpful, practically applicable, **scientifically sound criteria for categorising and classifying tribal and folk art** have to be offered and strengthened in order to better protect and strategise for survival of these art forms. Awards and prizes, through national and international competitions will go a big way in developing these unique art forms, even more.

Pension Plan: The West Bengal government has already begun a pension plan for chhow dancers, but chhow mask manufacturers also need this plan. The biggest conflict here begins between mask manufacturers and dancers, both of which are very unique skill sets. To help them financially, all mask manufacturers with BPL cards must have a pension programme established.

Provision of Market: According to the perception study, it was noted that there is no local market to buy the supplies needed to make masks and sell the finished products. In order to meet the regular demand and supply of the mask makers, a localised market should be established in Charida village and close to the Purulia railway station.

Bank Loan: According to information provided by the locals, it is noted that there are few banking facilities that will lend money to mask makers so they can make masks or buy raw materials. Although Bandhan Bank has already taken some

steps, additional nationalised or private banks should be established in order to provide these residents of Charida Village with loan facilities at lower interest rates.

Tourist Lodges: Because there are no tourist lodges in Charida village, both domestic and foreign visitors who want to buy such masks from the mask manufacturers must go a great distance, either from Purulia town or other locations from Bagmundi block. In order to showcase the Ayodhya Hills' natural beauty as well as the traditional culture of Charida Village, the West Bengal Government and a few private hotel enterprises may build some hotels, providing good facilities for national as well as international travelers. The guides can be trained in languages, so they too become valuable assets for society.

Sewerage System: Because Charida hamlet lacks an underground sewage system, significant rainfall may cause floods. There is no proper place for disposing of trash, which causes contamination of the ecosystem. Therefore, a rubbish disposal site should exist for the benefit of the nearby Charida village residents. They understand the concept of composting better than urban dwellers, and that knowledge needs to be utilised by the Government and the education system.

Sanitation: About 15 to 20 percent of households have a sanitation system in their home, while the other families utilise an open field, a forest, or a pond as their sanitation location. In order to promote "Swaccha Bharat Cess" or "Nirmal Bangla" for the improvement of the livelihood pattern of the mask manufacturers, a concrete sanitation system should be built in order to enhance environmental quality.

The aforementioned steps by the government can help a lot in improving the life and work conditions of the tribal artisans. But Education is an important factor in making them more aware of their markets, their abilities and the value of their work in the world. The education system there has its own share of problems with student disinterest, complete lack of socio emotional connections and retrieval of knowledge in their real life. Despite enrolment, free education and midday meals, attendance and results are very poor. After extensive discussions with village elders, children and teachers, the following suggestions may be offered:

SOME MORE DETAILED EDUCATIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- If we want to introduce this diverse culture in main stream of education, Government and Syllabus committee have to introduce their story, their livelihood, their art of living, their art and craft, their dance and drama, their knowledge of conservation of natural resources and the contribution of their ancestors in the syllabus. It is only recently that Indians are getting to know about revolutionaries like Birla Munda, who were vital in the fabric of the history of our country.
- In language and literature, from the primary stage to higher education, there should be at least one poem, or kobigan, or short story, or essay, or drama, or novel, or provincial literature which will energize the tribal students that there is something of their own. Through introduction of these themes in education, the tribal students will improve their attention and go to school of their own interest.

“Rangamatir Deshe ja, belpaharir deshe ja...” a tribal song is very famous as a Bengali folk song, in such a way a lot of other songs with catchy attractive tonalities depicting tribal culture and their heritage need to be introduced into main stream of education.

- In science and mathematics, it is easy to introduce their livelihood motifs for teaching, such as the design of the mud house and the decoration made by them are various tools of geometry and trigonometry. It is easy to introduce their daily life and daily usage materials, their food, their art and craft may be mentioned in various chapters in arithmetic like profit loss, interest and so on. In chemistry, it is easy to introduce the preparation of vegetable colours and dyes which they excel in, many of their processes of creating materials for their craft have chemical significance. Their medicinal plant knowledge and usage are gradually gaining international recognition now, and should be introduced into Botany and Biology in our curriculum.
- The city children will never know how the tribal life is, how the natural life is, how the natural example is, they only know the so-called smartness of

dress, smartness of spoken English or spoken Hindi and the sophistication of the city smartness. But they do not know the actual smartness lives in the simplicity with mud water. If it is possible to intervene with the tribal story, the tribal livelihood, the tribal art of living, the tribal art and craft, the tribal dance and drama, the tribal way of conservation of natural resources and the contributions of their ancestors in the main stream educational syllabus, the tribal students will focus their attention for the formal school education. At the same time the city children may be enriched to know that we have a very comprehensive human and nature-oriented culture that we term as “unity in diversity”. The tribal elders and artisans could also get an opportunity to teach city children and make them understand and appreciate their work. Thus, a constant exchange of ideas may take place amongst various communities of our country, which will lead to a more innovative application-oriented population, ready to face the challenges of the future for the human race.

- After completion of education, we all will have to take entry into the world of economy i.e. in business or in service either in Govt. sector or in Private sector or Corporate sector. Other than just relying on Govt clerical jobs, the tribal people may start up their own business with their craft and make their craft reach globally. If there is an inclusion in the syllabus about the tribal craft and its global marketing, through modern technology, that will be a mile stone in online marketing and computing.
- Finally, no government can execute such a mammoth task by themselves. We cannot shirk our own responsibility towards creating a more inclusive, truly educated society. The so called ‘civilized’ city dwelling populations taking decisions and setting discourses, will have to accommodate with the various cultures of our society and should accept and appreciate the tribal life and the rich storehouse of knowledge that it provides. It is also the responsibility of every section of the society to take part for educating the nation through various systems of knowledge generation and propagation, without relying on a very fixed norm referenced paper pencil memory-

based education. We hope situation will be better in near future and government as well as societies would take some effective initiatives to eradicate prevailing educational and economic imbalances prevailing among the tribal populations all over the country.

CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the rich cultural treasure of the tribal population of India and the problems of sustainability and encouragement of these cultural practices. Moreover, the role of education in bringing these cultures closer to Indian households and inculcating pride and interest in tribal children has also been talked about. An education system, predominantly based on a Western model cannot really assimilate the richness and diversity of our country and its knowledge forms, and we are understanding that fact more and more as electronic media drives home the limited access that our school syllabi have in the real, everyday lives of so many of our countrymen. This needs to change, as that invaluable knowledge is what will make this country as great as it deserves to be.

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