

Original article

ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN MATERIAL AND NON-MATERIAL CULTURE OF TRIBAL LIFE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN BANKURA, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is deeply rooted in Indian rural folks life. Tribal people of India are no exception to that. Especially Santal Tribe has their long-standing agricultural heritage, which is being reflected in both their Material and Non-material culture. Though the Studied Santal Tribe of Eastern India is affluent in Agriculture related Material and Non-material culture, instead they are lagging behind due to non-incorporation of modern technology in Agriculture, which causing less production and which in turn trembling the future of their agricultural tradition. Initiation of revival programme and amicable support from the part of local service providers can save the studied Santal Tribe's adored tradition and dependable livelihood i.e., agriculture.

Keywords: Agriculture, Tribal life, Subsistence-occupation, Material and Non-material Culture

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the primary source of income for the majority of Indian population (GOI, 2012). According to 2011 census of India, Indian rural population comprise 68.8% of total population which stands for 83.25 crore of Indian population (Sarkar, 2014) and more than 76 percent of the Indian rural population depend on agriculture and allied activities. Agriculture dominates Indian economy to such an extent that high proportion of working population of India is engaged in agriculture (Begum, 2015).

Almost 8.6 percent of Indian population belongs to 705 tribal communities and counts 104 million Indian populations (GOI, 2013). Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and are West Bengal are the states having a large number of Tribal populations. In Indian states and Union Territories around 93 per cent of Tribal population live in rural areas and are earning their livelihood through agriculture and allied activities (NSSO, 2013).

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Tribes of India have a long and rich cultural past. Nevertheless, as Indian Tribes lacked a written tradition, hence it is difficult for anthropologists and historians to ordain their past decisively (Tribe, Tribal India, Tribal History, 1993). The tribes, according to Verma, are "the autochthonous people of Indian land are being considered to be the earliest settlers in Indian Peninsula. They are being called as Adivasis, meaning the first settlers. Before to the caste system, people were divided into different tribes. At that time, each tribe was a self-contained unit (Varma, 1995). But presently the overall areas inhabited by the Indian Tribes represent a significant part of the underdeveloped areas of the country (NSSO, 2013).

However, the Tribes of Indian Sub-Continent especially of Eastern India are better known for their cultural vibrancy (Yadappanavar, 2003). Most of the Material culture of Tribal Communities in the said area aside of being unique is actually native to the region and the Material culture item of Tribes of Eastern India significantly includes agricultural implements with many other things (Mehta, 2004).

The variation of Tribal Material culture from the mainstream material culture of the region pertaining to Tribes arises primarily owing to the patterns of their livelihood quest and social lifestyles which is often being regulated by their geographical habitat (Ota, 2015). Non-material cultural heritage refers to the manifestation and cultural space of traditional culture handed down from generation to generation, such as traditional knowledge and skills (Weil et. al., 2007). Tribal people of the study area of Eastern India seems to have their Non-material cultural patronage aside of their Material cultural heritage in pursuing agriculture as primary livelihood strategy.

OBJECTIVES

To understand the role of agriculture in the studied Tribal villagers subsistence strategy.

To understand the influence of agriculture in their Material and Non-material culture.

To evaluate the present condition of agriculture, to predict the further consequences and to suggest remedial measures.

METHODOLOGY

Field study has been done during October 2017, in Santal inhabited Dhobaddi village of Bankura, W.B., India. Field survey performed through observations, personal interviews of farmers. Additional interviews have also been taken of those inhabitants of the village who were primarily associated with agricultural activities which included women, young boys, and girls. Elder women were also been consulted to gain information about ritualistic aspects of agriculture. Additional information and specification regarding the implements were recorded with measurements with the permission of owners. Secondary data from journals, books, internet sources have also been used to complete the present endeavour.

STUDY AREA

To accomplish the present study, a small remote village of south-western part of Bankura district was selected. The village named Dhobaddi, is a small village under the Gorabari Gram Panchayet and Khatra block of Bankura District, West Bengal, India. The inhabitants of the village are mainly Santal tribe.

Soil Condition of the Village

The soil is mainly gravelly -sandy and is sometimes reddish in colour due to the high content of iron. Reddish soil (*Moram mati* or *Lal mati* or *Hansa*) and gravelly-sandy soil are predominant the village. The village roads and paths are found to be covered by these kinds of soils. The Tribal villagers of Dhobaddi village locally call the high land soil as '*Ghutu hansa*' while the low land soil is known as '*Baihara hansa*'. Agricultural land is mainly covered by loamy soil which is locally being called as '*Aatiar hansa*'.

Topography

To give the topographic description of the village Dhobaddi, it can be described that the nature of lands of the village is undulating. The border lines of the village found to be surrounded by some hills and rocks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The root of Indian village economy is embedded in agriculture, though there are so many secondary occupations. The phenomenon is also true in case of the present village Dhobaddi. There are some certain reasons for the rural folk of becoming depended on agriculture. Perhaps the main reason is that the rural people of India are so close to the soil and the second reason being there was a culture of agriculture in almost everywhere in the world in the rural villagers since the commencement of civilization. The tradition of agriculture is still being continued within the Indian rural folk.

Being rural Tribe the primary occupation of the studied Santal people are settled, agriculturist. They say they can't trace back from which juncture their forefathers pursued agriculture as their primary livelihood activity. But they can recall that at least for last three to five generations they have been adopting settled agriculture as their primary subsistence strategy. It has been found that both men and women are engaged in this pursuit. Though forest collection, fishing, hunting, labour work are some other important subsidiary sources of subsistence to them. Moreover, their women prepare leaf plates (*patrakhali*) and cups (*phuluhdana*) out of Sal leaves (*Sarjom Dare*). They also make brooms and mats out of grass and sell these products in the local market to supplement their family income. They are even expert in carpentry works and this skill also helps them to supplement their livelihood.

But as per them any of the subsidiary occupations can't give them as consistency and convincing support for a living as agriculture does. If the market's trafficking for agricultural products not that profitable then they indulge in the reciprocity of agricultural products within the village or sometimes with nearby villages. That's why they always rely on agriculture for livelihood. There was no Santal family in the studied village that doesn't have at least one agricultural plot and there were no girls, boys, men, women who never did any sort of agriculture-related work. Literally every day they necessarily do some sort of cultivation related work for their subsistence.

SOME FACTS AND FEATURES RELATED TO AGRICULTURE IN THE STUDIED VILLAGE

All the family members share their hand in agricultural activity and there are some strict age and sex wise division of labours.

The studied Santal people sell agricultural products to the local market after fulfilment of their domestic needs. Most of the families don't produce extra paddy they only sell their produced vegetables. Reciprocity (General) is still in practice there circling agricultural products.

They associate agriculture with their art and recreational activities too. Songs have been composing, paintings have been depicting (on houses walls, courtyards), and embroideries have been doing with the essence of agriculture. They even welcome new agricultural production with songs, dances and music.

The knowledge of cultivation they gained from their ancestors' generation wise. They mostly solve any problem related to agriculture discussing with other farmers or after discussion with local seed and manure sellers. They don't get any vocational training for scientific farming and Panchayet officials hardly support them in any such crisis situation. They feel communication and caste barrier with Government officials recruited to provide agriculture-related support. On the other hand, the officials are not that cordial to approach the farmers to extend support. It seems to be they are just working in papers.

Even though studied Santal people are not getting that support from any such civil agency instead agriculture is as important to them as they choose a groom for their girls depending on the boy's ploughing and cultivating capability. Even family's wealth is being measured depending on the family's possession of agricultural lands and per year agricultural production.

As per them, they owe the debt to their land, which they consider as their mother for producing crops. In addition, they consider cultivation as their moral duty even if it is not that productive to pay tribute to their lands, environments and forefathers.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT AGRICULTURAL LANDS, PRODUCTIONS

On asking my informant told that the agricultural land of Dhobaddi village is mainly divided into two categories. They divide agricultural land on the basis of altitude and fertility. On the basis of altitude agricultural lands are of two types

Fanga/ Boith: These are the cultivable lands in high altitude. The people cultivate paddy, mustard seeds, potato and different types of vegetables on this type of lands.

Soi/ Boihat: These are the lands in low altitude. In this kind of lands the only paddy is being cultivated.

They further divide lands on the basis of fertility. For them land could be of three types owes to their fertility or productivity.

Entel hansa/ Bohal: These are the most fertile lands. Here ‘Amon’ type of paddy and vegetables are being cultivated.

Gitil hansa/Baid: These are the lands with medium fertility being used for raising paddy (seed bed) only.

Tora: This type of lands is least fertile.

On different kinds of agricultural lands they produce different kinds of crops including Cereals (Paddy viz. Amon, Aaus, Boro, Joya, Iri), Roots (Radish, Red potato, Carrot, Beet, Turnip etc.), Tubers (Potato, Ginger, Turmeric, Onion, Garlic, Arum etc), Vegetables (Cauliflower, Cabbage, Spinach, Brinjal, Tomato, pumpkin, Bottle ground etc), Pulses (Pea, Legumes, Gram, Red gram etc), variety of leafy vegetables, fruits etc.

Aside from all seasonal crops and vegetables paddy is the single important crop which is being cultivated predominantly. All the cultivators produce paddy at least for one season within a single year.

On asking one of my informants told that he possesses two bigha cultivable lands. He recalled the possession of the said lands for his last three generations. He is maintaining and cultivating the land after his father.

All the produced paddy of that informant is being consumed domestically. Therefore there is no market profit in his paddy cultivation. In some rare cases, he sells rice in Khatra market to fulfil some urgent needs like treatment. In such year he had to buy rice from market to meet his domestic need.

Aside from paddy he produces some seasonal crops including Radish, chilli, Carrot, Cabbage, Pumpkin etc. He produces much extra of each of these and sells all the extra harvest to local market.

In addition to agriculture, he also runs a Shop in the village. Sometimes he even joins the communal fishing and hunting to obey the customary system and for his own mental solace.

AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS

Agricultural implements reflect the Material culture of the studied Santal Tribal folk to a great extent. As their Material culture is backed by their Non-material cultural heritage hence Material cultural implements are the manifestation of their inclination.

The studied Santal villagers literally maintain a hand to mouth existence. Hence a very few numbers of domestic utensils and furniture have been found to be used by them. Instead, they possess a range of agricultural implements to maintain their primary livelihood activity, agriculture and they even consider agricultural implements as something devotional as they even relate their Gods and Goddesses with agricultural activities.

The agricultural implements are in use in the study area are mostly communal property, though some implements under private ownership. Nevertheless, the families of the study village possess some kinds of agricultural implements to cultivate their lands. Women are not allowed to handle heavy implements. There are some taboos as such associated with agricultural implements, viz., as per taboo Plough can't be touched by women. As per villagers touching of plough by women can bring a non-productive agricultural season.

Below some specific information about their agricultural implements is given.

SL. NO.- 1.

ENGLISH NAME- Plough.

LOCAL NAME- *Langol*.

FUNCTION- It is a main agricultural implement. Plough is used to tilling the soil of agricultural lands.

PARTS- Mainly a plough has three parts such as a Long handle (*Eash*), Shaft (*Tir*), Angular portion (*Bota*) and Working edge (*Phal*).

MATERIALS USED- Except the Working edge the remaining three portions are made of wood while the Working edge is made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS-The working edge is 26 cm in length and its maximum breadth is 7.5 cm. The handle is 122 cm in length and the long arm of the Angular portion 63 cm in length while the comparatively short arm (containing working edge) is 56 cm in length. The Shaft is 16 cm in length.

DURABILITY- 5-6 years.

MARKET PRICE-160- 180 Rupees.

SL. NO. – 2.

ENGLISH NAME-Yoke.

LOCAL NAME- *Joaal* .

FUNCTION- It is a frame of wood which is used to join two bullocks for drawing. With it, plough is also remain attached by the handle. So it is also responsible for working of the plough.

PARTS- There is one MAIN PART and three notches (*Khach*) in a Yoke. There are two ADDITIONAL PIECES (*Sooil*) both which remain attached with the Yoke.

MATERIALS USED- It is entirely made of wood, where sometimes Iron spike are in use for attachment of the two Additional pieces.

MEASUREMENTS-The Main part is 90 cm in length and its maximum breadth is 15 cm. Each Additional piece is 26 cm in length.

DURABILITY- 6-7 years.

MARKET PRICE-It is occasionally being made by the farmer. But they generally buy it from the market in the expense of 40-45 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 3.

ENGLISH NAME- Ladder.

LOCAL NAME- *Moi*.

FUNCTION- It's being used to level the cultivation land after ploughing.

PARTS- It has two parts. These are the MAIN BODY and STEPS.

MATERIALS USED- Wood and bamboo split.

MEASUREMENTS-Its Main body is around 232 cm in length and each Step is 31cm in length.

DURABILITY- 5-6 years

MARKET PRICE-20-30 Rupees

SL. NO.- 4.

ENGLISH NAME- Spade.

LOCAL NAME- *Kodal*.

FUNCTION- It is being used for digging the soil of cultivation land.

PARTS- There are three parts in a spade. These are HANDLE, WORKING SURFACE and BUTT END.

MATERIALS USED- The Handle is made of wood and the Working surface and Butt end is made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS-The Handle is 57 cm in length. The working surface is 13 cm in length and the Butt end is 10.5 cm in length.

DURABILITY- 8-9 years.

MARKET PRICE-55-60 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 5.

ENGLISH NAME- Pick.

LOCAL NAME- *Gaiti*.

FUNCTION- It is in use for prick the soil and to make holes in agricultural land.

PARTS- There are three different parts in a pick. These are HANDLE, BUTT END and pointed WORKING SURFACE. Working surface may be on one or both sides.

MATERIALS USED- The Handle is made of wood. The working surface and the Butt end are made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS- The Handle is 63 cm in length. The working surface is 20.5 cm in length and the Butt end is 12 cm in length and 6.5 cm in breadth.

DURABILITY- 10-11 years.

MARKET PRICE- 70-80 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 6.

ENGLISH NAME-Sickle

LOCAL NAME- *Kaste*

FUNCTION- It's mainly in use to reap ripen Paddy.

PARTS- There are three different parts in a sickle. These are HANDLE, BUTT END and flat WORKING SURFACE, which is a flat plate with an arch-like curvature and BARBS.

MATERIALS USED- Handle is made of wood, which remains covering the Butt end. The Working surface and the butt end is made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS-The working surface and the Butt end is made of iron. The Handle is made of wood.

DURABILITY- 5-6 years.

MARKET PRICE- 25-30 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 7.

ENGLISH NAME- Bill-hook

LOCAL NAME- *Da*.

FUNCTION-It is in use lose the soil of agricultural lands. It is also in use to cut branches and to prepare bamboo splits to prepare scaffold (*Macha*) and fence (*Bera*) in agricultural land.

PARTS- It has three parts these are WORKING SURFACE, SHAFT and MEDIATOR PART which remain covered by the Shaft.

MATERIALS USED- Shaft is made of wood and the remaining part s are made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS-The Working surface is 16 cm in length and its maximum breadth is 6.2 cm while the mediator part is 12 cm in length though most of the (4 cm) mediator part remain covered by the shaft. The Shaft is 14 cm in length and 5 cm in diameter.

DURABILITY- 8-9 years

MARKET PRICE- 45-55 Rupees

SL. NO.- 8.

ENGLISH NAME- Big Spud.

LOCAL NAME- *Khonta*.

FUNCTION- It is in use to prick the soil and to make a deep hole in agricultural land.

PARTS- There are two parts in a Big Spud. These are WORKING SURFACE and a HANDLE, for grip.

MATERIALS USED- The Working surface is made of iron while the Handle is made of wood.

MEASUREMENTS-The Working surface is 8 cm in breadth and 11 cm in length while the Handle is 124 cm in length.

DURABILITY- 12-13 years.

MARKET PRICE- 70-80 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 9.

ENGLISH NAME-Iron bar.

LOCAL NAME- *Shabol*.

FUNCTION- It is also in use to prick the soil and to make holes in agricultural lands.

PARTS- WORKING SURFACE and HANDLE.

MATERIAL USED- It is entirely made of iron.

MEASUREMENTS-The Working surface is 6 cm in length and 4.5 cm in breadth and while the Handle is 62 cm in length and its diameter is 2.7 cm.

DURABILITY- 13-14 years.

MARKET PRICE-95-100 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 10.

ENGLISH NAME- Weeding spade (Small spud).

LOCAL NAME- *Khurpi*.

FUNCTION- It's in use for cleaning the weeds of agricultural lands and to loosen the soil of plant's roots.

PARTS- It has three parts those are WORKING SURFACE, MEDIATOR PART and SHAFT.

MATERIALS USED- The Working surface and Mediator portion are made of iron while the Shaft is made of wood.

MEASUREMENTS-Its Working surface is 4.5 cm in length and this part's maximum breadth is 5 cm. The Mediator portion is 16 cm in length. The Shaft is 7.5 cm in length and its

diameter is 2.3 cm.

DURABILITY- 4-5 years.

MARKET PRICE- 15-20 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 11.

ENGLISH NAME- Winnowing -tray.

LOCAL NAME- *Kulo*.

FUNCTION- It is in use to separate the chaff (Tus) from cereal's grains through blowing of the wind.

PARTS- the MAIN PLATE to hold grains and CURVED EDGE to hold the main plate.

MATERIALS USED- Bamboo splits, canes, ropes.

MEASUREMENTS-It is 55 cm in length and its maximum breadth is 35 cm.

DURABILITY- 3-4 years.

MARKET PRICE- 25-30 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 12.

ENGLISH NAME- Husking pedal.

LOCAL NAME- *Dhenki*.

FUNCTION-It is in use to loosen or detach the husks of cereal's grains.

PARTS- BODY, is the main wooden portion. WORKING END, is the end which works in friction with husks. After that husks get dissolved from grains. SUPPORTING PORTION, it supports the body to maintain height from the ground. There remains GRAIN CONTAINING HOLE on the ground within which working end of Husking pedal works. The base of grain containing hole remains cemented to prevent mixing of soil with grains.

MATERIALS USED- Wood, iron spikes, flat iron plate.

MEASUREMENTS-It is 122 cm in length and its height from the ground is 65 cm. The maximum diameter of the grain containing hole is 45 cm.

DURABILITY- 15-18 years.

MARKET PRICE- It is a domestic fixed implement which has been made by the help of carpenter after bringing the materials form market. It making charges with used materials is 350 Rupees.

SL. NO.- 13.

ENGLISH NAME- Husking machine.

LOCAL NAME- *Dhan charano machine.*

FUNCTION- Husking cereals.

PARTS- BASE, UPPER FRAME, BARREL LIKE MOVEABLE PORTION.

MATERIALS USED- Wood and iron.

MEASUREMENTS-It is 80 cm in height from the ground and its breadth is 65 cm and the diameter of the moveable portion is 40 cm.

DURABILITY- 15-16 years.

MARKET PRICE- 6000 Rupees.

RENT- 100 Rupees for 8 hours.

All the agricultural implements found in the studied village are traditional. No contemporary implement or technique found to be used by them in agriculture.

AGRICULTURAL RITUALS

In the studied village a few agricultural Rituals have been found to be observed. The tribal villagers consider agricultural rituals as an indispensable part of their livelihood activity. As per them without satisfying their deities good agricultural production could not be gained and the Agricultural Rituals are being observed to satisfy their deities. Apart from this, it is a way for them to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers. Some of the informants admitted that apart from traditional and religious bondage observing Agricultural Rituals give them mental solace.

Below some specific information about their agricultural rituals is given.

SL. NO.- 1.

NAME OF THE RITUAL: Worship of plough (*Langal puja*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Ashar* (June/July).

VENUE: The house of the villagers.

DESCRIPTION: The plough is not keeping on the ground after cleaning. The plough is being decorated by a globule of Vermillion and Sandal-paste. Then plough is being worshipped by

flower, censer, resin and lamp. Sunned-rice and ripe Bananas are being placed as offerings.

PURPOSE: To demonstrate their devotion to the plough and to please it and then on to get improvement in the production of crops.

Sl. No.- 2.

NAME OF THE RITUAL: Crops carry (*Deni puja*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Aswin* (September/ October).

VENUE: Courtyard.

DESCRIPTION: The first bundle of produced paddy is being carried by the farmer to his house's courtyard. Precaution is being taken while borrowing the paddy. As per customary during the journey paddy should not fall anywhere between the agricultural field and courtyard.

PURPOSE: To get more production.

Sl. NO.- 3.

NAME OF THE RITUAL: Celebration of newly produced rice (*Nobanno*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Agrohayana* (November/ December).

VENUE: House of villagers.

DESCRIPTION: They prepare a kind of porridge (*Payesh*-food made of rice milk and sugar) or a soup (*Nobanno*-soup made of rice, coconut, Sugar, milk) by the rice of newly collected paddy. Then they offer it to the '*Tulshir Than*'. Sometimes fruits, sweets are also being offered in addition to *Nobanno*. On this occasion, different dishes are also being prepared in the kitchen. Once after offerings and worshipping are over they consume all the offered items with their family members and relatives. The houses Santal villagers get a festive mood on this very occasion.

PURPOSE: It is the welcoming ceremony of new paddy and new rice with the blessings of their worshipped deities.

Sl. NO.- 4.

NAME OF THE RITUAL: Worship of God Biswakarma (*Dhenki puja/ Bishwa karma Puja*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Bhadra-Sancranti* (August/September).

VENUE: Shed under which a husking pedal has been fixed (*Dhenki Ghar*).

DESCRIPTION: This festival is being performed by the Santals who are close to Hindu faiths. In this ritual husking pedal (*Dhenki*) being is worshipped by flowers, censer, resin and lamp.

PURPOSE: It is the ritual to please God Bishakarma to get enhanced technical ability.

Sl. NO.- 5. NAME OF THE RITUAL: Worship of bullock carts (*Gorur Gadi Pujo*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Aswin* (September/ October).

VENUE: Bullock carts.

DESCRIPTION: After cleaning, bullock cart (*Gorur Gadi*) is being decorated by points of Vermillion and Sandal-paste. Then it is being worshipped by flowers, censer, resin and lamp.

PURPOSE: It is being held to seek good production and then on transportation of a large amount of produced plant through bullock carts in every production season.

Sl. NO.- 6.NAME OF THE RITUAL: Worship of produced crops (*Chass pujo*).

BENGALI MONTH: *Kartick* (October/November).

VENUE: House and courtyard of farmers.

DESCRIPTION: Produced plants (fresh vegetables, grains) of each farmer's own lands are being decorated with the vermilion sign and being kept in *kulo*, then be entered in the kitchen by the housewives.

PURPOSE: This ritual is being held to adorn the new products and to increase the production of cultivation.

CONCLUSIONS

Agriculture is not just the primary occupation or a way of livelihood for the studied Santal villagers. For them, agriculture is something proportionate to their lives as they can't imagine their life or day to day activity without agriculture. Sometimes agriculture is the way for them to connect with their ancestors, deities and to their lands.

Instead of profound importance of agriculture in their Material, Non- material and aesthetic culture, they are unable to incorporate modern agricultural techniques or implements due to their poverty and not getting any vocational training.

Agriculture is being less profitable day by day for them due to market competition with affluent farmers. It's also being less productive due to not introduction of modern technology in agriculture.

The Santal tribal people of the study area found to be very hard working and pure by the soul. Introduction of vocational training and more logistics support with a regular interval from the part of local government might enhance their agricultural production and might save their long persisting heritage of primary subsistence activity.

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