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Title

**HEALTH EDUCATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE:
THE SANTAL COMMUNITY IN BENGAL**

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Abstract:

The Santals of Bengal are a Scheduled Tribe. The tribe is characterized by a clan –lineage based segmentary social system. The interpersonal and intergroup relationships of the people are primarily based on their kinship status. Kinship plays a dominant role in material transactions. The clans are autonomous yet complementary to one another. Households are the primary production and consumption units of the Santal. But agricultural and most other productive activities of the individual households are tied to the socio-political and ritual institutions of the village community. The people do not perceive any social stratification among them; ideologically they are egalitarian. They are partilineal and patrilocal. Monogamy is the rule among the Santal. Women have freedom to choose their partners. There is also a custom of bride-price among these people. This paper attempts to throw light on the Santal community in India focusing on the parameter of health, education and standard of living.

Key words: Quality of Life, Santals, health, education, standard of living

The overriding objective of a country's policy and planning is to raise the standard of living and enhance the productive capabilities of its people. With over a billion people, this challenge is particularly daunting for a developing country such as India. Poverty reduction has been the overriding objective of development planning in India. There has been over time a conceptual broadening in the notions of well being and deprivation. The notion of well being has shifted away from just material attainments, or the means for development, to outcomes that are either desirable in themselves or desirable because of their role in supporting better opportunities for people. Similarly, it is recognized that poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon going beyond lack of adequate income and must be viewed as a state of deprivation spanning the social, economic and political context of the people that prevents their effective participation as equals in the development process. This recognition has resulted in a renewed focus on education and health-critical for capacity building- and other social and environmental factors that have a direct bearing on the state of well being (Planning Commission, 2002). Since Independence, the government has accordingly followed a three-pronged strategy for poverty eradication, which comprises:

- 1) Economic growth and overall development
- 2) Human development with emphasis on health, education and minimum needs, including protection of human rights and raising the social status of the weak and poor

Directly-targeted programmes for poverty alleviation through employment generation, training and building up asset endowment of the poor.

This paper would attempt to describe the quality of life of the Santal women in Birbhum, West Bengal concentrating on three basic dimensions:

- a) Health
- b) Education
- c) A decent standard of living.

Total population of the village

Category	Population
Male	2500
Female	1000
Total	3500

Source: Preliminary household survey.

This village consists of Santals, but there are also Caste Hindus, Muslims, and Biharis. Santals have surname such as Kisku, Hansda, Chorie, Murmu, Soren, Tudu, Baske, Besra, Payoria and Dahari.

The Santal is one of the largest tribal groups in India. Traditionally, Santals belong to the Munda group of Austro-Asiatic sub-family of languages. The society of the Santal is characterized by a segmentary system of kingroups like clans and lineages based on patrilineal descent. The clans and lineages are not hierarchically arranged like the caste groups of the Hindu; they are autonomous yet interdependent and complementary to one another. All these groups show a strong sense of community life.

The Santals are reported to have, in the past, an elaborate territorial organization of ato, pargana and disum that are manifest symbolically in many of their secular and sacred ideas and acts.

Every household of the Santal operates more or less as an independent production and consumption unit, it is highly embedded within the social and cultural matrix of the village (ato) and as such many of their economic decisions and activities are subject to the approval and sanctions of the community.

Their topography is marked with forest dense with trees such as Sal, Karam, Mahua and Asan etc. Santals observe tribal endogamy and clan cum village exogamy. They are endogamous but are divided into exogamous clans such as Kisku, Marandi, Murmu, Soren, Tudu, Baske, Besra, Hemrom, Hansda, Chore, etc. They follow patrilocal residence after marriage. The kinship is of a classificatory type and for economic livelihood they depend on agriculture and are fond of hunting, fishing, collecting roots and tubers etc. The hunting and gathering is much valued by the Santals, and it is still practiced ceremonially with the help of bow and arrow. Most of the

Santals are landless and they have to adopt diverse occupational pursuits for livelihood. In economic sphere the women's labour is highly recognized.

Santali society being an egalitarian society, equal relations prevails between male and female in the work structure. Among the Santals, agriculture being the primary occupation and paddy cultivation being the major source of livelihood, its cultivation is marked with religion and magical beliefs and practices.

Particularly concentrating of the three indices health, education and income in the Santal women one can find a presence of abject poverty, malnourishment and low rate of literacy In the Santal community women are generally engaged as seasonal labourers, maidservants, sweepers, caretakers of some household or office.

Scholars such as Blishen and Akinson (1985) try to define quality of life by two measures:

- 1) Objective indicators: Which count commodities, which contribute to good life such as money.
- 2) Subjective indicators: Which measure the perceptions or evaluations by which individuals run their life, such as job, financial status and standard of living.

They point out that the human development index provides indices to calculate the quality of life of different aspects of women and in general.

Health is one of the most important determinants of assessing the quality of the life of women. It is found that there is an existing level of awareness among rural women regarding certain health care measures such as immunization, vaccination and family planning in a particular village. Studies have pointed out that the awareness is higher in villages in case of immunization and family planning and with the development of information technology people realize the importance of various health care measures and interpersonal relationships.

Looking into the rural social structure it is found that women in India are being deprived of necessary nutrition and health care facilities. They argue that during pregnancy and lactation when a woman requires 2,500 calories everyday she hardly gets 1,400 calories. Although poverty coupled with insufficient economic ability is a major cause of this shortfall but gender discrimination and traditional values are equally responsible for it. Furthermore, women are taught to take pleasure in giving more in terms of quality and quantity to men and boys. This attitude makes women victims of high risk of malnutrition and as a result they fall a prey to

retardation in growth and development, disease, disability and even death at the crucial stage of infancy, early childhood, and adolescence and during reproductive phase.

In the phase of infancy and childhood the discrimination starts even before childbirth. The advanced technology of amniocenteses is misused for sex determination and aborting the female child. When the child is born, sex of the child becomes the main determinant of nutrition. The condition is worst among the poor. The girl faces more health hazards than boys and even goes without treatment. This leads to retardation of their physical growth and affects their all round development.

In the phase of adolescence, she does not get an opportunity to go to school and starts playing the role of a mother when she herself is still a child. She looks after the siblings, does all household work and is deprived of basic needs. She is treated as a burden on parents and is married off at an early age. The resulting teenage pregnancy often affects her physiological growth. She gets a large family and her workload increases again. She is overworked and looks after her daughter.

During the reproductive stage, the inadequate intake of calorie leads to higher maternal mortality and malnutrition. This inability makes child care a difficult task for them, and this, in turn, affects the child's health. Calculating the state of nutrition and life expectancy of the particularly of women it was found that the ratio of the girl boy ratio varied and focusing on health of the Santal women it was found that majority of the women are in the state malnourishment.

Looking upon the nutritional level of women, I had taken their heights and weights and have judged whether they are malnourished or nourished according to the standards provided by the World Health Organization by calculating the Body Mass Index.

Formula of the body mass index is

Body Mass Index (Kg./ M2) = Weight in Kg.

Height in M2

Standards given by WHO

Category	Remarks
< 18.5	Malnourished
18.5 – 24.9	Normal
> 25.5	Obese

Mean height, weight and body mass of women in Santal community

Age-group	No.of women	Mean height (m)	Mean Weight kg.	Mean BMI	Remarks
15-20	100	1.49	38	17.1	Malnourished
20-25	100	1.56	42	17.2	Malnourished
25-30	150	1.54	49	16.2	Malnourished
30-35	150	1.51	45	15.2	Malnourished
35-40	100	1.59	52	17.2	Malnourished
40-45	100	1.62	52	18.2	Malnourished
45-50	100	1.53	45	18	Malnourished
50-55	100	1.53	48	17	Malnourished
55-60	100	1.55	50	17	Malnourished
Total	1000				

Pregnant women

Category	Mean height (m)	Mean Weight kg.	Mean BMI	Remarks
Pregnant 19(5 months of Pregnancy)	1/60	60	18.4	Malnourished
18 (7 months of Pregnancy)	1.55	55	22.9	Normal

Lactating mothers

Category	Mean height (m)	Mean Weight kg.	Mean BMI	Remarks
Lactating mother 22 (new born baby)	1.50	47	20.8	Normal
20 (4 months baby)	1.47	47	21.7	Normal

The table depicts that most of the women under study fall in the category of malnutrition In the time of pregnancy and lactating it is found in some cases that women are given attention

Another determinant of quality of life stressed by scholars in various studies is education. Education is one of the most crucial instruments for economic and social empowerment of women and the villagers. Due to ignorance and superstition, which are the greatest blocks to women's emancipation, strong hope has been bestowed on education as a catalyst of change.

With the Constitution of India conferring equal rights on women and men in all spheres of social life and also removing gender discrimination, access to educational opportunities has improved. But the conferment of the right to equal opportunities did not really result in the removal of all those hurdles which had hindered and continue to hinder a large number of women from making an effective use of opportunities for education.

Indira R, (2003) is of the opinion that in a society where most women have been kept out of the process of knowledge acquisition, it is not surprising if women themselves act as transmitters of values which hold up transformation. Confined to their homes and hearths, a large number of women hardly get exposed to the world at large.

Most of the women have been the victims of patriarchy for too long and take refuge in the same patriarchy to defend the atrocities they commit against other women. Scholars point out that education plays a crucial role in changing the social milieu. It also serves as an instrument for building or upgrading of personal skills.

Dashora and Sharma (2003) states in their study on the role of tribal women in education that tribal women perform multiple roles as mothers, housewives and wage earners.

Education is essential to be able to practice and benefit from the development process. They feel that education can enhance their literacy skills, improve their hygiene and develop their vocational skills for their economic enhancement to fight against exploitation and to conquer the disadvantage and discrimination which they suffer from, which is indeed the greater and foremost empowerment when women are educated, their dependence automatically disappears or at least decreases. They point out that education increases women's awareness and leads to their overall development thereby helping the cause of national progress.

It found in this study that the tribal women, who are uneducated, send their children to school and even colleges for higher education and cooperate in the development of education among tribal society. Extreme poverty, girls helping mothers in work at home, lack of conveyance facility, language barrier, and curriculum not oriented towards their life style, no guarantee of service, lack of awareness about skills, vocational training, motivation towards education and new techniques limit the achievement of tribal women.

Educational status of women

Education	Total in Number
Educated	501
Uneducated	499
	1000

Source: Preliminary household survey.

This table represents that women are more educated than being uneducated. Education is a major determinate to judge their awareness about various aspects of life.

Level of education of women

Level of Education	Santal
Primary level (1-5)	300
Secondary level (6-10)	130
Higher Secondary level (10+2)	50
Graduation level (10+2+3)	10
Post Graduation level (10+2+3+2)	2
Private	9
Total Educated	501
Uneducated	499
Total	1000

This table shows that women are primarily educated till the primary level. Some have attended the secondary level and University level but their percentage is very less.

The education of women working in various sectors of economy vary. Women working as teachers or clerks in the government sector are generally educated till the higher secondary level. Women who are engaged in menial jobs in organized or unorganized sector education hardly matters. Women confined to the household sphere differ in education level according to their age of marriage. Santal families, due to family pressure and performing the mother's role from the childhood, the girls do not get proper education. These days' female children from most of the families go for education whether they are from lower caste or from a tribal group. It is found that even though women are educated till University level In the Santal community under study, women whether they are earning or not are aware about their child's education. They think that an education till the higher secondary level can provide their child with a good job in the market. Concentrating on the percapita income of the Santal women it is found that women are generally engaged as seasonal labourers, maidservants, sweepers, caretakers of some household or office

etc. The women also work as teachers and clerk. Women perform jobs on the request of the owner, offering by the relatives, compensatory grounds or have engaged themselves with Visva Bharati University as gardeners or sweepers. No worker has undergone training for performing the job.

In this community one out of fifty employed are engaged in batik work. The woman gets the material from the employer and does it at her home. Colour combination, design and other specification are being given by the employer. After the completion of product, the woman gives it to the employer and receives the amount for the product deducting the charge of colour and design. In the Santal community, women are also engaged in needle (kantha) work. The work conditions and the structure of these women are similar to that of the Hindu women.

Women in Santal community are found to work in public works departments as clerks and as teachers in primary school. The women employed by the public works department work as peons and sweepers. Women who work as clerks do all the clerical jobs in the office of dispatching and arranging of documents. Women who are engaged as teachers in the primary school teach children till the fifth class. They work from 8am to 12pm. All these women get salaries at the end of the month. The salary is Rs.5000/- range per month.

Santals are also rice mill workers where they thresh paddy. This work is on contractual basis and Rs.50/- per day is paid. They also work as masons, which is also on contractual basis. Santal women employ themselves as maid servants or caretakers. or with the University. One of them is also working in private leather goods concern. The women here help the male members to colour and paste the items. The female is paid much less than the male members working with her.

Santal women also are employed in cattle and poultry rearing. For this they also get help from the block development office, which is approached by the self-help group. The money for buying cattle and poultry is given by the development office, and for rearing the amount is been spent by the owner. Women are also engaged as seasonal labourers where they are called in the season of sowing, harvesting and threshing. It is a daylong work to be done by them. In return they get a meager amount of Rs.50/- per day.

Women who are housewives in the Santal community have to do all the household chores themselves. Many a times they get assistance from their elder siblings

Working women's monthly income level

Income level	Santals
0-500	400
500-1000	220
1000-1500	100
1500-2000	96
200-2500	100
2500-3000	60
3000 and above	24
Total	1000

It is clear from the table that most of the women under study are below poverty line and earn the very meager amount in daily of monthly basis

Women in jobs outside the home, are of the opinion that the artificial environment and natural environment have come into close conflict to some degree, and have not only affected the sound economic and social development but also have endangered physical, social, aesthetic and even the spiritual wellbeing of people mainly those who stay at home. In case of employment, women are given a label of being unskilled labourers and are denied proper wages and working conditions.

Thus it is observed that women's work and contribution are underestimated because of the economic value of their goods and services. Women's produce within the household is generally ignored. While discussing women's work in economic terms or returns in money, one has to look at it in totality with respect to their other roles in the household. Their work at home has an economic aspect. By doing the household work themselves they save hired help and contribute to the economic welfare of the household Women are not only victims of the discrimination in resource availability but in the sphere of health and education throughout her life. Women's destiny is guided by three 'D's: discrimination, disease and death. Discrimination is due to foeticide, followed by lack of parental care in the area of food, clothing, shelter, quality of medical care, education, need for relaxation, marriage, job opportunities, etc. Disease is due

to lack of nutrition, fatigue and overwork, repeated pregnancies, lack of care during child birth, persistent, emotional stress and neglect, etc. While death is due to infanticide, rape, starvation, denial of adequate and proper food, early and needless pregnancies, etc.

Most of the studies emphasize the idea that women are not an independent entity, but are very much a part of the socio-cultural milieu of the family and household. Quality of life as an all-inclusive notion of life and living. From earlier times, living conditions are depicted by the style of life. The contemporary operation of quality of life research is noticeably directed towards two indicators, the so-called objective behavioural, quantitative variations or the so-called subjective perceptual qualitative variations of the manifestations of life

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